

Biker Of The Month

Mitch Klempf Of Klempf's British Parts

By Mike Brown

Mitch Klempf began his motorcycle life as a 14-year-old, bombing around his parents' Minnesota farm on a Honda 90. But soon, he wanted more power. It came via a 1964 Triumph Bonneville. Some might call that a quantum leap, but Mitch just refers to the step up casually in his usual understated way. For example, when asked about his racing background aboard a Trident, he doesn't reel off a list of victories, although he has the trophies to show for them, and instead down plays the whole thing.

Actually, according to Clinton Larson's article in the Dodge Center Star Record, Mitch was a highly competitive racer with "...a whole shelf of awards to prove it. Lots of the racers thought he was somewhat of a novelty back then, what with his older, British motorcycle that was supposedly no match for the bigger bikes coming out of Japan at the time. Once the race was underway though, riders quickly found out Klempf and his Triumph motorcycle were nothing to scoff at, especially since they usually only caught a glimpse of him once as he flew by them in the first turn."



Nearly everyone who orders from Klempf's British Parts will speak to Mitch himself, who stands ready to offer technical advice as well as a great selection of bits for your Brit ride.

Mitch traces his love for Brit Iron back to his first Bonneville, but his involvement in the motorcycle business arose more as a matter of necessity.

Like a lot of Brit bikers, Mitch has less than fond memories of obtaining parts and service for his old Triumph. "I brought my bike to the dealer five times," he recalled, "and I only got back home twice."

Parts availability wasn't any better. "Waiting two to three weeks in the summer for a part was bad," Mitch said of conditions at the time, and it was this situation that inadvertently started his business inventory.

"I started to collect all the spare parts I could. I even put some under my bed at home... My mom wasn't too happy about that," he said, but his friends had the opposite opinion, and Mitch began to be the guy to see if you really wanted a part before the turn of the century.

Mitch would need a pretty big bed today, especially after his recent acquisition of Moores Cycle Supply. Mitch had known the Moores previously, describing them as "real good people" and the deal was done sans lawyers, a simple agreement between fellow cycle enthusiasts.

"I need to clone myself," he said of his current workload and new business growth, but that has not apparently changed customer service. When a customer calls Klempf's British Parts, the odds are heavy they'll still be talking to the man himself, and it's this kind of service and customer care that Mitch says he wants to continue, even if it means ending the business day way past midnight and combining lunch and dinner between phone calls and parts packing.

Being able to speak directly to "the boss" has many advantages, but it also helps that he's an expert who wants to solve problems and offer years of expe-



Mitch's inventory is stacked to the rafters. Here's a nice selection of wheels and seats.

rience, even if it means losing a sale.

"Lots of guys call up and want a diode," Mitch said of the infamous Lucas part, "and I ask them why they want it." Often, Mitch said, he has to explain that the diode isn't the problem. "It's just the easiest thing to get to," he explained of the reason many people with charging system problems decide to change it out. So instead of a diode, customers often receive a mini-course in the Lucas charging system and avoid a big bill for an unnecessary part. "I treat people the way I want to be treated," he said.

Much of this first-class treatment is behind the scenes and involves careful navigation through the current state of British motorcycle parts. Years of experience have taught Mitch to be very careful

around aftermarket parts and to inspect each one before it's shipped. It also involves informing the customer of options and choices.

“Do you want a petcock that works or one that looks original?” Mitch said he would tell a customer in reference to the many poorly made replicas on the market today. Mitch said he likes to explain the options after finding out what the customer intends to do with the cycle, and then can offer a variety of choices from “good enough but not as good” to the best on the market.

Irrespective of quality, Mitch, like most customers and traders, now struggles with market forces that have inflated parts prices over the past several years. Mitch explained that the combination of higher fuel prices and the international exchange rate unfortunately occurred together and accounts for the conditions today. However, even with these issues, it can pay to buy new as opposed to repairing OEM parts, and Mitch offered a good example, wheel rims.

“I've seen rechromed rims where the nipple drops right through the rim hole,” he said, explaining that overaggressive polishing needed on some older rims often causes the holes to enlarge so much that this condition occurs. Also, plating costs today can really take away the financial advantage.

Mitch, like a lot of Brit bikers, also stands amazed at how the used parts market has crept ever higher over the last decade or so. “Stuff I almost threw out 10 years ago can go for 200-300 dollars now,” he said, cautioning all to hang on to old bits and pieces no matter how bad they might seem as this trend is likely to continue.



Need a good Brit fender? Mitch has a full inventory.

At times, Mitch is forced to bring a customer back down to earth, and he related several instances. “Sometimes a guy will want to rebuild an old bike to make money,” Mitch said, “and I have to tell him it won't happen.” He explained that while many old Brits cycles are appreciating; current prices for most common ones aren't like the high dollar range one can get for something like “an old Indian or a Vincent.”

Mitch also recalled a customer who wanted to build an old Bonneville to ride with his friends on new Harleys. “How fast do your friends like to ride?” Mitch asked, and learned that 80-90 MPH cruising was intended. Once again, Mitch's considerable experience came into play.

“New Harleys today can cruise 85-90 and only turn about 2,200 RPMS,” he told the customer. “If you try to do that on an old Bonneville you'll need someone to follow you to pick up all the parts that fall off or the whole bike when it breaks down.”

Of course, Mitch also knows an old Brit that can live up to high speed cruising, the Trident, something he knows very well as this was his racing ride. He remembered being poked fun of by Kawasaki riders when he first began racing a Trident he built with a now famous Rob North frame. Mitch said he was able

to get his hands on one, no easy feat, during Triumph's waning days, and he quickly silenced the Kawasaki boys, finishing races 35 to 40 seconds faster and with way better handling to boot.

Still, Mitch cautions Trident enthusiasts too. He remembers dealerships having many problems in the service department because the Trident demanded a very good mechanic and a lot of maintenance. "They can blow up fast," he cautions when service/repair work is not properly done.

Sadly, Mitch no longer has much time for service work, although that used to be a big part of his business. Even worse, he said his summers are so busy he seldom finds the time to ride his 2001 Triumph Sprint ST. Success, it seems, comes at a price.

As for what it takes to make it in the cycle business world, Mitch puts it simply: "hard work." This wasn't idle talk, as he had to put down a part he was packing at 9 PM when this interview first began.

But Mitch finds his work rewarding and having many benefits as well. He said the best part is all the

good people he gets to know, although "most of them I never get to see in person" as Mitch's business is primarily mail order.

So now instead of waiting for 2-3 weeks for parts to get his bike running in the summer, the summer parts rush keeps him from riding. Winter, Mitch said, is when he gets the time to breath a little easier. Unfortunately, this isn't prime time bike riding weather in Minnesota, but that might not keep Mitch off his Sprint. He said in his younger days he used to wrap twine on his Honda's tires so that he could ride in the snow. "Worked pretty good," he recalled. If anyone happens to see a Triumph Sprint in February sitting next to an empty spool of twine, they might want to start up a conversation with the rider. Could be they're talking to Mitch Klempf in the flesh.

Of course, a much more reliable way is to simply call him at 507-374-2222 or visit www.klempfs.com. You're bound to enjoy the experience, and guaranteed to get first-rate, honest advice and great parts for your Brit ride.



Mitch still has his racing ride, this '72 Trident housed in a Rob North frame. On it, he was tough to beat.