



From Guns to Cycles?

by Alan Clack

Hampshire Constabulary Historical Society

Smith and Wesson is known the world over for its guns, but just over ten years ago they went in a strange direction with pedal power. At that time, they introduced a line of law enforcement mountain bikes. Made in Taiwan but assembled in the Smith & Wesson factory in Massachusetts (they are now handled by Iowa-based Cycle Source Group), they went big in the USA. Five years ago, Ron Watkins of Cycle-Force UK became the first to import these cycles to the UK.

Ron worked for a camping and outdoor pursuits group until he went on holiday and came back to find the firm had gone bankrupt. Ron was in the process of a procuring a large order of Smith and Wessons for Sussex Police, the first agency in the country to be interested in these new police tools. Not wanting to lose this order, Ron, with the help of Charles Beral, spent the next few days going back and forth between Sussex Police and Smith and Wesson to get this first order into the UK. In the end, all the cycles had to be paid for up front before shipment to UK, so it was a very big gamble for the two. From that humble start, Cycle Force UK has supplied bikes to and/or gotten enquiries from most of the 43 forces in the UK.

I went to visit them and to tour their facility. Now based in Bracknell, you would not imagine that behind two large metal blue doors would be such an interesting world.

Behind the first door is the most important area – the hub of the operations – the workshop where each of the three spec and six frame sizes are assembled by hand. Each cycle can be mixed-and-matched with wheels and forks and frames to match each force's requirements. They do not build many standard Smith and Wessons now. A dream for me; it is one of the best laid out workshops I have seen, with room to work on four cycles at a time and storage for ten finished bikes (above).

Next to the workshop is the office with three work stations and the kettle (kitchen), and behind the workshop is the board room, for all important meetings. Then the clothes store, where Cycle-Force warehouses Mocean uniforms, Patrol Cycle shoes, gloves for patrol duty, and other items. Finally, there is the cycle store, which at any given time might contain up to three hundred boxed Smith and Wesson frames, wheels, forks, and other parts and accessories (at left).

Many thanks to Ron and Charles for giving me a glimpse behind the scenes at Cycle-Force UK; why not visit them yourself at <http://www.cycle-force.co.uk/>.

Alan is a member of the Hampshire Constabulary History Society and Police Car UK, and a collector of police cycles. He is a former special constable in Hants, and often rode a police cycle on duty. He can be reached at alan.clack@ntlworld.com.

© 2008 IPMBA. This article appeared in the Summer 2008 Issue of *IPMBA News*.