

FARM to FACTORY

Words: Josh Pics: Jonty Edmunds



Kiwis are famous for our globe-trotting overseas experiences. We have an uncanny knack of falling into the coolest of jobs. Scotty Brooker is a prime example - he left for England in 2004 and somehow wound up as David Knight's spanner man in the US of A.

If you're a young mechanic, reading this in your smoko break at your rural-driven bike shop, this one's for you.

Fielding resident, Scott Brooker was once in the position you are in now; slaving away on manure-encrusted farm quads all day, waiting in hope for someone to bring their motocross bike in so you can work on something you're actually interested in. He was enjoying riding with his buddies on the weekend but was starting to tire of working on bikes of the four-wheeled variety during the week. He wasn't really happy where he was and knew that his spanner skills were destined for greater things. So with a couple of calls to important people things started to change - he was picking up work as a race mechanic, something much more exciting for the Manawatu man. Then one day early in 2004 a text message from a certain Paul Whibley (his friend and riding partner) changed Brooker's life path for the better. "I got a text message from Paul saying come over, I've got a bed for you. He was in England riding for Paul Edmondson's Fast Eddy team," Brooker explains. "Within ten days I packed up, got a ticket and moved to England and lived in a caravan with Paul and Katherine. That's sort of how it all came about and it hasn't stopped."

And so it began, Brooker set off for the land of warm beer and Morris dancers to become his old riding buddies' right-hand man on the World Enduro Championship (WEC) trail. Whibley, aka The Axeman, finished an impressive sixth in the E2 class that year and things were going swimmingly for Brooker. "It was just an experience really, a good way to see a bit of Europe and the world enduros, and being able to help Paul was really good as well." Along the way, Brooker became friends with a burly Manxman by the name of David Knight. A GNCC and WEC champion, Knighter would later play a more important role in the Kiwi's life.

Lucky Link

Jump forward to late 2007 - Both Whibley and Knighter had taken their racing across the Atlantic to the American Grand National Cross Country series. Meanwhile, Brooker found himself in Wales working for BMW Off-road riding schools. "I was the only technician and we had 45 brand-new BMWs I assembled and put into dirt trim. They had riders and instructors on them on the weekends and I only had four days to get them all serviced and ready before each group. It was busy times." Busy times

indeed, and a far cry from the Freedom Honda workshop Scotty had cut his teeth in back in Palmerston North.

While Brooker was preparing bikes for stark amateurs in Wales, one of the most professional riders in the world, David Knight, was struggling with his new mechanic during his first year Stateside. "He had some troubles with his young American mechanic and a few mechanical issues and failures," Scotty offers. "He needed someone he could trust. After his problems we got talking... I wasn't really enjoying my job in Wales too much and he wasn't really getting on with his mechanic so it sort of all came about like that." Knighter then talked to Kurt Nicoll, a former 500cc GP #2, and now the KTM Racing director in North America, about getting the ex-pat Kiwi on side as his mechanic on the GNCC circuit. Brooker continues, "Kurt rang me and I proposed how it should work and I told them what I wanted and he came back and said, 'Yep we're happy to do that. We had some problems last year (2007) and we don't want it to happen again.'" And with that a deal was inked and Scott Brooker from little old Fielding, way down there in NZ was David Knight's full-time personal mechanic.

Oceans Apart

Unlike Scotty's old mate Whibley, one of Knighter's stipulations when he signed on with KTM for the US GNCC series, was that he would remain living in his quiet homeland of the Isle Of Man. This means a full on schedule for Knighter and a lot more work for Scotty, as he has to organise parts and bikes in two different countries. Brooker describes the lifestyle as hectic, real hectic. "Because we live in the Isle of Man and race in America we're on the road all the time and are hardly ever at home, it's pretty demanding."

The flying back and forth isn't as straightforward as you might think and sees the duo on the move all the time. "We usually fly from Manchester to Chicago which is an eight-hour flight, but then we have to fly from Isle Of Man which is a half-hour flight. But then you've still got easy three hours waiting in the airports as well.



Scotty on hand to refuel Knighter during GNCC pitstop.



The Man and his Right-hand Man take a break.



From Chicago, our workshop is in Cleveland, Ohio, so that's usually where I fly to. Scotty talks through his routine during a race week, "Usually I fly out on a Sunday, get to the workshop on the Monday, and prepare the bikes Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. The truck will leave for the race on Thursday and get to the track on Friday. David will normally turn up on Wednesday and we'll go riding Thursday and Friday, then prepare the bikes Saturday and they race Sunday. Then I wash the bikes Sunday night and Monday morning, before flying back to Isle Of Man on Monday and start testing again."

If that doesn't sound like a jam-packed week, I don't know what does! To make things more complicated, Scotty has to organise what parts are going on what bike, where that bike is and where the part is coming from. "We've got two identical bikes in America, and we've got two race

bikes in the Isle Of Man, well we've got five or six bikes in the Isle of Man really. It's like a big jigsaw puzzle really, just sort of trying to bring everything together."

Full Factory

Well and truly one of the stronger forces in the enduro and GNCC world, KTM put a lot of money into their programs, and Scotty really reaps the benefits of this fact. "I think half of my wages come from America, and half from the factory in Austria. I'm a bit of a special case really because I get all my flights and accommodation paid for and I get to fly backwards and forwards."

With bikes in the US and the Isle Of Man, and engine and suspension specialists in California and back at the factory in Austria, Scotty is forever undressing the race bikes of suspension and dropping out motors to send away for rebuilding and research feedback. "Basically, my job is just to put everything together, make sure it

Small World

Before Scotty went global he worked in bike shops in Palmerston North. The first of which was at Freedom Honda, where he worked with Richie Ebbet, who now owns Moto SR, a suspension-tuning outfit who use RG3 products. "Richie and I got the on farm servicing up and running. Looking back we had great times hooking round the country in the truck getting a bit sideways at times." So it turns out it is a small world after all then!

Scotty doesn't just swing spanners you know!





Top Mod

In this day and age of popular bike modification and personalisation you can buy just about any sort of bolt on part to make your bike go faster or handle better. But are they all really necessary? I put it to Scotty to tell me which modification he would recommend to every rider. "I think the best thing anyone could do with their bike is get the suspension sorted. Most bikes these days you don't need to go faster, people who are riding a bike to its full potential are doing pretty well." While it may not be the cheapest option, Scotty highlights the importance of this. "If your wheels aren't sticking to the ground you're wasting your time really."

stays together, and go out and do the testing with the rider and talk to the factory and tell them what's good and what's not."

The Man

With a distinguished career like that of David Knight's, you wouldn't be blamed for thinking he might be a demanding rider to work for. Scotty reckons that's about the brunt of it, but he enjoys the challenge and the fact that as a team they are always trying to make the bike better. "We're working really well together. I'm with him 24/7 so I'm learning what he likes and how he likes things done. We're putting in the hours and he's getting the results so it's all worth it. David's a real good test rider; he knows what works and what the bike feels like. We're always the last ones ready at the track because he'll be out testing till the last minute, whether it's gearing, suspension, seat height, subframes, ignition, different master cylinders... David's always looking for that extra bit. That's what makes him so good because he's an excellent rider but he also knows what works and he wants the best equipment. It's really, really hectic but at the end of the day it's worth it as well just as long as he's winning races."

What's Next?

Scotty explained that Knighter prefers the social feel of the WEC to the hype and glamour of the US GNCC scene and there's every chance the Manx man will return to the more traditional discipline come 2009. Will the Kiwi lad follow with? "At this stage I'm just focusing on this year and doing my job well. I really want to do a good job and I'm sure things will come. I'm sure next year I've got the opportunity to work in the WEC if David goes. I'm not really thinking too far ahead about that really. I'll just make the most of it while I can. I might only do it for a year?"

With a mechanical background, dual-citizenship through his Irish Passport and friends like Paul Whibley and David Knight, the world is Scotty's oyster. "I hope to end up back in NZ at some stage, but at this stage I don't know what I'd do if I went back now, you know? The longer you're here the harder it is to leave really."

So there you go folks, the story of how a Fielding bloke went from doing farm services to spinning wrenches on David Knight's factory KTM. So if you're still sitting in the smoko room and you're not happy there, do something about it! **DRD**

This pit tent is a far cry from fixing farm quads in Manawatu.

