

AN UNTECHNICAL YOWL

A feeling of guilt came over me when I read the Editor's plea that he had little written material from members. The thing which holds me back is that I am probably the least technically-minded member of the Club, and many years ago, in my 'Brum' Scott days, I racked my brains to make head or tail of the ingenious 'Loftylube' system. Having neither engineering know-how, nor workshop facilities, I was reluctantly compelled to stay loyal to the dubious delights of the capricious Pilgrim Pump. I know that many Scottists advise you to leave settings well alone once you have got a reasonably compromised adjustment, and a tiny blob of red paint on the knurled knob was my primitive guide, but the damned thing seemed to have a mind of its own, changing discharge rate according to the weather and the creeping temperature change being conveyed by the crankcase.

So you must excuse some untechnical reminiscences! First encounter with the Club, for until then I didn't know it existed, was that the Brum bike was propped against a bridge just outside of North London whilst I fiddled with the pump. It had suddenly decided to lay a smoke screen at the pleasure of being released from London's traffic, when a cheery voice asked if I needed help. This was from the vocal chords of our present President, one Glyn Chambers. Obviously he was familiar with Pilgrim Pump fiddlers, so membership details were imparted and I was soon on my way to fish for trout at Grafham . . . these were the days when some Scotts were used by guys of my generation as everyday transport . . . not as highly polished relics to be wheeled out to the occasional rally. In those days I was trundling in most evenings from the bottom of the Old Kent Road, which is called Bromley, to run an evening class in fly fishing in Clerkenwell, and, although the Brummie hated traffic, that was all I had to get me there. It was greatly admired by one of my pupils and ex-Lord Mayor of London, the late Sir Frederick Hoare. He was one of that fascinating minority, the Old English Eccentrics, though blithely unaware of the fact. On being made Lord Mayor his peers put an embargo on his pedal cycle, claiming such an unlordly way of locomotion in the City to be unceremonial, whereon, to please them, he bought a scooter, but they vetoed that. To this day I own and use a fine pair of leather gauntlets which he bestowed on the Scott when the powers-that-be took away his scooter and put him into an official car.

My first Scott was a hybrid Flyer, I think. On the start of the '39 rhubarb its owner had broken it down into little bits, smothered it with grease, covered it with a tarpaulin and set off to take on the SS. I'm afraid that something like a 9mm bullet ended his endeavours, and, years later, his mother thought to earn £7 from the heap of rusty junk at the bottom of her garden. You can imagine that the cycle parts were in a mess, but, on degreasing the motor and assembling it, wonder of wonder, that and the gear box were in fine fettle. Post War it was hard to find bits to replace almost everything that was once tubular, but I recollect that some Webb forks were fixed to an Ariel front wheel, whilst the back wheel, long gone, was a rubber-shod Enfield plus Grasshopper tyre. The sparks department had to be renewed, a BTH affair on a firm platform, and the whole thing was with slim tank and handchange. I suppose the Club is redolent with old bike builders, so you won't need telling how your heart goes into your mouth when the first petrol spurts from the carb and you kick and kick until your ears ring?

That was not the first Scott I knew because my friend Harry Lowing, who did most of the rebuilding, also had a 1912 two-speeder, which he took on the Pioneer Run each year, but that, alas, is long gone.

This brings me to the present day, all sixty-three years behind me,

plus a plethora of BMWs, Triumphs, Beesas and Velos, all the knick-knacks we pick up on our passage through life. Fiftyish I reluctantly took my first car test, the old knuckles were stiffening up on the twistgrip, but still with a Honda 125 to sample the sea and country air up the Old Kent Road every morning. Then a mild dose of depression set in, with the political masters at Westminster set on putting me and my small fishing tackle shop out of business . . . ashes to ashes, dust to dust, if recession don't get you, the Red Routes must . . . So some weird insanity took hold and I started to look round for a Scott which, I figured, would take my mind off the falling turnover and rising expenses which seemed to be aimed at getting me into the dole queue; and they will, I think, succeed.

I had a vague idea of a 1947 model, the year I was called to the colours, achieving the same rank as the late Adolf Hitler in WW1. I came across this splendid 1973 Silk Scott, and in a mad moment bought it with savings I should have kept for my workhouse days. It seemed to have a truly low mileage of some 1,300 miles, true through the usual signs, and by its tax disc, it hadn't run since 1985. "Ah," the man said, "it runs. Just kick it over." The insult produced a kick-back like a mule, a reversed motor, the worst vibes I've ever felt through a handlebar, and one hell of a banging through the exhaust. "I'll take it," I said.

Trouble was that fighting to keep the ravening wolves from the door, it wasn't until the New Year that my friend and I crept into the beast's lair with spanners and feeler-gauge. The crankcase was filled with oil, seems the seal has gone on the pump side, and, of course the points had got into their surface-of-the-moon syndrome. All was cleaned up, the bike kicked but dead as a dodo until a few drops of nectar in the pots brought it to sing like one of N.F. Simpson's weighing machines. There you are, a spot of tax and insurance cover and I should have it trundling again, with that cracking exhaust note which my friend described as "a bit of a snort."

It's been hard to get any information on Silk Scotts. I have a feeling that many members look down on anything so modern, and the Silk factory neither answered a letter, nor gave much help on the phone. Even the fact that I was the fishing companion of the late Harry Weslake produced no sympathy. It's sad, for the Silk Scott has some fine points, though with no manual ever produced, they say. It's lightness, compared to my old Brum is such that someone looking forward to his Green Card like me can haul its tail round to bring it through the shed door. Also, gazing through that estimable *Yowl* Index there's precious little about this breed. Of course it was made for someone with a more supple spine than mine, and I may desecrate it a bit with a flared back bar to grapple with.

Well, there you are, I warned you this would be hardly a technician's handbook, but if any members familiar with the Silk Scott version would get in touch, that would give me a lot of pleasure, for it's something like a jig-saw puzzle when the picture has been lost. Cosmetically almost concours, the red paint has departed from the cylinders, which is something I'll have to do a van Gogh job on when the sun gets up a bit higher in the sky. My motor cycle memories are filled with ghosts and I well remember old Harry and I drifting across Darwell trout lake with our rods laid down whilst he sketched on the back of an envelope how to fit a 350 DOT racing two-stroke boat engine into a Zundapp frame, another beast we made . . . but there you are, when I finally succumb to the plans of those political geniuses who run the Economy at least I'll have something to play with.

Geoffrey Bucknall.