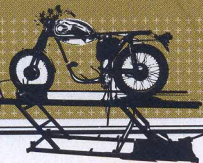


GETTING TROLLIED

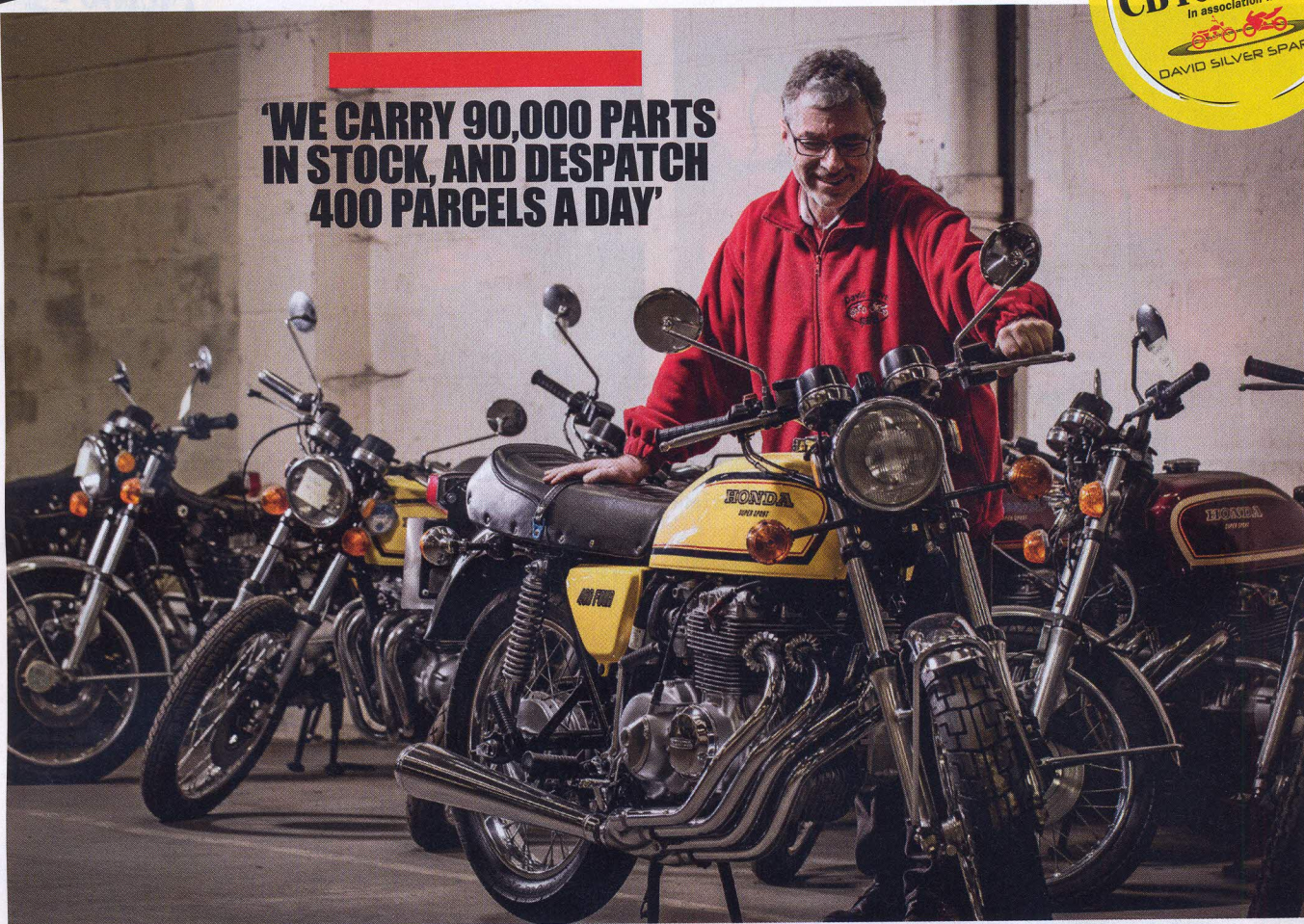
With the project Honda 400 Four in bits, it's time for some serious shopping. Where better for the supermarket sweep than David Silver Spares?

WORDS: GEZ KANE. PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY FREEMAN





**'WE CARRY 90,000 PARTS
IN STOCK, AND DESPATCH
400 PARCELS A DAY'**



Tea, biscuits and 'flu aren't the only things to get passed round the *Classic Bike* office. Responsibility for the forward progress of our Honda CB400 Four project bike can now be added to that list. While workshop denizen Rick is still firmly in charge of the spannering, I've come aboard to help source parts, think about the bike's final spec and appearance and generally worry about the stuff that Rick would rather not down spanners for. The plan is that, when the bike's finished and on the road, I'll be its custodian, running our road-burning Honda in the Our Classics pages.

I've fancied a CB400F for almost as long as I can remember. Honda's smallest single-overhead-camshaft four (on the UK market at least) was a cult bike when I was dipping an ignorant and very excited toe into the world of bikes. *Bike* magazine memorably described it as 'the poor boy's musclebike', though, alas, they didn't realise just how poor this particular boy was at the time. A decidedly secondhand CB175 was all I could afford and, by the time I could afford a used 400 Four, the world had moved on and a GS750 Suzuki was more appealing.

A move to a job at Mocheck in Clapham in the late 1980s rekindled my interest in 400 Fours once more. Although it was a decade after the glory days of Mocheck's production racing efforts with their over-bored CB400s (and the road-going

Mocheck Harrier) there were enough of the old hands still around to get me interested in the little Hondas, and I've wanted one ever since. When our CB400F project bike arrived on the scene, replete with Dresda box-section swingarm, Yoshimura big-bore kit, ARE cast alloy wheels and a nice pair of period rearsets, I was hooked.

It came, I saw, I wanted.

So, I'll be chasing round polishers and platers, poring over parts books and fantasising about a golden autumn aboard my 1970s hot-rod. But first, there's a sizeable list of parts that are either missing, plain horrible or too far gone to re-use. Time for a little retail therapy.

Fortunately, CB400Fs have retained their cult status and there are a number of specialist resources available to Rick and I. But the first port of call for anyone needing NOS or pattern parts for the little fours has to be David Silver Spares. The company boasts what is probably the biggest stash of 400 Four spares in the world – and bits for this bike are their best selling line.

Having started his working life on the parts counter at Sondel Sport in Islington, London, David became aware that many of the parts distributors he dealt with were sitting on huge stocks of parts for models that had, at the time, dropped out of favour. "I took a gamble on buying a carload of Honda parts from one of them," he explains. "Within a few weeks, I'd sold it all – some to breakers and some through

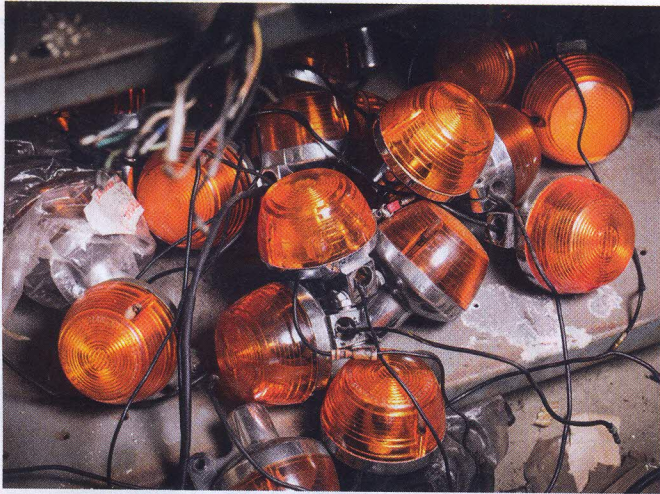
small ads. I realised I was onto a good thing and started to go round all the Honda parts dealers in the UK, offering to buy job lots of old stock. Before long, I had to rent warehouse space from a mate in Kilburn. I haven't looked back since."

Indeed he hasn't. But it's David's ability to look forward that has seen his business grow into the 40,000 square feet of warehousing they've occupied at Leiston, Suffolk since 1989. "We've had so many parts re-manufactured as the supplies of genuine NOS dried up," he says. "That's how we can continue to support owners and restorers. We carry around 90,000 individual part numbers in stock, despatch about 400 parcels a day at peak times and turn over more than £4 million a year."

Those are impressive figures – and good news for any classic Honda owners. But for CB400F owners, the spares situation is probably better than for any other model.

"The development and improvement of our range of repro parts is ongoing," says David. "The latest addition to the range is a reproduction sump pan, which we launched a couple of months back. But since the middle of last year, we've introduced or improved more than 25 parts for the CB400F, including ignition coils, oil filter housing, front mudguards and an improved pattern seat with a steel base."

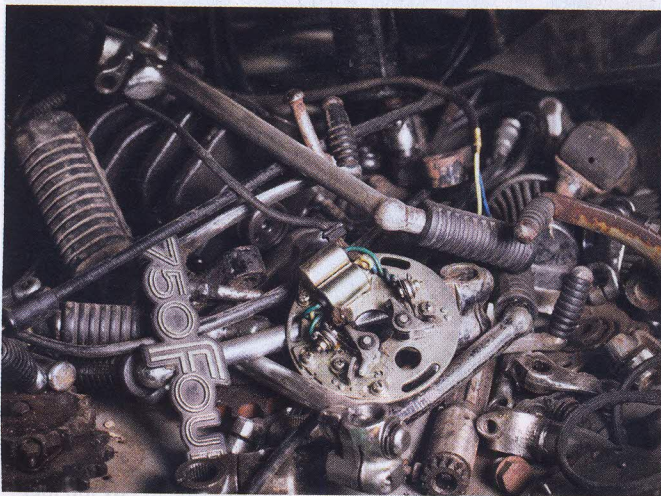
To kick off, we need a new camchain. Honda's camchains and their tensioners were always a weak point in their 1970s



▶ In cool, dark conditions, genuine indicators reproduce at an alarming rate



▶ Quite a line-up, and proof that we're in the right place for 400 Four bits



▶ Needless to say, with so much stock, some of it evades organisation



▶ 'Give it a squeeze' – Dave helps Gez select the very ripest gasket set

engines. Rick hasn't completed the engine strip, but David and his CB400F specialist Dean Hendricks advise a close look at the horseshoe-shaped tensioner arm.

"The chain tensioner bolts would seize and owners didn't bother to free them off in order to tension the camchain correctly," says David. "Then the chain would run loose and rub against the pivot of the tensioner arm, damaging it. Then the arm seizes on its pivot and everything just gets worse. We've manufactured stronger replacement arms with a bush at the pivot."

A new primary chain is another item high up the shopping list. Honda recommended fitting a new one at 50,000-mile intervals and, with no real idea how many miles the Hyvo chain in our bike has under its belt, replacement seems prudent. We've also decided to return to running a stock airbox and filter in place of the mouse-chewed K&Ns that were on the bike. I know that larger carbs and less restrictive filters might be required for future tuning, but for now, jetting up a bit to suit the 54mm bores should give us a good baseline to work from.

David guides me expertly along the miles of racking. In goes a full gasket set, engine oil seals, a repro front mudguard, new

brake caliper seals and piston, plus a re-manufactured air collector box to link the carbs to the airbox. A few of the parts on our list are out of stock, but Dave reckons he'll have them in within a week.

What's clear is that the 400 Four is a great choice for inexperienced restorers looking for a 1970s machine to bring back

to life. You really can get almost everything for them, and if you get stuck, the chances are David and his team will know the answer. Which could be handy when we get into the meat of the rebuild. **CB**

Contact davidsilverspares.co.uk or call 01728 833020



NEXT MONTH

Back to Rick's Kent-based super-shed, where the Yoshikitted engine is stripped and serviced in a jiffy...