

Ace Classics

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THE RIGHT STUFF

This year, Ace Classics, the Triumph pre-unit specialist with an ever-expanding range, celebrates 20 years in business.

Words by James Robinson Photography by Joe Dick

Ace Classics seems to be, in the nicest possible way, something of a drop-in centre. The day before our visit, I'd emailed Kev Rushworth – who with his father, Cliff, make up front of house of the pre-unit Triumph specialist business – a picture a friend had sent me, of a striking pink and cream pre-unit Trophy. I'd attached no explanation, just added the line: "I'll explain tomorrow..." When we arrived, it was Kev with the first question: "Why did you email us a picture of Tony's bike? We've been wondering about it ever since you sent it," he asked.

"Er, who's Tony?" said I.
 "The bloke who owns that Triumph. He lives just round the corner... he often pops in... actually that's him walking up the street, over the road. I reckon he's coming in."

So Tony duly arrived and I had to explain how basically a friend had sent me the picture of the very pretty Triumph, taken at North Weald, saying how he fancied building up something similar from a load of parts he'd accumulated and could I run it past the guys at Ace to garner their views. Sometimes the old motorcycle world is a very small place indeed.

That seems to be the way it goes at Ace Classics. There's a steady stream of people trickling in for a cuppa and a chat – either at the shop, or at the cafe on the next street along, where Cliff and Kev are definite regulars. With Cliff treating us to a bit of lunch, we sat down for a chat – with Tony, the Trophy owner, with us as well.

"I've finally given up roofing," explained Cliff, between mouthfuls of cheeseburger. "For 19-and-three-quarter years I've effectively had

two full-time jobs, doing the roofing and the shop as well. Now, though, I'm concentrating on the shop alone. It's a fitting way to celebrate our 20th year in business."

"We started off as a motorcycle shop in 1991, but after looking at the bits available from other suppliers, we decided to start producing our own range of parts. Slowly, we built up an inventory of parts and tooling to manufacture things. We first tacked chainguards, cente stands and rear number plates and in 1998 we produced Triumph nacelle tools for the legs. We continued to make our press tooling for the stripbands and wheel dishes, all being made in the UK. We now produce mudguards from 1938-70; we can even make the 1958-59 deep valance mudguards to order at a price. Our most recent projects are alternator chaincases and dynamo chaincases and engine and gearbox plates for the rigids and single down tube and duplex models and also the four-gallon petrol tank bracket from 1938-59.

"We only opened on Fridays and Saturdays for the first five years; now, we're open five days a week."

For the last few years, while Cliff split his time, Kev has been in the shop full time – since he was 16, in fact. Kev also lives above the shop, so he really is full time.

"It's sometimes a bit difficult to switch off," Rushworth the younger explained. "It's tempting to just pop downstairs and do this or that."

TINKER WITH

There's plenty to tinker with in the shop too, with a host of machines from the Rushworth private collection on display,

There are stacks of mudguards available, for Triumphs from 1938-70.



On this side the bottom is stock and customer machines, up top are display models from the Rushworth's own collection.

as well as machines for sale, either by Ace Classics or on behalf of customers. Obviously, pre-unit Triumphs dominate (in both machines on display and those for sale) though there are a few others mixed in as well. On the day of our visit there was a tidy-looking pre-unit BSA twin mixed in among the 'stock' which included a pair of Tiger 100s (one in standard finish, the other resplendent in 'tangerine dream' Bonnie colours) and a rather gorgeous 1948 Speed twin, which had actually featured in *The Classic MotorCycle*.

Above:
 Need a DS57 mudguard bolt? Reckon these guys can help...

Below:
 Oil seal holders, which look old from the outside, but have a modern seal within.

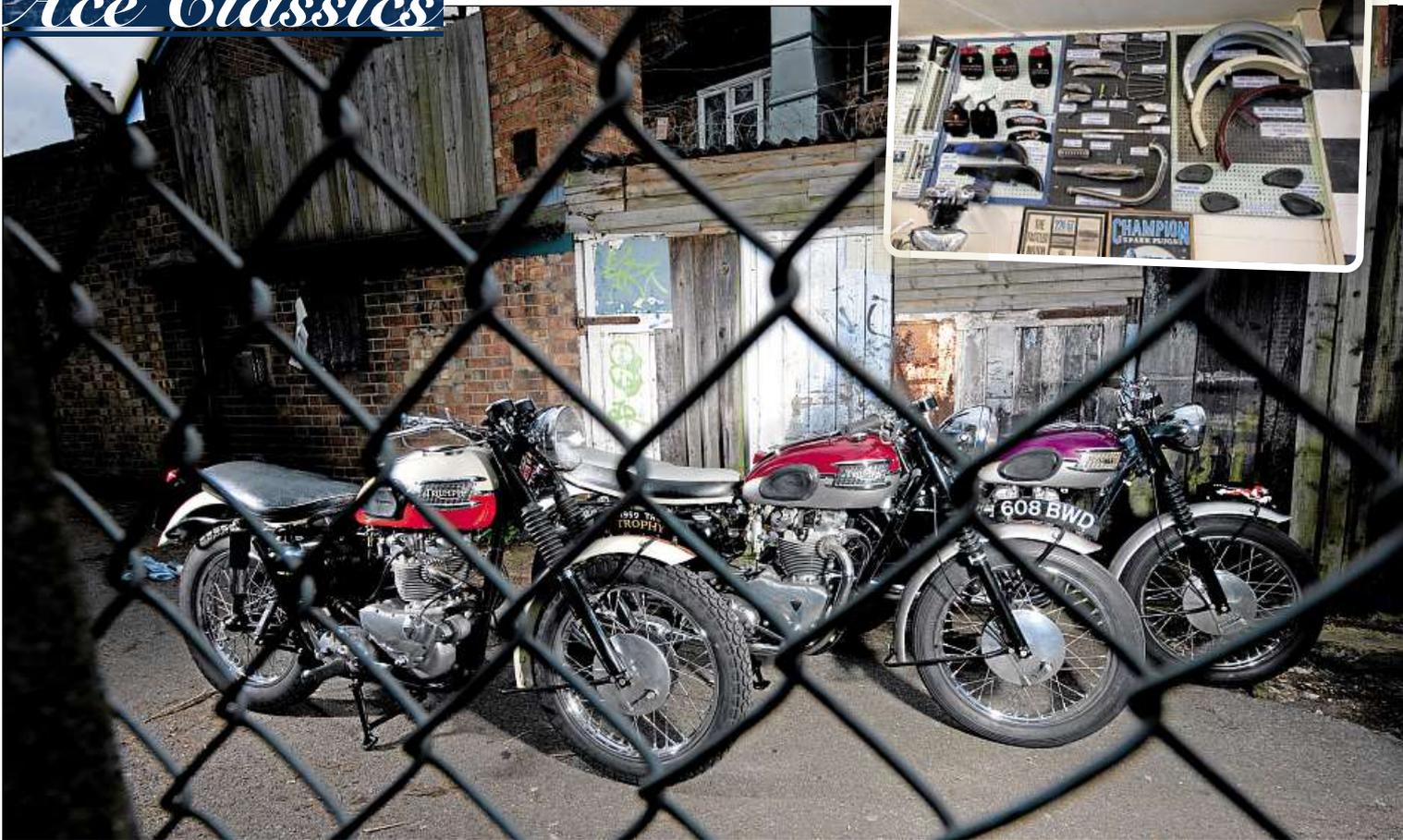
At floor level, there were a few of Cliff and Kev's own machines. "It's just easier to keep them in here so we can get to them," explains Kev. The machines included a lovely pair of 1963 units (one a TR6, the other an Alaskan white Bonneville; "That's what I ride most," said Kev, of the Bonnie), a sprung-hub Tiger 100 and similar-framed T-bird. "My dad often rides that one," said Kev, of the black-finished beauty, equipped with US spec bars. With his hand on said bars he adds: "They just make the bikes more manoeuvrable." Also in the line-up is Kev's 'racer' which featured on our cover last year (December 2010), plus there's 608 BWD, a 1961 pre-unit Trophy with an interesting history.

"That's the press bike which featured in *The Motor Cycle*," said Kev, showing me a print out of the pages. It's actually been in *The Classic MotorCycle* before but it's still lovely, complete with its qd headlight.

PRE-UNIT BONNIES

Machines are not only displayed at ground level, for up on a shelf there's four pre-unit Bonnies from each of the first four years of production. First up is a 1959 'tangerine dream', then next along is a 1960, the first year of the duplex frame. This one has an interesting tale to tell.

Cliff said: "We built that one up out of all new old stock parts. Everything on it is genuine Triumph and was all new when we did it." Although it's been done a few years now, after Cliff bought it as a rough but running restoration project, it now looks as good as new and indeed its early history is known; it was bought new by one Ernie Parrish, who'd prowl the London streets challenging other riders to burn-ups – and more often than not, winning. It then passed to Brian Clarke, who sold it when he married in 1964. Years later, a customer in the Ace Classics shop, an old friend of



Above: Whether this is keeping the Tigers out, or the Trophies safe, there's a pun here somewhere... from left, 1959, '61 and '63 TR6s. **Inset:** Just some of the spare parts available.

Brian's, recognised the registration number and a reunion was arranged. Ernie Parrish, though, has never come to light.

Third along is a beautiful light blue and grey T120, from 1961, with fourth, a 1962 T120R, resplendent in reddish-orange and silver – colours which, incidentally, are very similar to those which reappeared for the 1969 US spec Bonnie, called Olympic flame and silver. A neat touch on this one is a 'Kev' registration number!

Also up on shelves around the showroom are a huge number of petrol tanks. "We bought them over the years," said Cliff, "And they're all in original Triumph paint. Some are 'experimental' colours which never made it to production, while others are production schemes and used for colour matches. They're invaluable as reference."

What's also interesting to note is the way the two colours on each tank are joined together – there's no exact line by any means, with the two colours running blurrily into each other, safe in the knowledge the chrome trim strip will cover the join. By contrast, another tank, which has been repainted, has carefully been masked and the join is immaculate. It's a telling insight into what the machines were and are – then, mass-produced machines for hard riding, now, carefully put together 'labours of love' for appreciating and savouring.

That the machines are now restored and put together lovingly, is reflected in the amount of spares Ace Classics now offers. Many are pattern parts, but as Kev said:

"Bad pattern parts have given all pattern stuff a bad name and it's just not the case." Such is the wealth of pattern items available, pretty much everything for pre-unit Triumphs – except oil tanks – are now made. One of the things with recently had made is herring-bone oil pipe, which we can now supply."

"We do some unit stuff too," said Kev, "With chainguards, for example, popular."

Both generations agree that the internet has been a boon to business, especially with regard to overseas orders.

"America has always been a good market for us," noted Cliff, "While we supply quite a lot of stuff 'in bulk' to dealers there too."

Also, the internet generates a lot of enquiries, especially for engine rebuilds.

OUT BACK

"We like doing them," grinned Kev, with his hand resting on an engine. "As they don't take up as much room as whole bikes. Because we've got so much stuff on at the moment, Dick (Smith, proprietor of The Baron's Speed Shop) is coming in and doing three days a week. He worked here full-time for years anyway." On the day of our visit, Dick was 'out back' doing such engine work on a pre-unit Triumph-based chopper which had come in, while proudly displayed on engine stands on the shop counter, was a freshly-restored iron-barrel pre-unit engine, looking glorious in its freshly painted and polished state.

Kev then walked us out back to show us

some of the stock – there's piles and piles of it, rack upon rack from floor to ceiling.

"We make every nut and bolt for pre-unit Triumphs," said Kev, as he dug into a drawer and retrieved a DS57 mudguard bolt. He then grabbed a newly made number plate, explaining all types are available. Next are knee grip rubbers. "These are available for three and four-gallon tanks, in both types, the ones with backing plates and those without," Kev explained.

Fork seal holders are plentiful – they've been updated with modern seals inside a traditional-looking holder – while all exhaust pipes are presently in stock, including the newest, which is a megaphone type for the race kit (which Kev is developing; the plan is that the sprung hub Tiger 100 in the shop will be fully 'race kitted' and on display to showcase all the bits available). Like all pattern parts supplied, the exhausts are 'fitted up' onto complete machines, ensuring a proper fit once they're with the customer.

"We get an awful lot of repeat business," said Kev, "Which makes us think we're doing something right." And standing in the bustling shop, the line-ups of beautiful Triumphs, the stocks of spare parts and the thriving workshop side of the business, one can't disagree. They are certainly doing something right. ■

Ace Classics are at 101-103 St Mildreds Road, Lee, London SE12 0R1, 0208 698 4273 or www.aceclassics.co.uk