

# JT Sprockets— Miracle in Mettle!

Sprocket users, represented by 97% of the motor cycles on UK streets (excluding most BMW's, and other 'shafties'), never give a moment's thought to those two chunks of toothed-metal rapidly revolving at either end of their drive chain...until, that is, the first signs of trouble.

**N**O matter which end of the chain we're talking, everyone takes sprockets for granted, right to the point they need replacing...and, occasionally, a few 'graunchy' miles beyond that.

Before JT arrived, riders returned to their

sprocket seller where the man-behind-the-counter was accused of selling something too soft, or too hard, depending whether said sprocket had run its course before or after the bike's much cherished chain...had likewise expired.

Whatever the circumstance, the sprocket

took the blame! Techno-speak, too, tends to be angled in favour of chains; which are perceived more glamorous than humble sprockets. On aerosol canisters, for example, how often does it state 'Chain Lube', rather than 'sprocket lube'? Traditionally, the poor old sprocket was traditionally discarded in the outa sight, outa mind category.

Given this raft of endemic and rider-inflicted problems, was Bike Alert slightly deterred, 17 years ago, before it entered the 'transmission business'? Not in the least, but, having once determined to establish JT as the world's superior sprocket, Chris Boyiantzeas realised he couldn't tackle this vital component on a piecemeal basis. A revolution was required; a revolution is what he instigated.

From inception, and before JT came on stream, Bike Alert had—as it were—'cut its teeth' with sprockets; learning the business, planning ahead. Sprocket supplies at that time were spasmodic, the quality was inconsistent and supporting literature was generally vague. Solving these issues at a single stroke was not for the faint-hearted.

In launching JT it was necessary to Think Big, Think Accurate. As mentioned elsewhere (see Bike Alert is Accelerating in last month's issue) Chris tracked an embryo engineering operation in Bangkok, which was

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performing satisfactorily in its domestic market and which, encouragingly, was prepared to enjoin wholeheartedly with his ambitious proposal for creating the definitive replacement sprocket. (Not just replacement; JT, as always planned, now enjoys as much OEM business as it can handle.)

Sprocket quality was paramount. This began with the purchase/installation of dozens of CNC machines, the training of operatives, and, following finalisation of the designs—including such minutiae as 'gunge' grooves, bar codes, and those multi-shaped lightening 'holes'—came the crucial selection of raw materials. The best steel is found in Japan, and the best alloy—representing about 1 per cent of JT's output—is sourced from Austria. Purchasing channels were duly created.

To cover 2 years hard preparation in one paragraph fails to do justice to this intimidating venture which, if embarked upon in mid-1980's Europe, would be reasonably straightforward, perhaps, but when the enterprise is based in the Far East, 6500miles away, it's an entirely different proposition. That it succeeded with a vengeance is a great credit to Chris, and the confidence displayed by his Thai partners.

A rapid uplift in its erstwhile rate of business forced an early relocation for JT, from Bangkok Central into the suburbs, to a purpose built 'greenfield' site. Along the way

the workforce expanded twentyfold...whereby annual sprocket production now runs at 12million.

Bike Alert (London), by perspective, hold an optimum stock of 1million sprockets at any one time. Inside JT's half dozen, brightly-lit, cathedral-like production halls (about 250,000 sq ft in all) there repose numerous green-painted machines, equipped with diamond-edged cutters, briskly transforming plates and bars of high carbon steel into gleaming chainsaw-blade shapes and sizes, prior to proceeding for in-house heat treating. Thereafter, depending upon the destination, a black, chrome, or zinc finish is applied. There are constant inspections at each stage, despite the unlikely event of a gigantic £250,000 (or more) machine tool making an error. Separate banks of heat treatment ovens, stretching 40 metres end to end—seemingly working in 'slow motion'—process copious skips of sprockets. Certain items have to 'cook' for a considerable period yet, despite this enforced delay. Production quantities are so colossal that 'bottle-necks' are simply non-existent in this 2-shift factory.

As an aside; for several years JT has manufactured its own leading brand 428H chain, targeted specifically within SE Asia's voracious market. JT clearly possess the expertise for heavier chains in the future. In

what is a staggering statistic we learned that annual production is 2million+ chains, and can verify every individual bush, plate, and roller is sight-inspected. Answering Inside Line's (obvious) leading question, Chris's sole comment; "You ain't seen anything yet..."

En route to the plant we anticipated we'd be viewing something akin to a 'dark Satanic mill', never mind that a ready-for-sale JT Sprocket is a beautifully finished piece of kit.

The reality was utterly contrary to the expectation. By its very nature sprocket manufacture is a rugged, dirty business. JT runs a spotless ship. Not a single strand of swarf is visible on any section of the floor, and 650 white-gloved, grey-uniformed workers clearly take genuine pride in their surroundings. Mature trees line the factory site's border; a roofed, open-sided staff canteen is situated across from the obligatory tropical garden.

Inside Line's man-in-the-Far East closed his eyes and mused how JT's factory could easily be positioned deep in Germany's Ruhrland, on a sweltering day except, that is, for the clumps of free-growing palm trees. Internal factory temperatures hovered around 90 degrees fahrenheit, a normal June day for Thailand. The outside thermometer was a couple of degrees lower...so much for our dark Satanic mill.

At the end of the day the reputation of these sprockets is based on durability. That JT endure is because, in production, it employs the finest steel and aviation alloys available. Coupled with a universal availability and compatible margins (and a 'doddle' of an Application Guide), it makes for a formidable product.

To have grown an unknown brand to world market leader-ship, in 15-years, is a remarkable achievement. If Chris himself was not so habitually active he might find time to pause awhile and indeed appreciate that this Anglo-Thai partnership, in which he's the driving force, is a 'miracle in mettle'. Since our opening remarks things have moved on. For some years now, thanks to JT, our man-behind-the-counter has dispensed his sprockets with a totally free conscience. With impunity, too!

**JT Sprockets—talk to the firm about retailing these items that will help to boost your profits. Details call 0208-2977970, fax: 0208-2977992 or e-mail: baeurope@bikealert.com**

