



# the British biker

## build-off

## A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT BIKER TV

**It's a fact of life that everything that happens over there eventually makes its way over here. I am, of course, talking about everything that's good, bad and ugly from the land of the free and the home of the brave which, for better or for worse, gradually permeates the fabric of British society so that it's difficult to remember what life was like before cheeseburgers, baseball caps and the annoying use of the word 'issue' when you really mean 'problem'. But the culinary overuse of lard and bovine waste products, the headwear choice of car thieves, muggers and slaphheads and the bastardisation of the English language pales into insignificance when we come to the subject of inane television programmes.**

And it's not just the plethora of American made shite on the TV that's the problem (or is it an issue?), because nobody forces you to watch the fucking thing – the same knob (sic) that turns it on can turn it off... What's really pissed me off about the rake of American 'reality' biker shows on TV these days isn't their content. Rather, it's that documentaries about Daytona or Sturgis featuring the same fat fools in outside leather vests grinning stupidly into a camera and shouting "All right," or chopper-building soap operas focussing on the unspeakable in search of the unrideable are NOT being made for biker viewing.

Nope, they're being made to be gawped at by members of the great British

public while they sit on the couch eating microwave chips and a Netto pie off of a plate balanced on their knees. So who gives a shit? Not me. But when members of that self-same British microwave chip-munching public suddenly become experts on bikes and bikers just because they've watched every episode of American Bedwetters, it makes me want to beat them to death with a fork leg wrapped in a copy of the Radio Times. For instance, the bloke up the road who used to look at me when I rode by as though I'd just butt-fucked his daughter on their immaculate front lawn now wants to engage me in conversation concerning the 'Fireman Bike' or the 'Hamburger Bike' or some other fucking rubbish that I know little, and care even less, about.

So when I heard that there was going to be a British-made version of the Biker Build-Off, I've got to admit that I didn't expect it to be up to much. Previous UK television programmes about bikes and bikers were mostly what I've heard described as little more than 'A gimp with a bad beard showing a fat woman how to adjust a chain'. But far from being a corporate exercise made by luvvies and bean huggers who wouldn't know what a motorcycle was if it was made out of tofu and rammed up their Marmite motorway (although if it were BBC luvvies they'd probably be queuing up with their trousers already down), it turned out that the British Biker Build-Off was being made by people I knew about people I knew, albeit some of them by reputation only. Therefore, there was a pretty fair chance that it would be about real bikers building real bikes – skinned knuckles, tears and tantrums – not about a bunch of little rich

boys building money-no-object motorcycles with full access to complete CNC-equipped workshops and shelves groaning with ready-made parts, and definitely not about some well-loaded loud-mouthed fat bloke having a phoney shit-fit because the parts he ordered haven't arrived for the bike that he's 'building.'

Financed on an incredibly small budget out of the pockets of the organisers after no backing whatsoever had been forthcoming from within the motorcycle industry, the British Biker Build-Off was aired on the Discovery Channel late last year in a series of six half-hour programmes. It featured the talents of some of the best UK bike builders as they each constructed a custom motorcycle in the six-month period leading up to the grand finale at the 2005 Pro Custom Motorcycle Trade & Builders Exhibition, better known as the ProCustom Bike Show. Now this was no mean feat considering that the budget only allowed for a two-man film crew instead of the usual four, and that the builders involved weren't being paid for their time. Nor were they allowed, under the strict UK broadcasting regulations, to endorse any commercial products or services in order to finance their builds.

With viewing figures that exceeded the ratings for the US equivalent Build-Off, the UK series was a success, though not without criticism. A fair point to make was that all of the builders featured were located 'North of Watford', giving rise to the comments of it being a Northern Biker Build-Off, but with resources so tight – and the film crew also being located above the North/South dividing line – finances dictated that the closer the builders were to each other, the less time and money would be spent travelling from location to location. It was a situation that everyone involved in the project realised was far from ideal, but given the financial constraints and the time period allowed it was the best compromise that the production company could come up with. Screen tests which are now being made with bike builders from all over the UK should ensure that the envisaged 2006 Build-Off will be more geographically representative.

Other complaints that the programmes were too short and that not enough actual bike construction was shown is easily explained in two words – television companies. In order to secure an airtime deal, the Build-Off production company had to agree to two things (among many others) – that the programmes would be of thirty minutes duration and that they, the TV company, had the right to the final edit. What you have to remember here is that, although these programmes were made by bikers about bikers, the television company controlling the final product isn't remotely interested in making programmes FOR bikers. Their actual quote to the Build-Off production crew was that they wanted 'personalities and jeopardy.' In other

words, they wanted a soap opera with hairy-arsed bikers doing weird shit that would appeal to the aforementioned great British viewing public – yep, the tea-time microwave chip munchers. So it's no great surprise that the bulk of the workshop footage was edited down to a minimum and the tantrums and tomfoolery played to the maximum.

The saga came to a conclusion at the ProCustom Bike Show at the end of May where the bikes were judged and Jamie Millership from Classic and Custom declared the winner with his theme bike 'Pirates of the Caribbean,' as featured in BSH some time ago. You've also seen Vic Jefford's Warhorse, which took first place in the ProCustom Show proper, so it's about time we brought you the other Build-Off contestants' entries; Stez's Polar Cycles Twin Cam Harley, the Ace O' Spades 96-inch S&S from Steve at SHD and Tooty from Thundercity's Panhead.

CLINK



**British Biker Build-Off: [www.bikerbuildoffuk.com](http://www.bikerbuildoffuk.com)  
 Pro Custom Show: [www.procustombike.com](http://www.procustombike.com)  
 Classic & Custom: [www.classic-custom.co.uk](http://www.classic-custom.co.uk)  
 Thundercity: [www.thundercity.co.uk](http://www.thundercity.co.uk)  
 Polar Cycles: [www.polarcycles.com](http://www.polarcycles.com)  
 Phil's Chopper Shack: [www.choppershack.com](http://www.choppershack.com)  
 SHD: [shd-stoke.co.uk](http://shd-stoke.co.uk)  
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# POLAR CYCLES' TWIN CAM

'A FRIDGE TOO FAR'



(Yorkshiremen throw nowt away) – were fitted with late model OE Harley switchgear and master cylinder, along with a pair of Euro Component grips complete with German-style sticky-out indicators in their ends. The reasons for using OE Harley parts, albeit having been chromed, on what is essentially a one-off custom bike were twofold; *vis a vis*, Stez would have liked nothing better than to spend a few days machining a one-off master cylinder, but didn't have a huge amount of time to spend on the bike, and secondly, one of the conditions of using Pete the Greek's original Dyna for the project was that the bike would remain his after the Build-Off, which meant that it had to remain rideable and not be transformed into a show bike ornament. In fact, the bike has since been ridden by either Stez or Sime to custom shows large and small all over the country last summer, earning both trophies from the organisers and accolades from the bikers in attendance

wherever it went ... often simply for the fact that the bike had actually been ridden to and from the events.

True, it would have been a damned sight easier for Stez and Sime to build a more recognisable 'chopper' type custom bike for the Build-Off using a ready-made frame, forks, tank, exhaust system, mudguards, etc, which would undoubtedly have appealed to the judges more than the radical creation that they came up with. But if you want to be recognised as a true master of your craft, doing things the easy way is never an option.

words & photos: CLINK



a donor. This was fortuitous as Pete's Dyna also sported a nice set of chromed RevTech billet aluminium wheels with matching discs, Harrison Billet-6 brake calipers and a few other tasty pieces like the custom forward controls.

Deciding to do something different to get away from the usual kit bike thing – the 300mm rear end and swoopy fuel tank scenario that's been done to death these past couple of years – Stez kept the stock Harley-sized sixteen-inch wheels and, instead, did a really radical number with the rolling chassis. Resident Polar Cycles frame man, Simon, had no trouble making the perimeter type frame from Stez's ideas, but he did have problems getting tight enough radiuses on the steel tubes forming the backbone of both mudguards that were intended to be integral parts of both frame and front suspension. So, before Sime could make the mudguards he had to make a machine that could make the mudguards – as it were – a beast of a bender that he calls the Polar-Roller.

Stez's original plan called for the rigid rear end to feature a big Harley-type police patrol type seat complete with its own shock absorber set-up, and this is how Sime and Stez built the frame. Until, that is, the extended rear drive belt that'd been on order for months looked like it was never going to materialise, when Plan B was put into operation and they shortened the wheelbase enough to allow a stock length Harley belt to be used. But this made the big Harley Police-type seat look daft, so the rear end was panelled and modified to match the front and a much smaller fixed solo seat was used instead. Matching the radical form of the bike is the stunning HR Giger-inspired ICE paintwork that follows the twists and turns of the bodywork, the skeletal features of Giger's Alien perfectly matching the 'ribs' of the frame and mudguards, absorbing the shapes of the chassis into the subject of the artwork and making them an intrinsic part of the bike as a whole.

The leading link forks were created using Zodiac billet aluminium yokes (again for convenience, as they were on the original bike) and Stez made the fork legs from 39mm seamless tube to match the Harley-sized holes in the Zodiac yokes. He also made the big, beefy billet aluminium top mount for the pair of H-D Softail rear shockers

which form part of the design. A specially-made Parker aluminium fuel tank, sans tunnel and sporting a Dakota digital info centre in the middle, is rubber-mounted on cross members 'inside' the frame to protect it from the vibes of the now solidly-mounted 1450 Twin Cam Dyna engine (NB Dyna engines are rubber-mounted and don't have internal balance shafts) so, while the ride isn't as smooth as the original Dyna, it's no worse than a conventional Evo... And compared to something like a Shovelhead, it's as smooth as a porn star's beaver. The motor is just as it came out of the donor bike, though it was painted and polished, naturally, and fitted with matching Rebuffini (or something similar) wing-shaped billet aluminium air filter and coil covers which secrete away the stock CV carb on one side and OE coil on t'other.

The fully adjustable handlebars – an expensive custom set-up that came from Kev Beardsley's first version of his Lucky 7 Harley



**S**o you have six months to build a custom bike capable of competing with the best in the country. It has to be done in stages so that a film crew can track its progress from drawing board to completion, but it also has to be done to schedule – ie up, running, taxed, tested and on the road for the final programme – and at the same time you have to run a business and work on other people's bikes. Not only that, but you also have to plan, administrate and execute everything that needs to be done to run a major annual custom bike and trade show ... as well as eat, shit, shave and take the missus to Tesco's. So what do you do? Well, if you're Stez from Polar Cycles, you roll up your sleeves and build a bike with a radical leading link front end using the front mudguard as part of the suspension system and hook it up to a one-off perimeter-type frame and a Harley Twin Cam engine.

Stez had been thinking about just such a bike for some time, making drawings on beer mats and the like, and this was an ideal, if not straightforward, opportunity to put his plans into reality. With the ability to produce most of the bike in the Polar Cycles workshop and the decision having been made to use a Harley engine and gearbox, the project was kickstarted into life when Pete the Greek volunteered his 1999 Twin Cam Dyna as

Like others of our fellow builders in the Biker Build Off competition, we at Thundercity Cycles started with some radical and outrageous ideas that turned out to be impractical given the six months' time constraint of the contest. When we knew that we were one of the builders selected for the TV programme, our first plan was for a V4 bike, but we soon realised that completing it in time would be impossible. We weren't prepared to compromise on that particular project, so it was back to the drawing board.

After a bit of confabulation between myself and Tooty, we decided that we could kill two birds with one stone. Like our colleagues, we run a more than full time business, meaning that we simply couldn't shut up shop for six months, however committed to the TV programme we were. It also meant that, as

the old saying, 'The cobbler's children have no shoes' goes, our own bikes tend to get put on the back burner due to customers' work. For some time Tooty had been thinking about a new chop, and so we figured that we could tie the two projects together. But, as it was to be Tooty's personal bike as well as our entry for the BBO, he would have the final say on all of the design. I'm not saying I regretted that decision, but there were times when there was quite a lot of, um, 'discussion' about various elements!

We agreed that it was about time that we made a departure from our usual 'Wide Ass Lowrider' look, and went in a completely different direction. We'd all grown up reading Easyriders, and had been heavily influenced by Dave Mann's paintings. Our ideas of customs and chops came straight from the bikes he drew – high neck, hardtail choppers with huge apehangers and long springer forks. As kids we'd modelled ourselves on the righteous bros riding those machines and dreamed of the days when we could defy our mums and dads and grow thick, lustrous beards and plaster our bodies in tattoos. We just knew that if we could own such fine motorcycles and were the pictures of manly perfection depicted by Dave Mann, then we too could attract the sort of skinny, blonde, big-chested, slutty-looking biker chicks that he so lovingly painted ... and which, of course, there are millions of in Leeds. Right.

Well, as Tooty had already grown the thick, lustrous beard and has enough tattoos to make him a shoo-in for a remake of 'The Illustrated Man', all he needed was the righteous chopper. We didn't want to go half-cocked at this project and build a

retro-looking bike – we wanted an actual '60s/'70s-style chop. Because the clock was ticking we bought in a Santee hardtail frame as the basis of the build, but we made no concessions on the power train; this is a replica Panhead engine with a kicker-only 4-speed gearbox. At first we used a handshift and suicide clutch but, after a few miles and some near misses, we realised why people call it a suicide clutch, hence the conversion to the usual – and more manageable – set-up.

Being a big girly, Tooty insisted on having proper brakes, so the bike has discs front and rear. We do like to make life difficult for ourselves, and it proved to be a nightmare fitting a disc brake to a narrow springer front end that was never designed to take a brake. We found an XL-type petrol tank that we liked, and it was handed over to TCC's resident wizard, Edge, to convert from high to low tunnel. He also had to chop out the original filler cap and weld in a flush-fitting pop-up unit. While he was at it, for the sake of neatness, he also removed the ugly pressed steel bottom section and welded in a flat base which looks much better. The TCC logos and risers were CNC-machined by our mate, Martin, and Edge fabricated the frame accents, stainless rack and sissy bar.

The electrics – which should have been dead easy – were complicated by the designer's insistence that the bike had to have LED bullet indicators and



# THUNDERCITY CYCLES' OL' SKOOL CHOPPER



fucking strobe lights (look, just *don't* get me started on strobe lights!), and this consumed a large part of the final build, as well as of the collective TCC patience. For the paint we turned to one of our favourites (and one of the best in the business), Steve at The Roadhouse. The base is blood red with flames in ivory which Steve accentuated with mint green pinstripes, all done by hand. The whole paint job then had a red candy applied over the top, which gives the bike a rosy glow, reminiscent of Tooty himself.

Comfort had to give way to style when it came to the seat, and Marty at Smart RRRs and Gordon at Buckskin Leather collaborated to fashion this beautiful creation out of finest animal hide. The wacky exhaust system was the product of Andy at Zorstec's warped imagination, and is a totally unique design fabricated in stainless steel. We love Zorstec's pipes because not only do they look good, they perform brilliantly as well.

Despite what appearances might suggest, the finished bike rides like a dream. It's very light and nimble, and the Panhead motor provides tons of low down grunt. Starting the beast can involve a lot of swearing (especially when the engine is hot), and when it kicks back you don't half know about it! It was seen at quite a few shows last year, and picked up a fair number of trophies, including Best Old Skool at the Bulldog Bash. It might not have taken the top prize in the BBO, but as far as Tooty's concerned, his Ol' Skool chopper is definitely a winner.

words: **ANDY MALHAM & BLUE** // photos: **CLINK**



# SHD ACE O' SPADES

For all that might be said about the British version of the Great Biker Build-Off, one thing that it has succeeded in doing is to raise the profile of Stoke-based bike business, SHD. Judging by the quality of SHD's Build-Off entry, 'Ace O' Spades,' that's something which has been a well-deserved by-product of the venture. Although 'Ace' may not have won the Build-Off, its haul of trophies at a number of notable events since then has helped to establish SHD as one of the better domestic custom-building concerns around today. During the latter half of 2005, the bike went on to take – to name but a few – 'Best Chop' trophies at the ProCustom Show in Doncaster, the Devil's Own Show, Thundercity's custom show and the Independence Day Show at Ambergate, while Runner-Up Best Chop awards at both the Rock & Blues and the Bulldog Bash could, perhaps, be regarded as even finer achievements given the incredibly high standards of competing entries at the UK's two most prestigious custom shows.



On the face of it, the time frame involved at the outset of the Build-Off – six months to conceive, design, build and fine-tune a top-class chop – might not seem overly tight. Consider, though, that all of the British entrants were – and are – one, two or three-man bands, unlike their US counterparts who all seem to have had battalions of back-up staff, hangers-on and various other bods on hand to step in and handle routine shop work while the bosses concentrated solely on their Build-Off entries. As such, the Brits had their work cut out in making sure that day-to-day duties involved in running a business weren't ignored while their precious (little) spare time was devoted to projects that couldn't, in any way, shape or form, end up as unfinished second-rate efforts come deadline day.

One or two compromises, therefore, inevitably had to be made. The first of them, as far as SHD's Steve Wheeler was concerned, came with the decision to base their particular build around a ready-made frame rather than creating a chassis completely from scratch, something that would have seriously risked the success of the project because of the lengthy processes involved in experimenting and perfecting a totally-new product. As their starting point, Steve chose a twin-downtube rigid North Sea Choppers frame from Zodiac (incidentally, also available in single-downtube and softtail versions), and in view of the fact that it had been nominally developed by the Dutch firm to accept a 96 cubic inch S&S Evolution-style engine and Zodiac 5-speed gearbox, he figured that he'd also go along with that format for Ace O' Spades, on the grounds that fitting any other engine and gearbox would inevitably involve apparently 'minor' adaption tasks that Sod's



Law would surely have turned into time-consuming disasters. The engine and transmission are hooked together by a three-inch open belt primary drive which, along with the erm ... extremely short Samson Extreme two-into-two exhaust pipes on the other side, helps to keep everything down below nice and compact.

Despite its steep steering angle, the high headstock of the North Sea Choppers frame dictated a relatively long pair of forks if the bike's ground clearance was going to remain remotely practical. Steve settled on a set of fourteen-inch over stock SJP 'Fat Glide' forks and yokes, a hefty-looking set-up that balances out the bulk of the modified West Coast Choppers fuel tank – had the forks been any more delicate, the tank would have stuck out like a ballet dancer's bollocks. The black anodised handlebars are SHD one-offs that hark back to the early days of motorcycle customising in the UK. Anyone who was around back then must be put in mind

of a pair of 'Z' bars, one of only about half-a-dozen off-the-shelf handlebar options available to the bike builder in the Seventies (hated 'em myself – always much preferred T-bars or drag bars...).

By selecting aftermarket products to form the bare bones of Ace, Steve gave himself some breathing space in which to produce a number of totally unique components. For instance, the unfeasibly shallow – yet perfectly adequate – oil tank, took fourteen of your Earth hours to fabricate, while the *piece de resistance* – that flamed rear mudguard – was the result of some seventeen hours of very, very careful cutting and shaping. Ace is also liberally scattered with ace of spades-themed one-off parts in the shape of the cylinder head breathers, side-mounted taillight, choke lever, brake hose guides, fork stops, points cover and fuel filler cap, as well as the spade-shaped solo seat that came courtesy of Dragon Seating. Reading a list like that might sound as though Steve had gone over the top by cluttering up the bike with naffly-contrived parts just for the sake of it, but as you can see, he carried it all off beautifully.

Ace O' Spades was undoubtedly the most subtly-built of the British Biker Build-Off entries, but it's none the worse for that, and it's well worthy of all the other accolades it's received, too. I think I'm on pretty safe ground in saying that we'll be hearing more from SHD before too long.

words: **STU** // photos: **CLINK**



## SPECIFICATIONS:



### POLAR CYCLES' - TWIN CAM

**ENGINE:**

1999 Harley-Davidson Dyna 1450cc Twin Cam, stock carb with Dynajet kit, Rebuffini billet aluminium air filter with high-flow element, Polar Cycles one-off stainless exhaust system, stock Dyna Twin Cam 5-speed gearbox, clutch, primary drive and primary cases, aftermarket custom primary cover and ignition cover with chrome removed and painted.

**FRAME:**

Steel tubular rigid perimeter frame designed and fabricated at Polar Cycles.

**FRONT END:**

One-off Polar Cycles leading link fork assembly, Zodiac billet ally yokes, H-D Softail rear shocks, RevTech chromed billet ally 16" wheel with 130/90 x 16" Avon Venom tyre, RevTech polished stainless discs and Billet-6 calipers, mudguard integral with suspension system, chromed H-D master cylinder with braided stainless brake lines, Arlen Ness headlight, fully adjustable handlebars with Euro Components bar-end indicators and chromed billet ally grips and throttle, chromed H-D switchgear with internal wiring.

**REAR END:**

RevTech chromed billet ally 16" wheel with 150/80 x 16" Avon Venom tyre, RevTech polished stainless disc and Billet-4 caliper, aftermarket billet ally master cylinder with braided stainless brake line, RevTech chromed 70-tooth final drive pulley with stock H-D drive belt, wheel spindle and one-off covers by Polar Cycles, mudguard integral with frame, frenched-in LED taillights, chromed ally number plate by Polar Cycles.

**STUFF:**

One-off Parker aluminium fuel tank with Dakota digital info centre, seat by Steve at Acorn Leathers on Polar Cycles base, aftermarket billet ally forward controls, one-off wiring harness by Polar, Rebuffini billet ally coil cover.

**PAINT AND FINISH:**

Paintwork by Ian and Mark at ICE Paintworks, Worksop, Notts (07762 070060). Chrome and polishing by Polar Cycles.

**THANKS TO:**

"Pete The Greek, everybody at Polar Cycles, and Ian and Mark at ICE Paintworks."

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### THUNDERCITY CYCLES' - OL' SKOOL CHOPPER

**ENGINE:**

RevTech Pandemonium 1450, stripped and rebuilt by Thundercity Cycles (01132 406332), converted to points, Stage 2 tuned. No electric start - kicker only. One-off oil tank and coil hanger. Antique oil filter. One-off exhaust system by Zorstec.

**FRAME:**

Santee hardtail with Devil's Tail battery box, modified gearbox mounts, tank, seat and mudguard mounts.

**FRONT END:**

12" over Paughco springers, American Wire 90-spoke wheel, GMA brake, one-off mudguard. 16" apehangers, modified King Sportster tank, 4.5" headlight.

**REAR END:**

American Wire 80-spoke wheel, one-off mudguard, seat by Buckskin Leather and Smart RRRs. Diamond LED taillight. One-off rack and sissy bar, the smallest indicators in the world

**PAINT AND FINISHING:**

Candy Apple Red with Pearl White flames, Mint Green pinstriping and red and green flip flop lacquer, by Steve at The Roadhouse. Polishing by Thundercity Motorcycles.

**THANKS TO:**

"Tooty for unreasonable demands, Edge for engineering and fabrication, Martin at Taylor Machine Services (01422 382993) for CNC work, Marty at Smart RRRs (01904 783232) and Gordon at Buckskin Leather (01904 791557) for the seat, Andy at Zorstec (01274 587004) for the pipes, and Steve at The Roadhouse (0113 255 9682) for paint."

Thundercity Cycles. Tel: 01132 406332,  
website: [www.thundercity.com](http://www.thundercity.com)



### SHD - ACE O' SPADES

**ENGINE:**

96 cc in S&S Evo-style engine, S&S 585 camshaft, S&S Super E carb with one-off ally velocity stack, one-off Ace O' Spades head breathers, choke lever and points cover, Crane Hi-4 ignition, Samson Extreme 2-into-2 exhausts, Zodiac 5-speed gearbox, 3" open belt primary drive.

**FRAME:**

Zodiac North Sea Chopper twin downtube rigid.

**FRONT END:**

14" overstock SJP Fat Glide forks and yokes, Motorcycle Storehouse 3.5" x 21" 80-spoke stainless wheel with Metzeler 120/70 x 21" tyre, single-pot SJP caliper, Rick's disc, Goodridge stainless braided hose, one-off SHD 1.25" handlebars with Performance Machine controls and W&W grips, SJP headlight.

**REAR END:**

Motorcycle Storehouse 10.5" x 18" 120-spoke stainless wheel with Metzeler 280/35 x 18" tyre, single-pot SJP caliper, Rick's disc, Goodridge braided stainless hose, one-off 'flame-cut' SHD mudguard, one-off SHD 'Ace' sidemount number plate and taillight.

**STUFF:**

Modified Jesse James/West Coast Choppers Villain fuel tank with one-off 'Ace' filler cap, one-off SHD oil tank, one-off solo seat by SHD and Dragon Seating, SJP forward controls, electrics by SHD, all wiring and hoses through-the-frame.

**PAINT AND FINISH:**

Black base with red flames and white pinstriping by Miles Carter. All polishing by SHD.

**THANKS TO:**

"Miles Carter, John Fantauzzo, John Rathbone Racing and Prima Engineering (01782 711909)."

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