



Big Ed on his graduation day in 1980. He certainly hasn't improved with age. The suit used to be a regular sight at kit car shows, but he can't get into it any more. Perhaps we'll publish something more up-to-date next month.

Wow! This is a strange experience!

I've been a publisher since 1991 but I've never been an editor and it does feel odd. Even odder because I've never even been a journalist, save for a few articles in the last year in Kit Car concerning my ongoing argument with another publisher. I'll come back to that later. For now I'll tell you a little bit about myself.

I'm an engineer. I graduated from what is now known as Brighton University in 1980; having previously spent a short time in the army followed by an engineering apprenticeship at the ITC (Industrial Training College) and Monotype Corporation. Following my graduation from Brighton University with an Honours Degree in Engineering I worked, in amongst other positions, as a design engineer on torpedoes for the Royal Navy and on secure communications and counter-surveillance equipment for MI5.

In 1985, I decided to go into production with a quaint little 'traditional' 1930's style sports car kit called the Bulldog. After becoming a fully-fledged manufacturer, in 1986 I developed a more rounded 1960's style pseudo-Cobra thingy called the Hawthorn (named after a famous British racing driver) which was based on Morris Marina components. From these humble kit cars, in 1988 and with a little help from Southern Roadcraft, I produced a Cobra replica called the Sumo Mk 1.

My Cobra Credentials

About 2500 Pilgrim Sumo kits were sold up till when I sold the company, about 300 have since been sold. On top of that, Pilgrim had supplied at least 600 Cobra body shells to RAM, Southern Roadcraft, Magnum, Gravetti and other manufacturers. My company was taken over in April 2002 by Tony Holmes, who formerly served me as my factory manager. His company, now called Pilgrim Cars (UK)

Ltd, continues to be one of the most prolific producers of Cobra kits to this day.

I personally designed all the variants of the Sumo, and I was responsible for the mechanical design of Pilgrim's other models. I think that establishes my credentials as an engineer who's been responsible for the production of more Cobra replica kits than any man alive – with the exception of Mr Carroll Shelby himself. I've personally tackled every sort of design challenge facing Cobra builders in every area of the car's construction. So, with all this in the background, I believe that nobody's better placed to publish and edit Cobra magazine than me. Whether that's true or not, you're stuck with me as publisher. However, the editor's position is up for grabs and is currently under offer. More on that in Volume 3.

How did I get into Publishing?

Like many engineers, I'm not best suited to writing or even to publishing. So I thought I'd explain why I'm now in this particular pond.

It's the result of an eye-opening encounter which took place in February 1985 – my first month at the helm of Pilgrim. I'd made arrangements with all three magazines of the day to test my prototype Bulldog. Peter Filby (of Component Car; as it was at the time) insisted that he have the first test. I therefore booked him in before either Ian Hyne (Kit Car) or Peter Coxhead (Kit Cars & Specials). Fib's (my pet name for him) was to attend 'first thing' one morning. Well, I waited and waited. Come about 11am, I telephoned his office to be informed that he was 'on his way'. I telephoned approximately once an hour thereafter until 5pm and got the same response. I gave up at around 5.30pm and 'phoned Peter Coxhead to confirm that he'd be coming the next day – I'll come back to that conversation later.

Peter Coxhead and Ian Hyne duly visited as



arranged, as did Fib's eventually. We discussed his lack of manners regarding his broken appointment, which he explained was due to having a puncture but no spare. I implied that it couldn't take from 8am to 5.30pm to fix a puncture and suggested it was unusual to not contact either his office or the person he was travelling to. He turned to his assistant, ordering him to corroborate the story of the puncture. He was adamant and uncompromising in his stance.

Neither of them knew what Peter Coxhead had told me in the aforementioned conversation. He said that he'd spoken to Brian Johns who'd told him that Fib's was actually with him on that day at the DAX factory. I don't know for sure which account was correct. One seemed implausible for the reasons stated. The other came from a man with no axe to grind, who I later employed.

At the very least I had concerns about reliability which caused me to question, rightly or wrongly, integrity. This episode made me feel very uneasy and no doubt started a thought process which culminated in my eventually becoming a publisher. And all because of such a trivial issue. Emmm!

Integrity and Knowledge are publisher's assets

Fib's also made clear that what he published concerning any car was a reflection of his feelings rather than fact. To be fair to him, he made it perfectly clear that he hadn't the knowledge to comment from any other perspective. By way of example, in the conversation referred to above, he said very clearly that he couldn't even change a wheel. He's subsequently published admissions to the effect that he doesn't understand the oily bits of cars. These are not criticisms, but simple observations to the effect that he's simply not qualified in technical matters and even less interested. We therefore spent only 10 minutes discussing Bulldog. The rest of the day he probed the financial base upon which Pilgrim was built. All in all, my first meeting with 'Mr Big' left me with more questions than answers, and not a little bemused.

Over the next few years I cringed at what I saw Which Kit? do to a succession of kit car companies. I watched as Dutton, Cheetah, Eagle, JPR, Jago and a few others systematically fell victim to its unique brand of 'objective' reporting. It seemed that the magazine had 'feelings' which developed out of disputes, usually about advertising. They spilled into the magazine; typically by way of a disgruntled reader's letter criticising the manufacturer, amplified, repeated and commented upon over subsequent issues until the manufacturer's temper was lost, prompting further salvos of negative comment in the magazine. The manufacturers listed above went to the wall which served as an object lesson to others who've generally learnt to 'respect' that rag and not argue with it.

When Pilgrim came under fire, I refused to buckle. That began a long story which I'll not rehearse today. Suffice to say that I acquired my first maga-

zine in 1991 and embarked upon my publishing career. I will just say that the argument that caused us to fall out catastrophically in 1998 was a technical one. Curiously the author of the contentious piece was the very person who admits to having no technical knowledge, qualifications or interests. It was alleged that a Sumo wasn't capable of taking a Chevrolet engine. Which Kit? stood by its guns through years of litigation; in the process it spent something like £150,000 defending the ensuing legal suit before its apology was forthcoming. LOL.

The single point that I'm making here is that my platform is very important, to me at least. It's based on truthfulness built on genuine technical knowledge and experience tempered with humility. It shall ensure that what you read in Cobra will be trustworthy and not simply egotistical 'feelings' influenced by advertising revenue. If we do get something wrong it'll be a genuine mistake and we'll put matters right without hesitation.

Where do WE go from here?

I've made clear who I am, how I'm qualified, where I am, what I do and where I'm going in respect to producing an honest and technically accurate Cobra magazine which isn't going to place truth on the altar of appeasement. That's a particularly tough task I've set myself, but only half the task at that. A magazine isn't just about its subject matter, but must also encompass its most important asset – its readers – its people. That means that it must be entertaining and deal with reader's real concerns and experiences. So, I'm going to need all the help I can get to develop this title into a self-supporting, mature publication in its own right. To do that it needs a loyal and committed readership. To get that I'm going to need your help, support, contributions and advice, because I can't steer this ship on my own.

As you can see from the contents page, I've got many professional contributors. However, that's not enough! I need your input in the form of your questions, build stories, pictures of your cars and anything else you can think of. I'd like to know everything about you and your Cobra. What went right and what went wrong. Who was a pleasure to deal with and who was a pain in your a***. Why you got involved and how you'd do it differently next time. I reckon that YOU are the real subject matter of this magazine; so you've simply got to tell me what you want in some cases and in other cases you've got to supply the information that other readers want to know.

Please remember that your 'mundane' experiences are probably completely new to most folk and are exactly what somebody new to the game wants to know but is afraid to ask. The lessons you learned the hard way may save others going through what you went through. Your joyous experience may be the inspiration for someone else to actually bite the bullet. With your help, we could breathe a fresh wind of enthusiasm into this already vibrant Cobra industry.

That Python Thing

Q Hi Den, I'm the chap who wrote a letter to Which Kit Car? a few months back, only to find that an entirely inaccurate version of it was published. I don't even read that magazine anymore as I can't trust its integrity.

After corresponding with you I decided to learn more about what I'd got caught up in. It's not that I disbelieve you, but I contacted some of Vince's customers, and to my amazement what I heard was universal praise for him and his engineering talent, and the driving abilities of his cars. This came as a bit of a surprise after what you had said. So I decided to talk to him direct, getting far more information that way.

Also, an American friend of mine flew out to Sri-Lanka for a few days to speak to Vince about making a couple of chassis especially for racing. He offered to help Vince for a few weeks on the Python, which turned into a couple of months. They've been working flat-out trying to finish the first Python for the Stoneleigh show; doing 20 hr days.

I believe that they will have a vehicle that will be worthy of praise, but I also feel that Vince and his car have been harshly dealt with by you. I'd therefore like you to explain what dealings were made on Vince's behalf because I have concerns that the problems are not of Vince's making and that he is being blamed unfairly.

I'm sure you can see the parallels between this and what you suffered at the hands of PF.

*Dave Ingerson (ozzie dave)
BrisbaneOZ*

A Actually Dave, I haven't said a negative word in print about Vince or his Python. Please read the actual words. What's been said amounts to two advertisements, both admittedly run for a few months. They pointed out that what was said in another magazine wasn't true. That led to allegations being levelled at me which simply don't hold water.

It may be that Vince's half dozen or so customers (in as many years) are happy. But that doesn't excuse the fact that he's been employing a magazine editor to publish lies in order to gain sales. Maybe that's put too strongly; so let me say instead that Vince remained silent whilst Which Kit Car? recommended his Python above established products whilst knowing it wasn't viable or available at the time. This whilst admitting having that magazine's editor on his payroll at the time. Whatever way it's expressed, it still stinks – doesn't it?

For the 2½ years BEFORE the car even existed, its advertisements claimed that it was lighter, stronger, handles better, fits perfectly, etc. That was clearly dishonest in that these things couldn't have been known that far in advance. One of the jobs of an honest editor is to prevent his magazine carrying dishonest advertisements, but that's the crux of this sad story – isn't it?

The fact is that Which Kit Car?'s address and phone number brazenly appears on the Python's advertisements. That magazine's clearly playing in a game whilst acting as its referee (disregarding the rules of integrity it so rigorously enforces on others in the process). For example, 'Which? (whatever it's called today)?' recommended Python as 'best buy' over a year before it had seen one. That's absolutely astonishing – isn't it?

We've warned readers not to take that magazine's recommendations at face value. Specifically, we've said that the new Python isn't a simple development of the old proven model, as was claimed. Which Kit Car?'s May issue says that Vince even had to "revise the body as necessary". So, we're now informed that not even the body of the new car is common to the old. You know from your friend that what's arrived in the UK is actually a prototype. Hardly the long

established epitome of proven perfection portrayed in the hype.

Which Kit Car? is now attempting to distance itself from our legitimate warnings by pointing its grubby, crooked finger back at us. Misleadingly stating, in its May issue, that Kit Car has "constantly attempted to undermine the Python's integrity and mock its quality". That's absolutely untrue. We've only mocked what's been written about it - that's a completely different point - THE point in fact.

I know that you've read the internet forum in which I suggested to Vince that somebody reputable and neutral, like Nigel Dean, test the Python. His outright rejection left me wondering exactly what his problem is. It convinced me that the only commonality between what's happening now and what happened to me, is that Which Kit Car? is still printing untruths. My pain in all this is in knowing exactly what to do for the best.

You know from the personal experience of your letter that the content of Which Kit Car? isn't truthful. You've indicated (in other correspondence) that you agree that Vince's advertising claims weren't right. If Vince is being hurt by my pointing these things out, then it seems to me that he's only got himself to blame. Therefore, perhaps it's best not to extend him too much sympathy.

**Den Tanner. MD of Kitcars Intl.
Ltd. Publisher of Kit Car and
Cobra magazines.**



Vince loading his prototype Python into a container bound for Britain. It's been subject long hours of frantic activity to get it to its first show.