



Scott's stripping yarns

#10

Photography Scott Redmond

Our man meets Kevin Schwantz's No1 stalker

EVERYONE HAS GOT a hero. As a nipper mine was Trevor Brooking. I'd regularly save my pocket money and visit the Boleyn to watch the greatest number 10 ever to wear claret and blue. What made him unique was his loyalty. Sir Trevor spent nearly 20 years playing for West Ham, the club he grew up supporting.

Sean De Fraine's hero is Kevin Schwantz, a racer loyal to the brands that shaped his career. Sean started collecting the revving Kevin memorabilia by accident after dropping a line to the Suzuki GP team just after his hero had been forced into retirement in 1994. A few days later the postman delivered a small package. Inside was a used kneeslider signed by Schwantz, which took pride of place in Sean's back bedroom. It was looking a tad lonely so Sean set about collecting some books, posters; nothing major, just pocket-money finds.

Things progressed at a steady rate until Sean discovered eBay. Before he knew it he was supporting a full-blown addiction, the pocket-money finds a distant memory as the collection began to outgrow the room, fast resembling a shrine to the King of Late Brakers.

Sean has a particular attraction to the Arais that Kev wore. Having enough replica helmets for each day of the week, he still craved more. A quest to replicate the camouflage design worn by Kev at the US GP in 1991 (see Top 10, p7) in support of the US troops fighting in the Gulf led Sean to Arai Europe in search of pictures.

Arai couldn't have been more helpful and this chance encounter led ultimately to a visit to Arai's European HQ, where Sean was offered a thank you gift for his own loyalty to the brand: a new Chikara, one of only 216 made, that retailed for over a grand, or a mystery gift. Sean took the mystery gift, a new Arai to be used as a blank canvas for Sean to design his own topping. In a Heston Blumenthal style he used the basics of four of Kev's best known lids and blended them into one unique design that Arai lovingly applied by hand.

His loyalty reward points didn't end there. After a late-night bidding war on another helmet from Kev's Superbike days Sean discovered he had been bidding against the newly formed Schwantz race school in Texas. Kev, it turned out, had been so generous in his career that they had very little to decorate the classroom with. After sending some pictures of his ever-growing collection, a rapport was struck up and Sean was enrolled as the UK moderator on the Kevin Schwantz website.

The crowning glory was an invite to the race school last August as a guest of Kev himself. Meeting his idol was the icing on the cake and riding the track with his hero was most definitely the cherry.

As I leave his house, Sean shoots up the loft ladder and brings me down a signed kneeslider – a blessing or a curse? It's now 1.17am and I'm bidding for an Arai Quantum in Pepsi colours on eBay, and there's a Brooking shin pad on my watch list. 📺

Sean De Fraine's back bedroom has become a shrine to No34



Scott Redmond, 36, is a spanner-happy bike breaker who knows quality when he sees it. Call him on 07815 661090 with your spares needs.