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Hard as nails,

If you have a look at the website www.amphardchrome.co.uk you'll be able to read a quite fascinating and extraordinary story.

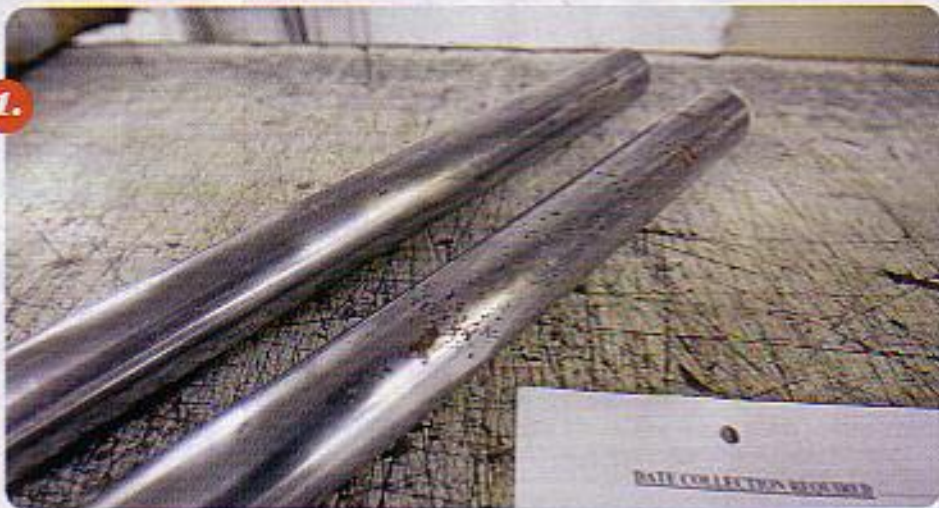
At the turn of the last century, a Luton man, forced to leave his employment through ill health, set up his own business. Nothing particularly unusual about that, but this man was skilled in the intricacies of musical instrument and the blossoming automotive brightwork. However, as the century opened he found himself up against the huge employer Vauxhall Motors, who snapped up everyone skilled in plating, so he changed direction toward hard chrome plating. The rest, as is usually said, is history and that's how we found ourselves on the door step of A M Philpot, hard chrome platers.

It has been a family firm from the beginning and as the Philpot dynasty neared the end, the company was taken over, in 1986, by a step-son in law, one Andy Morgan.

Andy served his apprenticeship with SKF bearings as an electrician and later worked for British Telecom, with one of his 'private customers' being A M Philpot. Already familiar with the workings of the plant, he steadily expanded the company until, in 1997, a move to the present premises in Cradock Road, Luton, was necessary.

Since 2006, the liquidation of two other specialist companies has allowed Andy to take over and incorporate their expertise into A M Philpot, and now a Milton Keynes based wing

WORDS BY NIGEL C. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE DICK



offers specialist coatings to general and automotive industry.

However, our visit was to see how they deal with our motorcycle fork legs - this service has an independent website - www.pittedforks.co.uk - which illustrates all the services available and prices etc.

Our arrival was warmly greeted by office manager, the lovely but camera shy Eve, who duly introduced us to a very busy but accommodating Steve Holland. Steve has been with the company

since 1991 and took time out to explain the process.

AMP offer a collection and delivery service if necessary and you can give them your forks either complete or dismantled and they will return them exactly to your instruction - ie, they have a complete refurbishment service, stanchions hard chromed, new seals and bushes, sliders polished or powder coated etc and forks assembled ready to fit. All forks are placed in their own individual plastic container, so no parts are mislaid and no mistakes are made as to who's are what!



www.pittedforks.co.uk



smooth as silk



I offered up a pair of bare stanchions, which were fairly straight but pitted and rusty. (Pic 1) First thing is a check for straightness and if they are a little bowed, they are straightened in a hefty press. Surprisingly, bent forks can be reclaimed so long as the metal has not creased.

The original diameter of the leg is measured. (Pic 2) Next stage is into the centreless grinder, a terrific piece of kit, which feeds the tube through a series of guide wheels across the face of the grinder until a thickness of 20 thou' of the metal is removed. (Pic 3 and 4) On average this is more than enough but obviously there are times when more has to be removed.

We were shown a stanchion already 37 thou' undersize but the pits were still visible, so even

more would have to be removed.

Following the initial grind, the leg is put manually across a polishing mop for a Saterne finish, which will highlight any potential pinholes in the metal before either moving on to the next stage or returning for further grinding.

We were then introduced to Oliver Jackson, who prepares items for plating. Big Ollie first masks the ends of the legs not to be plated with alloy tape and to protect the inside of the leg from the plating process. (pics 5 and 6) It is then dipped in hot wax. A quick three dunks is enough and the wax dries immediately. (pics 7, 8, 9, 10) The external coating is then cut off with a knife and the surface treated with a pumice-laden scourer to clean it before being rinsed in water. (pics 11, 12, 13) >





Then it's to the plating vat. The leg is suspended from the top rail, which makes it the negative, and it is then submerged in the acid, which contains metal salts, the positive. When the vat is charged, the positive moves toward the negative depositing the metal from the salts onto the item to be plated, via amodes. Ollie turns the vat power to eight volts and the bath starts to bubble like Frankenstein's laboratory. To deposit the required 20 thou, the leg has to remain in the vat for a day and a half, so mostly the vats are started up to run over night. (pic 14)

If the legs are somehow contaminated and necessitate cleaning, then they can be 'etched'

within the vat, by reversing the polarity. This is done by a huge manual switch, which gives forth a loud crack and a flash when operated - again reminiscent of the Hammer Horror films.

The following day the leg is removed and measured, if the requisite 20 thou' is present, then it is replaced in the vat for a further 10 thou' to be added, in order for the grind to return it to its original size.

Post plating it is immersed in the de-waxing tank to remove the internal wax coating. This is merely a container of boiling water, which melts the wax away. It is then rinsed in kerosene and the alloy tape removed before returning to the grinder.

After the final grind the leg is again checked for pinholes, before heading to the disc grinder for edges to be trimmed and cleaned up. It's then onto the centreless polisher for polishing (pic 15) to help the seals bed in and last longer, a wipe down and a further visual inspection for any flaws or pinholes before they're ready for return. Better than new. (pic 16)

So you see, there's a fair amount of careful work has to go into refurbishing forks and considering Philpot have more than 200 pairs of forks through their factory each month, their turn around of two to three weeks is pretty impressive. What's more, everyone's fairly well occupied!

Amazingly, the fork side of A M Philpot takes up just 20 per cent of the business, with plasma and metal spraying, specialist coatings and a whole raft of procedures involved in the canning industry sharing the facilities.

Their reputation is worldwide, we saw forks bound for France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Greece and the USA. For UK customers, a call before 10.30am will guarantee collection that day. Prices are pretty standard and are all on the website, and any type of fork can be refurbished. However, if you have a special need, give them a call on 01582 571234.

The overall conclusion was that A M Philpot, while being a 'right ship' and impressively professional, still retains that warmth of a family firm, an extremely good combination. ■

A M Philpot are at Unit D, Cradock Road Industrial Estate, Luton, Beds LU4 0JF.

