

CLASSIC BIKE SHOP

IT'S LIKE stepping into a time-warped. There's a Wurlitzer, a tiled counter straight out of a Fifties canteen, portraits of Presley and Brando's *Wild One* on the walls and more pre-unit hardware than you can shake a can of Brylcreem at.

"We are the original Triumph fanatics," explains Cliff Rushworth. "But we're not throwbacks, we don't want to go around in winkle pickers. We know this is the Nineties." It's then that you notice this isn't the real Fifties McCoy after all, mainly because this isn't half tatty enough.

This is Ace Classics in Lee, an area right by the South Circular road in south-east London. The name derives, predictably enough, from the celebrated rockers' canteen which used to adorn the North Circular. But the rest is as original as nostalgia gets.

Ace Classics was founded by two dyed in the wool pre-unit Triumph buffs, Cliff Rushworth and Alan Cakebread. Alan has moved on, but Cliff still runs the show, helped by a team of fellow enthusiasts who are also machinists, salesmen and tea makers.

Ask Cliff to name the Triumphs he owns, and you'd better have a good memory: 1959 Bonnie, 1960 Bonnie, Trophies from 1958 to 1960, a 1979 T140D, not to mention a Tiger 110, Norton Atlas and Ajay CSR. Heredity being what it is, his sons also own a Bonnie apiece: Kevin will be old enough to ride his 1962 model in three years, while Simon will be into the next century before he can sling a road legal leg over his 1961 version.

Cliff, now 42, didn't start quite that young, but young enough. At 16 he was tearing round South London on a Honda CB72 — "I don't like admitting it, but they were faster," he growls. Conversion to Triumph twins soon followed. The last 20 or so years have seen

TRIUMPH TEMPLE

Slick and polished on the outside, smooth running and well maintained within. Ace Classics is a bike shop that reflects its bikes. Stewart McDiarmid

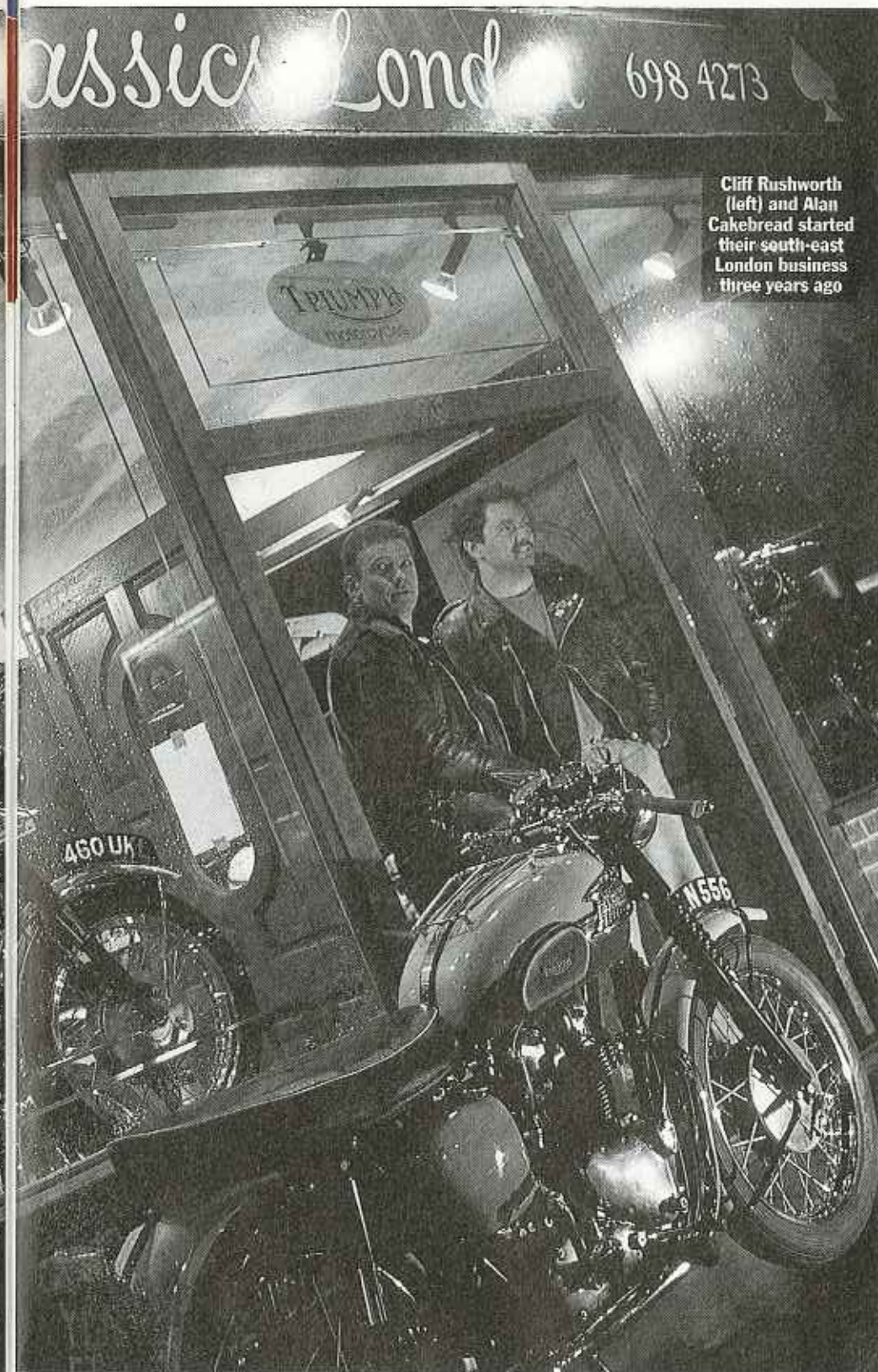
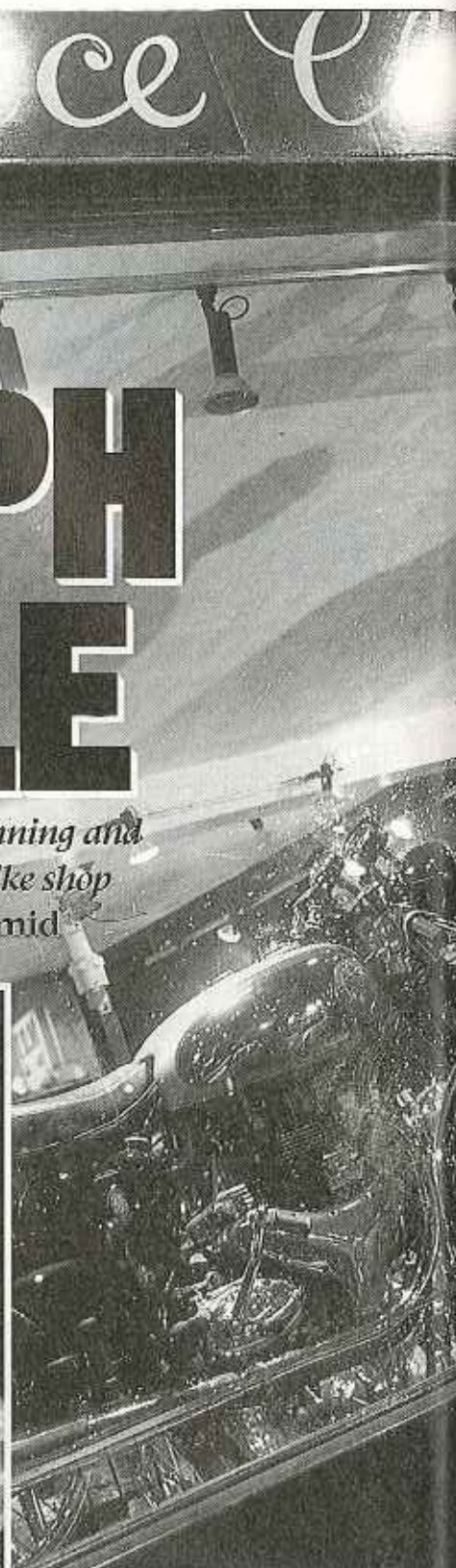


Pictured when the shop opened, budding rockers Simon (left) and Kevin own a Bonnie each. Dad began on a Honda

more bikes bought, sold, restored and above all ridden, than Cliff can easily recall. From this major passion grew the small personal crusade that is Ace Classics.

It's clear that if a well sorted Triumph excites Cliff, a lesser example just as easily offends: he is critical of the cowboys who have sprung up in the classic business: "You see some people selling bikes that are so bad, so unoriginal — and it doesn't seem to bother 'em — it's an insult. As Triumph enthusiasts we want to see it done right, to pass on our experience and knowledge.

"When we started buying bits for our



Cliff Rushworth (left) and Alan Cakebread started their south-east London business three years ago

bikes, loads of stuff was unobtainable or, if you could get it, it was so bad you couldn't use it. So we'd get, say, a couple of front mudguards made, and friends would get wind of it, and ask us to get some for them, too. It sort of snowballed from there.

"We specialise mostly in 1954 to 1962 Triumph Trophies, and Bonneville from 1959 to 1962. But now we're being asked for stuff for rigid models which we know less about. But we're learning — we had to, and pretty fast."

You don't need to examine Ace's books to see that Cliff is an enthusiast first and businessman a long way second. In spite of a growing business, he maintains his modest roofing work. The shop only opens on Fridays and Saturdays. Cliff usually finds a mate to mind the store for him on Fridays, and tries to get in himself on Saturdays. He isn't convinced a classic shop needs to be open five or six days a week: "But if it did come to that, it beats getting up at 6am in the snow to fix someone's roof."

altogether more instinctive approach which has done more for pre-unit enthusiasts than it has for Cliff's bank account. For instance, one display area is earmarked for original paintwork as a reference for anyone who cares to drop by and look without obligation. And you couldn't find a more evocative place to talk Triumphs than the shop itself, from the Wurlitzer juke box to the period posters. In London SE12, the Triumph feelgood factor is high.

Cliff has been running Ace Classics (081 698 4273) for over three years; that's three years of holding down two jobs, working long cold hours during the day and spending his evenings machining or making up orders.

Ace Classics' advertising motto reads: *Triumph pre-unit spares that fit.* Many of these they manufacture. Their parts include Trophy sump shields, lifting handles, gearbox cover plates, front and rear mudguards and stays, chainguards, centre stands, and QD wiring looms of which, as far as they know, they're the only producers.

The looms are a classic illustration of previously inferior copies. Another QD loom was advertised some while back that connected via "something 'orrible like a towing-hitch socket. We use a neat modern socket, externally identical to the original. People still ring up hoping 'it's not like that other one'. Still, if you make good stuff, word will get round."

In addition to supplying their own parts, Ace buys in exhaust systems, rubbers, tank badges and sprockets. Their range extends every month, and they soon reckon to supply "virtually everything" a pre-unit Triumph owner needs. They also undertake complete restorations, as well as offering painting, chroming, bead blasting and engine building services.

Cliff believes that the spares side has certainly saved them: "There's no doubt about it, if we hadn't gone into spares, we'd have gone under. We sold complete bikes to begin with, but the business is in spares."