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the percentage scored by TE Lawrence on the **Rolls-Royce armoured car course** when he enlisted, after his desert exploits in the First World War, in the British Tank Corps under the name Thomas Edward Shaw. Lawrence had ridden into Damascus in a Rolls in October 1918



Rich boys' toys

A British businessman is resurrecting the Brough Superior. **Matt Majendie** talks to Mark Upham about the exclusive bikes

It is 70 years since the last Brough Superior rolled off the production line.

The British creations, dubbed the "Rolls-Royce of motorcycles" in their prime, boasted a who's who of owners and admirers.

Writer George Bernard Shaw waxed lyrical about their intricate design, while TE Lawrence, of Arabia fame, owned seven Brough Superiors, the most recent of which he died on in 1935 as he swerved to avoid two boys riding bicycles.

His take on the bikes themselves was that they were "as fast and reliable as express trains and the greatest fun in the world to drive". But even that couldn't stop George Brough, who set up the motorcycle firm in Nottingham in 1919, from bringing production to a close in 1940.

Nowadays, the old bikes remain massive collectors' items - two years ago, one version sold for £166,000 (Dh904,000). But now, buyers with sizeable pockets can get their hands on newer versions of the motorcycles.

The man behind Brough's rebirth is Mark Upham, a British businessman, now based in Austria, with a long history in the motorcycling industry. Upham bought the company in 2008 and has just sold the first new Brough creation in seven decades to a wealthy American industrialist. The second bike is on the cusp of being bought by an avid bike collector in Belgium while Upham is in the process of tying up another deal in Switzerland.

Brough's resurrection will not, however, lead to a major production line of bikes. Upham plans to make them just about the most exclusive bikes on the market, and one suspects the business is almost a secondary feature to what is a massive labour of love.

"These are extremely exclusive; they're rich boys' toys," explained Brough's new owner. "I'm not saying they're the world's most expensive bikes, but they're certainly up there."

When it comes to price, this is the one area that Upham won't discuss because he believes it goes against the ethos of Brough and the motorcycles potential buyers.

"If people ask about things like fuel consumption and the cost of the bikes," he says, "then they're not the right person for us."

Upham himself is exclusive about who he sells the bikes to. He describes the first Brough buyer as a "wealthy eccentric", a phrase that could easily describe Upham as well.

"I'd far rather sell five bikes to people I like than 25 bikes to people I don't," he says. "For me, I have to check that I like the gentleman in question, if he is the right customer for me and if I can give him what he wants."

"Last November, I went to the United States [where most of the interest in Brough has been to date] and took 13 flights in 11 days to see various people about the bikes and ended up with just one appropriate buyer."

"There was another chap out in the US while we were showing the bikes in Pebble Beach who was wanting a discount. His attitude was all wrong - he was pushing me down and trying to show off in front of his girlfriend. And I said to him, 'sir, this bike is not available to you'. I'm afraid I want to be around nice people and see bikes go to nice people. We only want to have the best partners."

While out in Pebble Beach, Upham stumbled across arguably Brough's most high-profile and avid fan, American chat show host Jay Leno. Leno currently boasts six Brough



Mark Upham (top), the new Brough owner, is selective about who can buy the new bikes. Courtesy of Brough Superior

Superiors in his extensive garage, one of which is being worked on at present by Upham's team.

Upham also allowed Leno to take the controls of the newest Brough, although he admitted to nervous moments as the gregarious television presenter rode off without a helmet.

Leno was full of praise afterwards, describing the brief outing as a "real thrill". Upham reveals, "Since then, he's regularly been ringing me and I've had the opportunity to chew the fat with him on a number of subjects - he's a real petrolhead. Sadly, he won't be buying a bike. Jay Leno's the sort of guy that gets given bikes, and we're too young a company to be doing that right now."

Brough Mark II is very much in its

infancy, to the extent that Upham describes it as being in the "experimental stage".

However, there is no shortage of experts working on the new bikes, ranging from staff in England and Germany to prototypers just six miles away from Upham's Austrian base who also work with Audi, Bugatti and Lamborghini.

Upham, who also runs British Only Austria - which sells classic bikes and parts - began his love affair with Brough as a 19-year-old.

"It was one of the first bikes I had and there's always been a great ethos about them," he adds. "When they were first produced, they were more expensive than a two-up, two-down house. And they're probably

still similarly expensive now."

The selling process for Upham is generally a case of people approaching him, with no money to date spent on advertising and no plans to do so.

"It's all about being exclusive," he says. "We had a well-known bike tester get in contact to book a time to ride one of our bikes, and we said they couldn't as these bikes are pretty much only ridden by the owners themselves."

The American purchaser of the first new Brough has had his own test rider put the bike through its paces, riding 2,500km in and around La Rochelle in France. That has led to further tweaks to the bike to get it just right, all of which were done at no additional cost.

Upham explains, "The bikes are expensive and we make no secret of that fact, but it is then up to us to make them right for our customers, which is what we've done here."

Broughs could be set to make their way to the Middle East, and Upham has had initial discussions in the region. But he does not believe anything will happen there any time soon.

"We've been asked by quite a lot of people to get involved in the Arabian region," says Upham. "But it's an area we don't know that much about right now, and I certainly don't have experience of the etiquette or how to approach them or where to approach people."

"But the Middle East is a phenomenal opportunity and it's certainly a route we'll go down in the future."

Little is known about the spec of the bikes. To date, they have hit a top speed of 145kph, about 15kph short of the speeds reached by Brough himself when he competed in 53 races in his prime, winning 52 of them and falling off the bike in the other.

Upham and his team are targeting the 100mph (160kph) mark in the future. But they are in no hurry, as they focus on the traditional aim of the bike, in the words of Upham, as "being associated with heroes and wealthy people".

The bikes were so coveted during the Second World War that their owners hid them under straw in a bid to make sure they were not used for scrap metal to aid the war effort in Britain.

In all, 3,000 bikes were made in 20 years in Brough's initial guise, of which 1,000 still exist. Upham will take some time to get anywhere near that figure, with the hand-made bikes using the latest materials available.

But the Brough owner is obsessed with his new job in charge of the marque. "I wish I was a workaholic, but I've gone past that now," he says. "I'm not quite sure how to describe myself, but it's quite regular to finish work after midnight."

This sort of obsession and attention to detail made Brough a great success story from 1919 to 1940. Upham is hoping for a repeat.

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rearview mirror
Nick March

The 'wide boy' that muscled in on the Mustang

Back in the golden days of American car manufacturing in the 1960s, the Ford Motor Company could do little wrong. It developed good, bad, sometimes indifferent motor cars and domestic consumers dutifully bought them by the bucket load. These were simpler times, when talk of possible bailouts, bankruptcy or even an impending Japanese manufacturing invasion would have been written off as the ramblings of a mad man.

Take the Ford Mustang. The original sports car for the common man was developed by Ford as a nice little sideline that might turn over around 100,000 units a year. Instead, only days after its launch, herds of customers headed for their local dealers to place an order for this blue-collar wonder. Within 18 months of its April 1964 release, sales of the Mustang hit a magical seven figures.

Across the Atlantic, Ford Europe eyed the Mustang's popularity with some envy and began development work on their own pony car in 1966. In deference to the car's American inspiration, the project was initially named Colt, although this equine epithet was sent to the

knacker's yard when Ford discovered Mitsubishi had already bagged the name. Thus Colt became Capri, although the styling cues remained unmistakably Mustang in their reference, with a long rakish snout and low stance giving way to a smooth fastback.

The Mark I Capri was launched across Europe in January 1969. Initially a four-seater coupe with rectangular front headlights and a boot, Ford would later revamp the model as a sports hatch in 1974, complete with a power bulge in the bonnet, although its doubtful the 1.3L base model actually needed the extra space in the engine bay. Ford gave the Capri a final facelift in 1978, adding handsome new dual front headlights to the car's distinctive nose. This Mark III version would remain in production, exterior styling unchanged, until the mid-Eighties.

Cleverly marketed as "the car you always promised yourself", the Capri was an instant success, attracting young buyers to a Ford Europe range that was otherwise chock full of reliable but dull family boxes such as the Escort and Cortina. Indeed, Ford sold close to two million Capris during the car's 17-year life-



The flash car with plenty of the top-end models, perfect to impress a Home County lady. Courtesy of Ford

cycle. To put that into perspective, the Volkswagen Scirocco, a similarly styled practical and sporty coupe, managed significantly less than half that figure during an 18-year production run spent pitched into direct competition with the Capri.

Ford's great genius was to create a

car that looked fast, even if performance at the lower end of the range was distinctly ordinary. Mind you, it was a different proposition at the top end, where the more appropriately powered 2.8L and 3.0L models were capable of a top speed of more than 200kph and were equipped

with those all important low-profile alloy wheels, go-faster stripes and, so far as anyone could work out, a completely pointless black rubber rear spoiler.

These looks played out extraordinarily well in Britain, which accounted for more than a quarter of

all Capri sales, and more particularly the Home Counties clustered around London. This is the natural habitat of the so-called "wide boy", the chap who wheels and deals through the week and appreciates a flash motor to drive the "little lady" around in at the weekend.

The Capri hit this demographic perfectly, no doubt helped by its constant presence in two of the most popular British TV shows of the time: *The Professionals* (think a British version of *Starsky and Hutch*, except instead of driving around in a red Ford Torino, the lead characters Bodie and Doyle toiled around in matching Capris) and *Minder* (think a London that looks like every gangster movie Guy Ritchie has ever made, except better observed and much funnier).

Now, close to a quarter of a century after the Capri's demise, it has become traditional for Ford to produce a "new" concept every few years to make a generation of men go misty-eyed at the thought of once more experiencing the thrill of owning the car they always promised themselves. If Ford Europe has any sense, it will turn one of those concepts into reality some time soon.