

A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a bright red zip-up jacket and dark pants, stands in the center of a long, narrow aisle in a warehouse. He is holding a large, upright cardboard box with the word "HONDA" printed vertically on it. The aisle is lined with tall metal shelving units filled with various boxes and parts. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the man and the box, and deep shadows in the aisles. The ceiling has a complex metal truss structure.

INSIDE

David Silver Spares

40,000 square feet, 90,000 different parts and one man's big idea.
David Silver makes owning classic Hondas a breeze...

By Gez Kane Photography Adam Duckworth

INSIDE DAVID SILVER SPARES

» THE SHOWROOM

The façade of David Silver Spares Ltd's sales office looks a lot like a typical motorcycle dealer's from the '70s or '80s. Only the high steel security fence and surveillance cameras are a reminder that this is no high street shop, but a unit tucked away on the edge of a small market town. There's even a row of immaculate Hondas behind the showroom windows.

Stepping inside there's that indefinable smell of bikes and 15 classic Hondas ranging from a 1968 CB250 to a 1993 Fireblade. All original and all immaculate - or close to it. The bikes are a reference library in metal for the increasing range of re-manufactured parts David Silver commissions to keep older Hondas rolling.

At one end of the line is a truly superb 1982 CB1100RC - a genuine HRC-built production racer. It's a local bike David happened upon and the 6137 miles on the clock are genuine. Then there's that 1993 Fireblade and the only non-Honda on display, a Suzuki GT750 David bought, 'just because I liked it'.

A pair of CB400Fs are followed by two CB750K2s - models that form the company's business backbone. Next to them is a little CB100N, almost hidden in the shadow of a glorious 1980 CBX1000Z. Recognise that blue and white 1968 CB250? Then you must be a fan of James May's *Man Lab*. The bike was a constant in the studio during the filming of the first series and James swapped it with David Silver, taking a CX500 in its place.

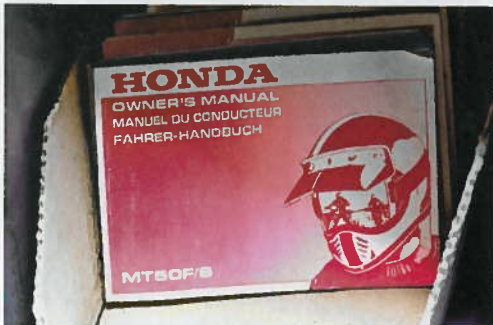
The precious metal continues with a 1972 CB350F, a delightful 1975 TL125K, a pristine 1962 C92, a 1972 CB500F and 1978 CB750F2 Honda Britain. It's a collection that any Honda fan would envy - and there's more. Across the yard, there's an overspill building with a mint CB250T together with a CB550F1 and another bike destined for the growing Honda collection of Mr James May, a beautiful 1970 SS125 twin. They're all gorgeous but, they're not for sale.



Massive expenditure on signage par for the course in this game



Obligatory palm tree has been on back order for six months



Local bike from a local person in sumptuous 6137 mile nick



David Silver: built the business from scratch and is now sitting on a not so little gold mine

Health and safety issue: hard hat and harness for second rung - surely?

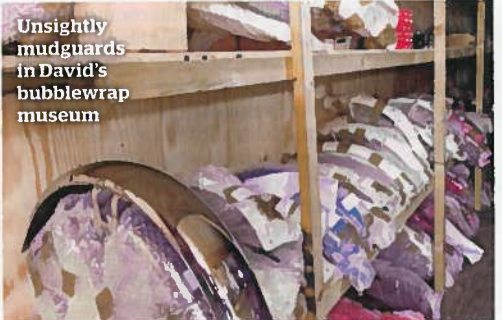
'We can't import parts from the USA, that's why we've set up a branch there'

THE STORY

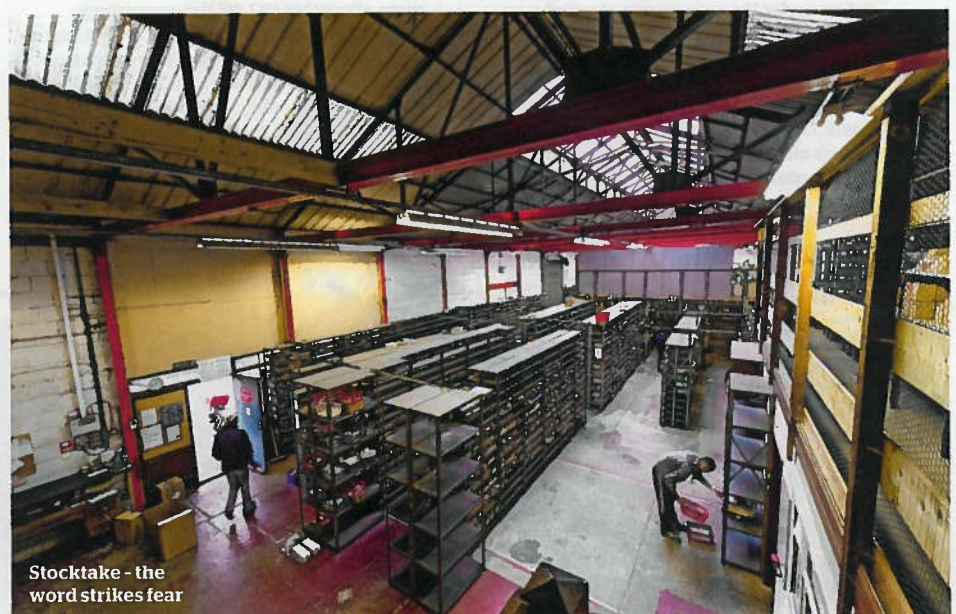
While David Silver Spares is an ensemble production, David Silver himself remains the main character. He started in the motorcycle trade working in the parts department of Sondel Sport, Islington. After trying to turn a profit out of restoring old bikes and selling them on, he realised sourcing parts was taking up too much of his time. He also knew from his contacts in the trade that plenty of dealers and parts distributors were sitting on loads of parts. In a moment of inspired entrepreneurialism he called on a distributor in London and bought a car load of Honda bits.

'I sold it all in a few weeks - some to breakers and some through an ad in *MCN*,' David explains. 'I realised I was onto a good thing. I started doing the rounds of all the Honda parts distributors in the UK, and dealers too. Most of them were happy to offload old stock onto me. I rented some space in Kilburn from a mate and set up the business properly in 1987 and moved up here in 1989 - just in time to benefit from the internet boom.'

David remains firmly hands-on. 'I used to do everything myself, but you just can't keep that up,' he admits. 'But I'm here every day, I go to shows and events at weekends and I'm off on a buying trip to the States for our new US warehouse over the winter. Thanks to EU legislation, we can't import Honda parts from the USA and sell them inside the EU. Everything we sell in the EU carrying the Honda brand name has to be sourced from the EU. That's why we've set up a branch in the USA and why remanufacturing parts under our own brand name is where future growth will come from.'



Unseen mudguards in David's bubblewrap museum



Stocktake - the word strikes fear

INSIDE DAVID SILVER SPARES

750 Four

CB750K1-K2 + US
£17.94 inc vat



CB750K2-K6
£17.94 inc vat

750 FourK

CB750K7 + US
£17.94 inc vat

750 FOUR

CB750 SOHC F1 - F2 + US
£17.94 inc vat

750 Four

CB750K6 + 73-76 US
£19.80



CB750K2-K6
£17.94 inc vat

400 FOUR

CB400F2 RFD
£17.94 inc vat

500 FOUR

CB500K0/K1 + US K2
£19.80

400 FOUR

CB400F2 YELLOW
£17.94 inc vat

SUPER SPORT!

CB400F2 RED
£5.94 inc vat

SUPER SPORT

CB400F1 RED OR BLUE
£5.94 inc vat

SUPER SPORT

CB400F2 YELLOW
£5.94 inc vat

REMEMBER
- PRESERVE NATURE -
ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET -
THINK SAFETY -

CB500K0-K2 + US
£1.14 inc vat

400 FOUR

CB400F1 RED
£3.00 inc vat

REMEMBER
- PRESERVE NATURE -
ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET -
THINK SAFETY -

CB500K0-K2 + US
£1.14 inc vat

550 FOURK

CB550K FOUR
£21.54

F350 Four

CB350F
£23.94 inc vat

EX500

CK500Z/A/B
£19.80

'Hello David, yeah
it's the trainee. I'm
lost...'



» THE STORES

We slip into the warehouse through a small door at the side. Inside, the battered grandeur of the Edwardian steelwork rises to a distant, pitched roof with a skylight framing a strip of cloudless blue Suffolk sky. This century-old cathedral of industry is a fitting home for nearly half a million individual Honda parts from the '60s to the '90s. It's recycling on a grand scale.

The space we're standing in is one of four interconnecting warehouses that total 40,000 sq ft, including mezzanine floors. 'We carry around 90,000 individual part numbers in stock,' says David. 'Everything is organised by part number - just as it would have been in a Honda parts warehouse back in the day. We've got plenty of space but, with a turnover of around £4.2 million a year, we need it.'

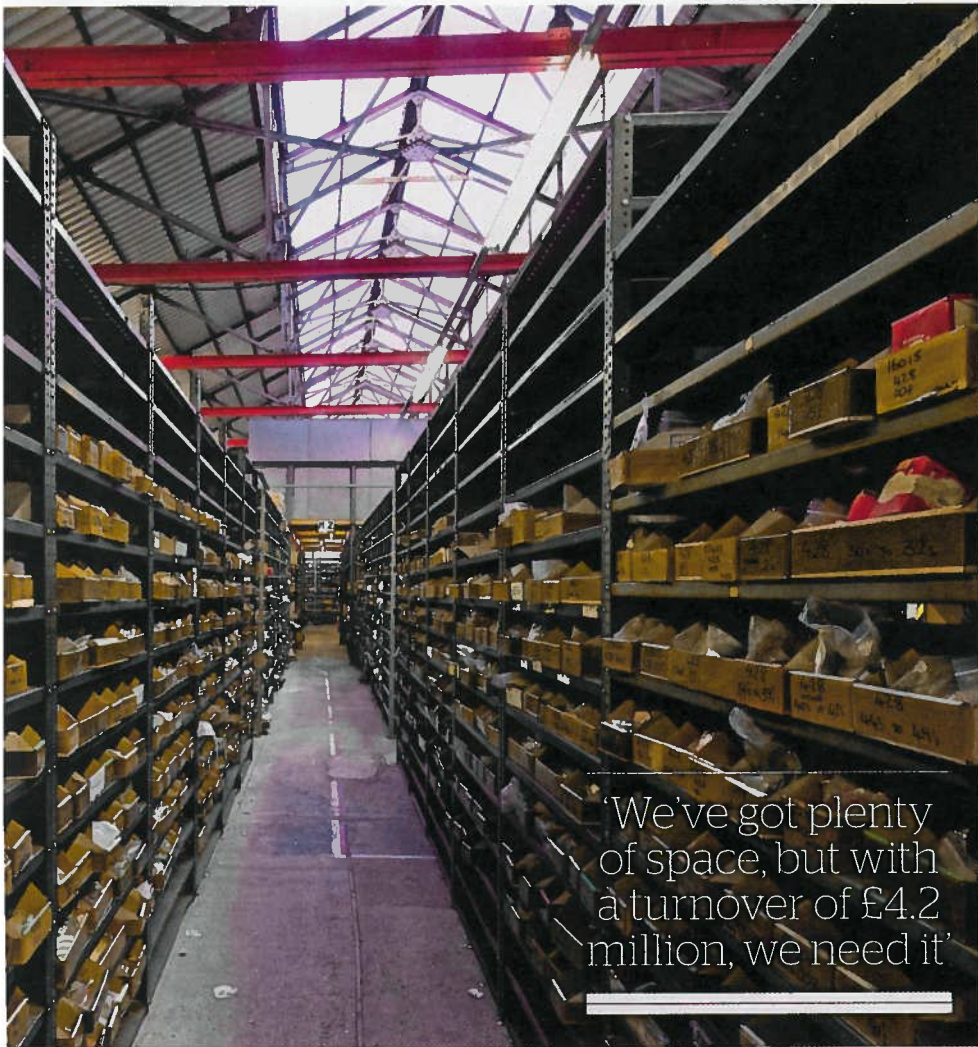
Five or six staff are usually at work picking orders under the supervision of warehouse manager David Foster, who has worked for the firm for 18 years. At the end of the warehouse nearest the packing room there are shelves set aside for completed orders, neatly placed in plastic crates to await packing and shipping. There's an area for part completed orders, one for UK orders and one for export. In another

section parcels sit waiting for collection by couriers. It's all very organised. Slick.

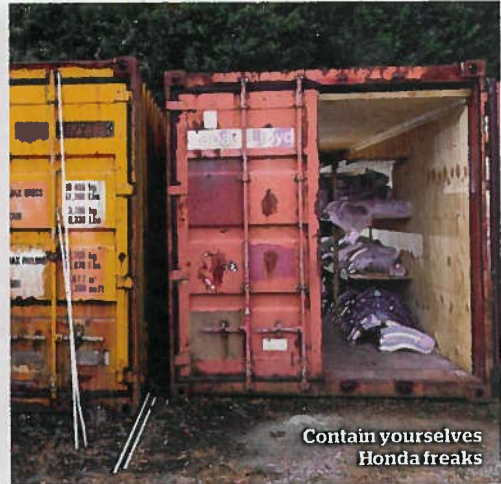
David's left us to wander round his Honda wonderland. The breadth of stock is amazing. There's a mixture of modern steel racking, homemade wooden shelving and good, old fashioned tea chests. My eyes settle on a box marked with the HRC logo. Like a true Honda anorak, I jot down the part number. Checking later, I discover it's a 'power-up' kit for a 2005 CBR1000RR-5, comprising HRC camshafts and valve springs. What an amazing find, even if I don't own a Fireblade.

Elsewhere I spot reproduction four-into-four exhaust systems for CB750s made by Japanese CB750 specialists Yamiya. Even at a sturdy £1500 David's first batch of ten sold within a week. There are remanufactured seats - with proper steel bases - for 400 fours, priced at a more affordable £82.80. Not surprisingly, Silver's have sold over 250 of those. But the top selling remanufactured part is a replica front brake master cylinder to suit CB350/400/550 and 750 fours - ready to fill and fit - for an amazing £36. You couldn't rebuild a master cylinder using genuine parts for that. All of which explains a lot about this place...





'We've got plenty of space, but with a turnover of £4.2 million, we need it'



Contain yourselves Honda freaks



Base metals are in fact gold

▶ THE CB400F RESTORATION PRODUCTION LINE

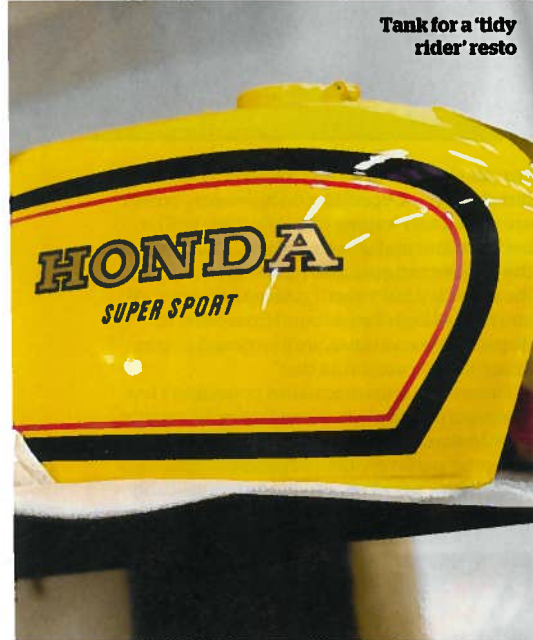
Parts for Honda's CB400F are David Silver's star earner. The model remains the most popular Honda with restorers and owners, if David's records are anything to go by. That's why he set up a production line restoration process. The project has its own dedicated warehouse and workshop space in a huge building just a few yards away from the main parts warehouses.

The idea of restoring CB400Fs on a commercial basis occurred to David in 2011. 'We have 6500 owners of these bikes on our database,' he explains. 'It seemed to me there ought to be a market for ready-restored bikes, so I started putting out wanted ads for them. I think I've bought more than 100 donor bikes so far and we've sold nearly 50 restored machines.'

A rank of donor bikes awaiting restoration line one wall of the huge warehouse building and more lurk in dark corners. There's a separate walled and roofed off section of the floor space that houses the workshop and dedicated parts store. The parts room looks like a scene from a breaker's circa 1980, with steel shelving piled with cylinder heads, barrels, engine cases, switchgear and all the other essential components of CB400Fs. Nothing is thrown away. 'Some original parts are so hard to find,' says David. 'Even rotten exhausts are worth saving. We get them repaired for people who insist on genuine parts - good genuine exhausts are hard to find and expensive.'

Step through into the workshop and the timewarp continues. On one of the two workbenches sits a yellow F2 model reaching the end of its restoration to 'tidy rider' condition. 'We restore the bikes to the level a customer asks for,' David explains. 'Some want a bike that looks good and goes well and they're not too bothered if it has a few pattern parts on it. We'll charge around £2500 for one like this, but others want a museum quality machine with all genuine parts - that'll cost around £4500.'

On the other bench, another bike is part way through a top-end rebuild. 'It smoked like a tramp steamer,' David explains. 'We're fitting new valves, guides, pistons and rings. We want each and every customer to be happy with what they've bought.'



Tank for a 'tidy rider' resto



Worth their weight in chrome-plated mild steel



Mercifully free of Honda Parking Only' sign

Rims all
spoken for



► THE PACKING ROOM

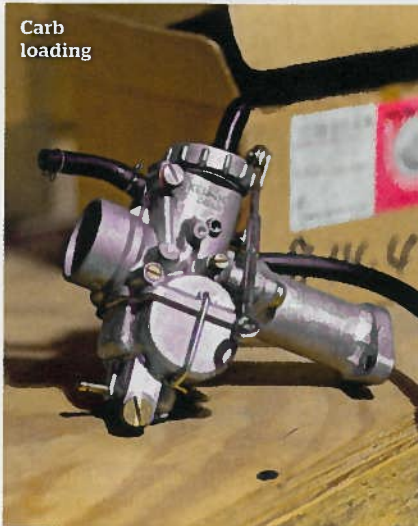
If the warehouse is on a massive scale, the packing room is altogether more homely. The radio is on and under the packing benches are piles of packing materials, flat packed cardboard boxes and reels of tape. There's a franking machine, printer and a couple of computer screens keeping track of orders. There's also a wall dedicated to the, ah, female form, lending a little levity to a pressured environment. The work is fast and furious, but the banter is non-stop.

Today is relatively quiet, according to Tris Revell, beavering away with a tape gun and a stack of Jiffy bags. 'We aim to pack at least 40

parcels each in a day - more when it's really busy,' he says. 'Depending on how many orders are picked and waiting to go out, there will be between four and six of us in here. At this end of the year we can guarantee all orders will go out the same day, but when it gets really busy, we'll aim for a 48 hour turn around from order to dispatch. At peak times, we'll pack and ship as many as 400 parcels in a day.'

Orders can range from a few pounds to a few thousand pounds in value and are split roughly 60/40 between the UK and export. 'Big trade orders for parts we have remanufactured might be £5-6000,' says Tris. 'Private orders probably average £150-200.'

Carb
loading



David
Silver IS
Honda
Britain

