

Bike Alert is Accelerating

Bike Alert, as the name implies, is the antithesis of 'sleepy'.

By Mike Jackson

THOSE who know this go-ahead Lewisham (London) based company will readily confirm it's a very wideawake outfit indeed. But who is Bike Alert Plc, and what does it do?

Well, on the basis the average *Inside Line* reader is also a 'plugged-in' dealer, it's almost certain there's a selection of fast-moving Bike Alert consumables already in stock, even as we scan this page.

The 'paperwork' for these items, mind, will not have originated from Bike Alert itself...for its task, y'see, is to supply the suppliers. In fact Bike Alert supplies virtually every national and regional wholesaler throughout UK; it does the same in the USA, in addition to servicing numerous importers across Europe and other world markets.

Unusually, for a high volume company, it restricts itself to three prime products: sprockets, filters, and tyres; all consumables, and all deliberately sourced in Thailand.

There's a traditional saying in Asia—attributable, probably, to wise old Confucius—he who sings the least...sells the most. This proverb could have been composed with Bike Alert's youthful proprietor specifically in mind. Chris Boyiantzeas, the company's forty-ish, anglophile MD is one of this industry's least publicity-conscious personalities.

Since Bike Alert began in 1984 he's relied on the company's level of service to do the talking. Having established two world market-leading products (that's JT and HIFLO-FILTRO)—and a profoundly satisfactory relationship with his wholesalers—he feels it's timely to explain why these products are unique in today's high tech market.

When gently chided by *Inside Line* that while Bike Alert's sprockets and filters were widely recognised by riders & dealers as

Number One in their category, no-one yet really knows how this was achieved, he grinned, lit another cigarette, and confessed, "Maybe we've hidden our light under a bushel for too long..." Which is why *Inside Line* went to Thailand in June to inspect and report upon Bike Alert's trio of factory partners. The experience was a revelation.

Those of us, like this reporter, who follow the unending Quality -v- Price -v- Source equation, are conditioned to believe the 'safest' and 'best' consumables can only be produced in Japan, or mainland Europe. We're also conditioned to assume that on arrival here they'll be inherently expensive.

This philosophy was undoubtedly true in the 'good old days', then, along came Bike Alert, and within a short mid '80s timespan, turned the perceived wisdom on its head.

UK wholesalers happily testify how Bike Alert has profoundly disproved this tradition, but the mechanics of how it came to be are a fascinating story in their own right...

In 1980, fresh out of university, young Chris created a successful m/c wholesaling operation in his Greek homeland—which

flourishes today—but, having begun Bike Alert in Dulwich (London), in 1984, he knew where his destiny lay.

From modest beginnings the firm soon gained a reputation with wholesalers for consistent supply, at which point Chris formed an enduring partnership with JT Sprockets in Thailand.

Impressed by JT's attitude and potential, he assumed overall responsibility for its non-existing export sales, simultaneously with an ambitious plan to create a definitive range of final drive/rear wheel sprockets which, literally, would fit 99 per cent of bikes in current use. The brief was quite simple. The new JT sprocket had to match (or exceed) all existent and future OEM specifications. And at sensible retail prices.

It was a long time in the planning. Over a series of extensive visits to JT's plant, on the outskirts of Bangkok, Chris involved himself closely with every aspect of the humble sprocket's design and production. In reality a durable sprocket is as complex to produce as any vital engine component.

He likewise immersed himself selecting



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On the day of our follow-up visit to Bike Alert's spacious warehouse in south east London, we were greeted with the announcement of an all new range of HIFLOFILTRO air filters, spanning approx 200 m/c & ATV applications. The air filters are available now, from UK suppliers. This new HF air filter, which we can confirm is made to the identical high standard of its sister oil filter—see *Inside Line's* special HIFLOFILTRO feature in next month's issue—is to be officially launched on the European market at Milan.



standard for filters—on an entirely voluntary basis—adding months of delay to the overall process, but which provided an unarguable endorsement upon HF's eventual introduction.

From Day One the distinctive red-papered filters sold in healthy volumes, smoothly following JT sprockets into Bike Alert's network of home and overseas outlets.

For the second time his comprehensive pre-production plan paid a nice dividend, with the result that throughout the main markets, HIFLO-FILTRO was immediately regarded as the oil filter to stock.

In the early 1990's, meanwhile, Bike Alert had begun importing Vee Rubber tyres and tubes, from Thailand. The family run Vee Rubber company is one of Thailand's export/manufacturing success stories—see *Inside Line's* special Vee Rubber Tyre feature in next month's issue—proving a perfect fit for Bike Alert, which distributes the range exclusively in the UK.

Produced from home-grown rubber, the VR brand has evolved as a major force in the replacement market for scooter, ATV, and motocross usage.

Until now, Vee Rubber has admittedly been marketed on price and availability, rather than quality. Knowing, however, the levels of investment VR itself is presently ploughing into its factories—and fully aware VR's standards now ensure it produces 'silently' for several internationally renowned tyre co's—Bike Alert intends promoting the brand on

the quality of the brand itself, which is, by the way, fitted OE by two major European scooter manufacturers.

This brief resume of Bike Alert barely touches the company's patently obvious dynamism. To observe its 25,000 sq ft warehouse in full weekday flow is an impressive sight and, clearly, with just three brands upon which to concentrate, Bike Alert conjures the impression of a British-based extension of its respective factory partners.

Surrounded by some millions of parts—many in various stages of re-packing, prior to despatch to UK, European, or rest-of-world distributors—we spotted numerous outgoing individual consignments varying between 10,000 filters/1000 sprockets/one dozen assorted tyres and tubes...an inherent curiosity ensured we checked.

On site, too, was a just-arrived container, disgorging fresh stock; in this instance...a mountain of green-boxed HF air filters.

Bike Alert's two acre complex at Axion House is thus a busy place, but despite the visibly commercial bustle, an overall calm prevails. We asked Chris about which aspect of his products he was the proudest? Without hesitation, "...we've never received an in-service warranty claim, other than for occasional packing discrepancies, either for a filter failure, or for a faulty sprocket, since we originated JT and HIFLO, 15 years, and 4 years ago, respectively." That's some endorsement!

Bike Alert: Tel:0208-2977970, Fax: 0208-2977992 or E-mail: baeurope@bikealert.com

dozens of additional new machine tools and, most important of all, chose the material specifications.

Eighteen months later, following considerable research and numerous return visits, he was ready to 'complete the loop' with the composition/publication of JT's first Application Guide; a masterly tome, enabling even the newest storehand to select the exact sprocket required.

On the subject of price—consistent pricing, that is—it's salutary, perhaps, how Bike Alert has maintained its price structures, without increase, over the last seven years. Fifteen years down the road, and in addition to distributing sprockets throughout USA & Canada—via wholly-owned Bike Alert Inc [Atlanta, Georgia]—the firm now sells JT products into 52 countries around the world.

So, with a decade of 'sprocketing' under his belt, it was natural progression to introduce an additional consumable. This second venture was the now familiar green-boxed HIFLO-FILTRO (HF) range of oil filters.

Production, range, and quality logistics were pretty similar to the earlier JT exercise, necessitating the tracking down of Thailand's top filter producer—which was already key OE supplier to the country's burgeoning auto industry—and, again, overseeing every detail through the manufacturing stages of what is now HF's 40-odd oil filter range for motorcycles.

Chris also insisted in establishing a TUV