

# Former legal eagle cutting a dash in graphic design

IT IS doubtful if readers of this month's article in Bike magazine on the top ten bike colours of all time have any idea who Harriet Laurie is.

Nor that as well as the iconic Triumph Daytona's 'strontium yellow' she is responsible for the Virgin Atlantic plane and train colours.

The fact that the Daytona is up there with the best of them is thanks to this extraordinary Askerswell graphic designer with a law degree.

Harriet, 44, had no idea of becoming a designer.

She studied law because she was incurably nosy and the law is all about people's worst moments, she says.

But Harriet is in love with learning and practising law did not seem so alluring as studying it.

She got there by a series of coincidences – not least of which was running a typesetting business while sharing an office with a graphic designer who seemed to be having more fun and making more money than she was.

"We formed a partnership and went after blue chip companies and we got 90 per cent of the pitches we went after," she said.

The artistic side of the business also came easily being, as she was, from a creative background.

That, combined with a 'what have I got to lose' personality, has taken her all over the world and given her the courage she needed to land both the Triumph and Virgin jobs.

A contact saw her portfolio and said they knew someone who might be interested in her work.

That someone was the owner of Triumph motorcycles John Bloor who wanted to revamp the Triumph colours.

He was not interested in the usual industry standard of following Paris fashions – but four years later because that was how long it takes big companies to get a new paint colour into production.

Mr Bloor drove from Hinkley to meet Harriet in Dorchester and it was the start of a three-year adventure for her.

Mr Bloor had done his market research and found that 75 per cent of the buying decision for bikes was on the colour and he was keen to find someone with flair and vision, someone who could make Triumph bikes stand out from the crowd.

As part of the interview he gave Harriet a stack of brochures from other bike companies and asked her to say what she thought.

"I was incredibly rude and said really they mostly looked like fridges. I didn't take the interview very seriously because I felt I was totally unqualified for the job and thought it was all a waste of time.

"But the bikes I picked out were the best selling ones and he said I was stumpy enough to deal with the \*\*\*\*\* at his factory. So he hired me."

He told Harriet to bill him monthly and if it got out of hand he would tell her.

So on a learning curve to rival Everest off she went to bike shows, boat shows and anywhere with all kinds of boys' toys on display.

"I came to the conclusion that bikes were the equivalent of jewellery for men. I hung out with bikers and talked to them and really tried to get what their passion was because I didn't get it.

"But a lot of it is standing around polishing them or showing off to their friends so suddenly that 75 per cent buying decision on colour made sense.

"The process was enormous fun. I



TRIUMPH: Harriet had to get familiar with bikers and their world

## Designer shows her true colours

took heaps of things to paint chemists, like toffee apples, silk pyjamas, the metal off champagne bottles and tried to explain to paint chemists what it was I wanted. It isn't just about one colour, it is about layers of colours and what you see as the colours go around curves."

She worked – and argued with – John Mockett who designed the shapes for the bikes. "I also interviewed loads of paint companies and it was really about finding the right place to work. In the end I found one in Switzerland and I worked in

their lab. It was heaven for me. There would literally be a tea cup on a fine weigher with little pots, pigments, dyes and micas around the walls.

"I was learning all the time what was possible and what wasn't, it is all about the shapes of the molecules. Luckily I was good at science at school so that came in handy.

"I'd say things like 'no I want that red more noble' and then spend a good chunk of time learning how the chemistry works to be able to marry my vision of what I wanted to see on the bikes."

It might have been a steep learning curve but it was also a good thing Harriet was not an industry insider. The accepted wisdom was that it was only the 'slow' bikes that could have any type of metallic colour. The thinking was that the super racing bikes were always having to be mended and racing bikes on the television could not have them because of glare.

Harriet was told no one would buy the bikes in her colours because bikers wanted to be seen to be the same as the racing boys. They were wrong.

"The Strontium Yellow for the Daytona was voted against by everyone but John was the most excellent person to work for because he is just such a maverick and has just done his own thing and done what people tell him is not possible so he supported me.

"That colour was the most successful and sales just went stratospheric. Every bike magazine went mad about the colour and the bikers did buy it and they loved it.

"I am thrilled and very touched that the bikers have rated my yellow paintjob so highly even after all this time... particularly as I had to fight so hard to get it into production.

"It still gives me a kick when I see the bikes. Then I thought I'd really like to paint something big

"I'd always noticed that Virgin Atlantic had the most terrible tails on their planes. Only people from the 80s will remember they had some dreadful pink/orange colours that were meant to be Virgin red but they weren't even UV stable.

"So I wrote a letter to Richard Branson telling him he needed to sort it out and I was the girl for the job. I worked hard to write that letter to make it really quite obnoxious but tantalising and that I would show them things they would not believe. "That challenge was taken up and I went to the design company in Convent Garden."

But the fifth floor studio was lit by artificial light and her designs were meant to be seen in daylight so spotting a ladder she had all the men in suits up on the roof where she entertained them with a bit of pure street theatre.

"I showed them a red and they said that's absolutely beautiful and I said 'no it's rubbish, this is better'.. I did that five times.

"They said 'we'd have settled for the first colour, we need you!'"

Now she knew more Harriet did the job in ten days and Virgin had new colours.

There followed a call from Yamaha wanting her in Frankfurt for a brainstorming session. But she looked at her three children, the youngest barely a year old and her Dorset home and said no.

"I thought this is not the life I want at the moment."

Triumph asked her back too and she was tempted but a week before she was due to go up the factory burned down.

"I took that as a sign!" she said.

Now her children are older she would not mind doing those sort of jobs again but she is busy with her own graphic design company Outpost Productions.

"I don't advertise but I have never not been busy, although I feel that all that expertise I learnt with Triumph is slightly wasted."

So anyone who wants to inject a bit of colour into their business Harriet's the woman for you.

She can be contacted on 01308 485704.

### REVIEW

BRIDPORT & WEST  
DORSET MUSIC CLUB  
March concert

## Stunning finale to season

A HISTORY of changing personnel during the run up to a concert might be expected to produce an inconsistent result, but the string quartet led by Gina McCormack of the Sorrel Quartet with three members of the Maggini Quartet delivered a stunning performance for the last concert of the season.

Haydn's quartet op. 77 no.1 was played with the utmost delicacy and rhythmic energy; lesser quartets have struggled with Haydn at the start of a programme, but this ad hoc group brought their individual experience and fine musicianship to bear with outstanding results.

Beethoven's op. 18 no.2 received similar treatment, demonstrating his unique style of leading his audience up one path, only to stop suddenly and start on a new idea without pre-amble.

This was not the first time the group had played this quartet, but they still brought maximum expertise and commitment to an elegant and witty performance.

For the grand finale, the quartet was underpinned by the piano, played sensitively by Christopher Langdown. Elgar's Piano Quintet begins unusually with a low bass figure, but soon builds with an accelerando and crescendo together to culminate in a climax strongly reinforced by the power of the piano in Langdown's capable hands.

The first movement ends with the same low figure in the pianist's left hand.

The slow movement's broad, majestic style develops with the viola theme so typical of Elgar, one of the many composers who played the instrument.

The last movement introduces ideas from the first movement, built up by these exceptional players to a coruscating peak, which represented the high spot of the concert in a fitting end to the season's concerts.

PHS

## Voices sing at church fundraiser

PROCEEDS from a concert at Beaminster Parish Church will help pay for the building's upkeep.

The Friends of St Mary's have arranged for Parnham Voices, a locally-based choir, to perform there on Sunday, April 6 from 4pm.

Money raised will go towards maintenance and enhancement costs of the historic church.

Peter Blake, group chairman said: "This will be a special occasion.

"They are a joy to listen to at any time and what better place to hear them than in our church?"

Tickets at £6 are available from Symonds and Sampson/Peter Brook estate agents (01308 863100) or the church office (01308 862320) both in Hogshill Street. They are also available on the door, subject to availability.



PORTFOLIO: Harriet Laurie designed the yellow Daytona bikes which became a top ten favourite colour among motorcyclists and the colours for Virgin's planes and trains