

SUZUKI
X7
RESTORING
AND RIDING A
TEEN DREAM

515,000 MILES BY SUZUKI KATANA



**HONDA
CBX1000**
5 OF THE BEST SIXES



**DUCATI
851 STRADA**
DESMODROMIC DESIRE



Practical Sportsbikes

BUYING, FIXING & THE BEST BIKES FROM THE 70s, 80s & 90s

BIKES INSIDE

Kawasaki GPZ1000RX
Yamaha RD350 N2
Suzuki GSX-R100
Honda VFR750F
Aprilia AF1 50

**"It's restoration on
an industrial scale"**

Breathing new life into 33
Honda CB400 Fours

Ducati 906 Paso

Dragged from a field,
restored in a cowshed



APEX PREDATORS

Get your claws into corners Honda NSR250R-SP,
Yamaha TZR250 3MA, Suzuki RGV250K tested inside

ISSUE 15 JAN 2012
15 >
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EXPERT

**HOW TO
REFURB
ALLOY**



WORKSHOP

**RG500
RESTO
ADVICE**



KNOWLEDGE

**PREP A
BIKE FOR
WINTER**



BUYING

**THUNDER
STORMING
600 YAM**

PROJECT GPZ750 PART FIVE: WIN IT INSIDE (WHEN WE'VE FINISHED IT...)

SILVER'S DREAM MACHINES

David Silver is a name many of you may know. He sells Honda spares, y'see? But did you know he has perhaps the biggest UK collection of Honda 400/4s tucked away and plenty more besides?

★ WORDS **BERTIE SIMMONDS** | PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN NOBLE**



David Silver and his roped-off area of VIP Honda rarities



“ I'M NOT DOING THIS FOR THE MONEY. WE WILL SELL SOME BUT IT'S ABOUT KEEPING THE BIKES ALIVE ”

“And you see that one there? That's a 400/4...”



The man himself with his collection of microfiches



David Silver Spares trade in used as well as new



Every one from a satisfied customer

Back in the early 1980s, David Silver thought that he could make a living resurrecting and restoring old motorcycles. So, David bought an old 550 K3, which was missing third gear with the aim of doing it up. He recalls: "A friend then explained that – even if my skills could do the job – I'd not make much money selling the bike on. What it did do was make me realise that it was hard to get parts for older bikes and from my time working for Sondel Sport on Highgate Corner in London, I knew that some dealers and distributors were sitting on a lot of unsold stock."

At that time Honda had many parts distributors around the UK who sold to their local dealers. David went to one in London called Parks of Lewisham, who wanted to sell their unsold parts cheap. "It was a spur of the moment thing," he admits, "I went there and filled the car up and sold some to a breaker later that day and the rest in *MCN* the following week, doubling my money."

This was the start of David Silver Spares we know today, and it's this business nous that – perhaps – sets David apart from the rest of the obsessives we've encountered here in the pages of *PS*.

To carry the story on, David soon got the names of all of Honda's parts distributors across the UK. Soon he was visiting each of them and buying up old stock in his spare time. By 1987 he'd quit his job, set up on his own and today, without David Silver Spares finding, sourcing and replicating old parts, we'd all have a job running old Hondas.

Popular bikes remain things like 400/4s, CB750s and 1990s sports tackle like FireBlades, NC30s and NC35s, as well as humbler machines that perhaps rarely rate a mention in the pages of magazines and yet all have owners who want to keep them running.

Bikes in David's own collection often end up as test mules or templates for the reverse-engineering of parts we can no longer find. "I've had my 400/4 for 10 years and it's been the basis for making many pattern parts." These then help keep our bikes looking good and going well. Today, the 20,000 square-foot call-centre Suffolk HQ (manned with friendly and knowledgeable staff, it has to be said) send out up to 500 boxes a day containing parts across the world, most notably to the USA, which is the firm's biggest customer, as well as the rest of Europe, the

UK and now also the former Eastern Bloc. Machines from Honda's early years in the 1950s to more modern 1990s bikes are the firm's stock-in-trade, from a C100 of 1959 through to a fox-eye Blade, if you need bits this is the place to come.

David's lust for all things two-wheeled started off (not unsurprisingly) with a Honda SS50 of his own. From there things have taken off for him and he can now exercise his passion for bikes and call it 'business'. In many ways he's no different to any of us: we work so we can buy/modify/restore bikes. He's just luckier than most in being able to merge the two and call it 'work' while having at his disposal the biggest collection of Honda spares and – importantly – knowledge of Honda spares in the UK.

"Do I work on my own bikes? Shamefully, no, but then running this business is a huge drain on my time, which is why I collect these wonderful bikes and make it part of my business. I do still ride when I can, but mostly small capacity bikes now, like 125s [he is a KYMCO importer] but I've had a go on one of the CB400s that I recently bought."

Ah yes, the CB400s. When snapper John Noble and I arrive for our visit, we're ushered towards a large industrial unit, the door is opened and the lights are switched on. The neons wink into life, revealing around 33 Honda CB400/4s in various states (and styles) from potential minters to broken basket cases and rusty Rickman'd relics.

It's hard to take it all in, but we've never seen so many of one model in one place before, all here in some giant laboratory awaiting re-animation and re-introduction into the modern-classic market.

David is honest about his aims for these bikes, he says: "I'm doing this to see if it's possible to undertake restoration on an almost industrial scale. I think this will be the first time this has been attempted – at least in the UK. This isn't just about money – although we will be aiming to sell the majority of these bikes when they are finished some time next year – it's about keeping them alive.

A good CB400/4 is a nice alternative to a more modern bike. Think about it. For, say, £3500 you get something with history, classic appeal and that's guaranteed to turn heads. We will be getting chroming done en masse and other jobs too. The scale means we'll get work done cheaper and we will see what the end results will be." 🍷

Two identical F2s and an F1



Proof that people do the strangest things



Well-used fiche reveals the details of some tulip silencers



Having listened to David, I'm sure he's not doing it just for the possibility of a quick buck, even if he's made his name as a purveyor of parts for old Hondas.

"We have around 6200 CB400/4 owners on our books," he explains, "and I decided to contact those we had e-mails for in the UK, to see if they wanted to sell us their bikes. From that original number, we had - maybe - 2000 e-mails and from that, 100 replies saying that they wanted to sell. I think we'll end up with around 50 bikes from those replies and here, today, we have 33, ranging from one which the owner bought from Bonhams, which comes complete with the awards it has won at various shows, down to one which is just a box of parts, to one that looks past saving, thanks to the ruined chrome, engine finish and paintwork. Obviously not all will be finished to the same standard.

Some just need chromework, some paint; others engine work or engine finishing. We need to look at each individual bike and see what it needs."

And there's the rub. How did Silver pan for 400/4 gold? After all, with each minter, there's a munter, right?

He explains: "Some of the clean, early ones we agreed to buy set the standard really and prices went accordingly. The important thing was that we never insulted our customers with poor offers. Both we, and they, know what these bikes are worth."

Some may feel this is a restoration without the soul, but they'd be missing the point. Sure, David Silver makes money in this industry, but he loves bikes and has quite a collection himself. And when you walk into David Silver Spares, just to the right of the counter is a large board full of 'thank you' pictures from happy customers showing off their restos, all completed with the help of David's company and spares knowledge.


He adds: "The thing is the majority of the 400/4s I've bought were not being used. They were sitting in the back of a garage or were half-finished jobs. People who rode and used them didn't want to sell, but of the bikes we've bought, every one has a story. Look at these two." David points to the two roughest CBs you'll ever see. "These are from Cornwall and you can see they are so rough, but we will save them. Somehow. Over here you've got a group of 400/4s that were going to be a grandfather's


legacy to his grandchildren, but he hadn't gotten around to finishing the refurbishment. Eventually the kids persuaded him that they'd rather have the money to enjoy now, while he is alive, so we did a deal. And here, this beautiful yellow bike is a one-owner machine with 89,000 miles on the clock bought from Mocheck in 1979. He's too ill to ride the bike now, sadly, but we will make sure the bike lives on. Another over there was partially restored but the owner isn't as mobile as he once was so he can't bend down to work on the bike. What could happen if we didn't intervene? The bike languishes for longer and could be sold for next to nothing to a scrap merchant as part of a house clearance? This will ensure that all of these bikes continue to live on, as working, useable modern classics. We've even signed documents to show the previous owners that's exactly what we will do with them."

While PS was there a phone call from yet another CB owner came through agreeing a deal. "This one hadn't run for 22 years," says David, "but the owner has it going now, so we're agreeing a deal. We've had bikes from as far afield as Cornwall, Ayrshire, Gateshead and Kent. We plan on keeping all these stories and potted histories with the bikes when we sell them on. It's all part of their unique histories."

With David Silver's own history with Hondas, what will make a future mega classic then? He says: "GL1000K1s will be bigger than they are now, CB900s, the first 'Supersport', maybe the CB500K1, the CB650Z, the CX500 and I wish I had bought a CB400A Hondamatic. I once overheard a dealer tell an owner they wouldn't even part-ex their 400A for a helmet. If you look at what the 400/4 has done, you'll also see it started the whole 400 trend for Honda to make popular 400cc machines, so the NCs are included as well as the likes of FireBlades. We have around 5000 customers who want NC30 parts and 3500 who want NC24 parts. They are still popular and we're asking Motad to help us make collector boxes for these models."

So, who knows? Perhaps in a decade or so, David Silver Spares will have row upon row of VFR400Rs sitting in his warehouse awaiting restoration? Or FireBlades, or Blackbirds or...

If this mass restoration works out, the possibilities are endless. 



This is the bike that started the British love affair with the 400

“ WE NEED TO LOOK AT EACH INDIVIDUAL BIKE TO SEE WHAT THEY NEED BEFORE WE START WORK ”

TURN OVER FOR DAVID'S COLLECTION

DAVID'S TOP FIVE RESTORATION TIPS

- 1** Obviously go to the parts experts for your machine or marque – and yes, for Honda that has to be us!
- 2** It is an old rule, but a good one: get a bike that is as complete as you can. Obviously, when you see some of the 400/4s I've just bought perhaps you'll argue that I don't listen to my own advice.
- 3** Never be rude or make stupid offers. With the 400/4 owners we were courteous and made fair offers for the bikes. These were our customers, but in the small world of classics, what goes around comes around.
- 4** Buy a classic that has good parts availability – and do check this before you buy. For example, if you're looking for parts for a TL250K1, you may have serious trouble...
- 5** Knowledge is everything, so keep records. We have our parts books, microfiche, computer server and so on. It helps and it works.

DAVID'S COLLECTION

1978 Honda CB750 Phil Read Replica

"I bought this for about £2000 eight years ago. The previous owner comes in twice a year and asks to buy it back, but I'm not selling. The bike itself is based on the 750F2. It's got 40,357 miles on the clock, is a limited-run machine and this is one of the last of them, I think, and it's in great condition. I've seen these advertised elsewhere for around £6000-£8000."



1993 Honda CBR900RR-P

"This is virtually as-new and acquired recently – you can still smell the polish on it. I swapped this for my previously-cherished NS400R. It's immaculate with just 1554 miles on it. I doubt it's been used in recent years either – it's so clean and there is no evidence of a tax disc on it. With a bike being seen in PS with next to zero miles on for £18,000, what does that make this worth? Around £5000-£6000?"



1970 Honda CB750 KO

"No, not a sandcast model so it's not the early production version, this is a 1970 machine from Nice, in France, on the Côte d'Azur. It's got 53,732km on it and it's been very well finished. It didn't look this good when I got it 12 years ago though. Therefore this bike has gone up in value tremendously and could be worth around £10k."



1979 Honda CB750F1

"Another recent purchase from Bonhams at the Stafford Show, this has had one owner from new and is in very good original condition as it has just 12,890 miles on the clock."



1978 Honda CB250T Dream

"Everyone has had or ridden a Superdream but the Dream was a model which was only around for a couple of years. This was a local bike and as it was that little bit different I decided to buy it. It's still very nice and clean and has just 25,288 miles on it."



1977 Honda CB400/4 F1 Supersport

"Yes, I do love them, but this is my 'original' one and not part of the wider collection. I've had it 10 years. The previous owner was a customer of mine. He and his wife would travel up from Somerset twice a month in their Reliant Robin to buy parts. It was her wish for us to have the bike when he sadly passed away, so we bought it from her. It's been the basis for a number of parts that we've 'reverse engineered'. I guess this is worth around £1900-£2000."



1968/1969 Honda CB750K 'sandcast'

"Yes, this is one of the original sandcast CB750s. When it came to me it was just a carcass, but it had a very low frame number. It could be a late 1968 or early 1969. It's been lovingly restored by the legendary John Wyatt of Rising Sun Restorations who did a superb job. It has just 13,796 miles on it."



1981 Honda CBX1000B Supersport

"I was tempted into buying this at the recent Stafford Show. I got it for just £2300. It has 38,590 miles on it and is a little quirky as people generally prefer the cleaner lines of the naked CBX, but this is a lovely bike and benefits from that massive engine."



1977 Honda CB550F2

"This is another recently purchased Bonhams bike. It was totally restored but we've taken the handlebars off it so we can get some made and keep as spare parts for our customers."