

# Foggy



Carl Fogarty,  
With Neil Bramwell

# ***FOGGY***

*The Explosive Autobiography*

CARL FOGARTY  
*with Neil Bramwell*

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## *Dedication*

*Dedicated to the memory of  
Vera Fogarty and Hannah Walsh*

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## *Introduction*

**BLACKBURN – 11.30am, Thursday 21 September, 2000:** This was not the way I wanted it all to end. I had hoped all my fans would know that one particular race would be the last time they would see me in action. And I would have wanted to win that race more than ever. Instead, it has all ended in a gravel pit on the other side of the world and, for one of the first times in my career, I have to admit defeat.

The horrendous arm injury I suffered in that 140mph fall at Phillip Island on 23 April has proved to be as bad as we all feared. I will never be able to ride like I used to – and win races. And that means the decision is made for me – it's time to call it a day. Still, I have to be thankful that I am still alive and that I have the rest of my life to look forward to. Because it could so easily have been very different.

Even now, I don't remember a thing about the second race at Phillip Island. I only vaguely remember starting the race. It had been a shitty day and tyre choice had been crucial for the first race of the Australian round, where I was a comfortable second behind Anthony Gobert – who gambled on wet weather tyres. The second race, a couple of hours later, was dry and I made a bad start. But, as my tyres warmed up, I was charging through the field.

I've not even seen the incident from any other angle than the on-board camera. But I was about to pass a slow Austrian rider called Robert Ulm on the outside. The theory is that his engine was cutting out. And I think he must have been concentrating on that and not on what was happening around him. So he was already pulling out into my line when it cut out again. There was nothing I could do to avoid him and I ran in his back. The TV footage was all grass and sky until they cut to my slumped body. I was apparently unconscious for about 10 minutes before sort of coming round in the track medical centre. Immediate X-rays showed that the humerus, the bone that connects the shoulder to the elbow, was fractured in three places near the joint with the clavicle.

The first thing I remember is being put into a helicopter and I couldn't work out why. And I don't even remember the journey because I was pumped up with morphine while I was flown to Melbourne with Michaela. She spent the night by my bedside while the doctors kept me sedated. This crash had really scared her. And that's one of the things that I have had to consider when deciding enough was enough. I have risked my life for 20 years and she has been there by my side for nearly all of that. She was almost sick when, from inside the Ducati garage, she saw the pictures of me out cold. And all her emotions surfaced while she kept a vigil at the Alfred Memorial Hospital. The only way she could cope with it all was to put pen to paper. This is what she wrote, and she wasn't even able to bring herself to let me read it until months after the crash:

'I sit here watching him with his tubes and IV monitors and wires – and wonder "Why? Is it really all worth it?" If that were Carl watching me in the same position, what would he be thinking? But he'll never know that, he'll never

realise how it feels to have the other half of your whole world lying there, lucky to be alive. And I know that the answer to my question would be “Yes, it is worth it!”

‘At this moment, my head tells me I have got to make him stop. My heart says I can’t. But it was only a matter of time before this day would come. For 13 years I have stood by, watching him – every one of those years waiting for this. I’ve imagined it many times, run through the whole thing in my head. How I would feel, how I would act? Would I be strong? Would I fall to pieces? And it’s finally happened. Sure, he’s still here and I thank God. But enough is enough, and I scream inside because I’m confused.

‘Why do I feel angry? Maybe it’s selfish, maybe I’m feeling sorry for myself. But I don’t have a right to. Eight hours ago, I thought I had lost him. I thought the man who is my world had been taken from me without even a hint or a whisper.

‘And, of course, there’s not just me to think of. Our kids are at home, totally oblivious to the seriousness of it all, thank God. What would I tell them? I can’t even begin to think – it’s as though my brain won’t let me go there. They’re so innocent, so happy, with not a single care. They love Carl so much. How selfish it would be of him to ruin that innocence and carefree attitude to life – it’s what being a child should be like. And yet all the time he still does it. He still goes on, knowing it could happen. But then he wouldn’t have to face them, would he? He wouldn’t have to tell them he’s not coming back. He wouldn’t have to be there to pick up their broken hearts. So who is the selfish one?

‘But he’s alive, he breathes, he sleeps and I’m sure in a couple of months he’ll be back out there. And so will I, knowing it’s his life, his world, all he’s ever known. And one day, when he’s ready, he’ll stop and say “Enough!” I just hope to God he’s here to make that choice himself and it isn’t taken away from him.’

Well, I am here, although, if there had been even half a chance, I’d have wanted to race for one more year. And the very first signs were promising, that the injury was not as bad as first feared. The following morning, the surgeons took about an hour to fix seven screws and a titanium plate to the bone. A lot of the muscles were torn and there were fears that a nerve might have been stretched. And I was told that I wouldn’t race for a minimum of six weeks. Even that was hard to take. So I asked Michaela if there was any chance at all that I’d make Donington in three weeks’ time. She just looked at me as if I was mad.

But I’ve never allowed myself to think about the chance that I might kill myself racing. Riders just cannot afford to have those doubts. I had said, though, before the start of this season that I would quit if I suffered any more big crashes. But I was not ready to quit like this. Despite all the problems I was suffering at the start of the season, I’d shown in the first two rounds in South Africa and Australia that I was still the fastest out there. The bike was good and I was riding well. So I was even more determined to go out and win more races.

That was my problem sometimes. I wanted to win too much. Other riders would have accepted that they’d had a bad start in that race and aimed for a few points. But there was only one thing on my mind, to finish first. So maybe I was riding on the edge.

The same thing happened in South Africa a couple of weeks before, when I crashed out in the second race but wasn't injured. Maybe I was pushing too hard again, because I'd been battling against another shoulder injury all that week, and I lost the front end and slid off. But I still managed to finish third in a tight first race of the season. All things considered, I would probably have settled for that at the start. But I'm a superstitious guy and, whenever I went on to win the title I always won the opening race. So I was even more determined to win in Australia before going to Honda's home track the following week in Japan.

It had been bad enough recovering from that first injury, a damaged right shoulder from a fall while testing in Valencia. It was one of the reasons why I'd struggled to motivate myself all winter. My body was starting to show the wear and tear of 20 or so years of competing in a gruelling and dangerous sport. There are only so many times that you can dig down and ask it to keep going through this recovery process. It gets harder every year and you have to listen to your body. I've got aches and pains everywhere, on top of this shoulder injury. It's different for the younger riders, because they still have everything to aim for – to prove themselves by winning trophies. The only thing that kept me going is winning races. And it soon became clear that this injury was going to prevent me from doing that.

For the first few months, I could hardly think straight. Okay, I was still as irritating as usual and within a couple of weeks I was taking it out on Michaela by stuffing toenails in her trainers or burning her with a hot spoon while I made a brew! But I was constantly tired and very dizzy, obviously a result of the bang on my head. The arm was extremely weak and painful and needed to be rested. I had to try and keep myself happy with boring shopping trips to Marks and Spencer or family weeks away in places like Newquay or the Cotswolds. I am not the kind of person who finds the Cheddar Gorge interesting – unless I was abseiling down it!

By as early as June I knew that there was no way I was going to be able to race again that year. And it seemed as though I wouldn't be missed in some quarters. The *Motor Cycle News*, of all people after all the help I had given them down the years, published a front page with the headline 'Who Needs Foggy?' after Neil Hodgson's World Superbike race win at Donington. They must not have noticed that I was mobbed by fans invading the track as I did a lap of honour in an open-topped car. It was a kick in the teeth at a time when I needed it the least, but at least the editor wrote me an apology, explaining that people had taken it the wrong way. It's not often that happens.

A few days at the Monaco Grand Prix as guests of Ferrari and Shell, where I met up with Michael Schumacher, David Coulthard and Mika Salo, perked me up a bit. But these were all just distractions from the thing weighing on my mind. I was starting to realise that I might never race again. The bones were healing well, but the soft tissue around the break and the shoulder had been badly damaged. But, although I knew deep down that I'd reached the end of the line, there was something preventing me from admitting it to myself.

The only thing that was going to make my mind up one way or another was to get back on a bike. I'd ridden a few laps at the World Superbike round at Brands Hatch and the crowd went wild when they saw me back on a race track. But I could barely hang onto the bike. We needed more controlled conditions so Ducati fixed up a test in

Mugello in Italy at the start of September.

Words cannot describe how bad I felt when I came in after the first few laps. I was going down the straight, sat on the bike like a praying mantis. I was in absolute agony and I was one per cent of the rider that I'd been at the start of the season. I couldn't even get down behind the bubble, change direction or hang off the bike at corners. It confirmed everything that my specialist Andy Carr had said. The bone would not heal as quickly as in any other area of the body because of the poor blood supply; there had been damage to the muscle and the nerve had been stretched and pulled around. There was no way the arm would be able to take the constant pounding of riding a superbike.

A lot of people find it hard to grasp just how serious the injury is – and I find that very frustrating. If I had broken my back they would have been able to understand why I was quitting. But the nerve and rotator cuff muscle damage has robbed me of a lot of power and movement. Even my daughter Danielle beat me in an arm-wrestle recently. So there was no way I was going to be fit for the start of the 2001 season.

So my mind was made up the second I got off the bike in Mugello. Those few laps had made me realise just how difficult racing motorbikes for a living had been. Until that point I had always found the physical side of the sport very easy. But that's not all you have to take into account.

The travelling used to be exciting 10 years ago but had already started to become a real ball-ache. It all seems very glamorous from the outside, because the sport is very colourful and there are lots of girls in bikinis in beautiful climates. But tell me what's glamorous about flying to the other side of the world, hanging round a track and living out of a hotel for a week. It had become a case of getting in and getting out because we had a business to run back home and we were both aware that we were missing the kids growing up.

Don't get me wrong, I've been lucky to make a very good living out of fulfilling my dream. Not many people can say that. All I ever wanted to do was ride a bike and become world champion but, once that happens, you find out that it's not as easy as you thought it would be. There's a massive responsibility because people want you everywhere and everyday. Then, on top of all the problems I had with motivation, I had to face unwanted distractions like my own uncle trying to make money out of me risking my life. It had become increasingly difficult to stay single-minded, aggressive and focused enough to keep winning races. Perhaps I was already looking forward to a time when I could start to be a nicer person, to start enjoying myself and spending more time with my family.

There were a lot of people who thought that I was deliberately negative because it made me look even better when I went out and won against all the odds. But towards the end of my career I had nothing left to prove – I was the best superbikes rider there had ever been. If the World Superbike championship had not grown into arguably the biggest championship today, and I hadn't grown with it, I might have regretted not moving to Grand Prix.

It always used to be said that the 500ccs were harder to ride, but there's only a handful of people saying that now. The GP circuit has also copied the success of superbikes and changed their rules to allow the four-stroke engines that the fans love and ride themselves to race in 2001. There is no way the two series will survive in competition and I think the manufacturers will choose to run with the GPs. When that

happens, I'll be able to say I was the best four-stroke rider in the world, anyway.

I don't really care how I compare to stars of other sports. But, if I'm ever asked who was the best British sportsman in the nineties, I'll say me. I've won eight world titles, and there aren't many who can match that. Stephen Hendry, maybe, but snooker is a leisure pastime, not a sport. I couldn't argue with the rower Steve Redgrave because he has had to train so hard to achieve success in a sport which, like mine, has struggled to attract mainstream publicity. I admire guys who do well at motocross because it's so physically demanding, although nobody has dominated it in Britain like Jeremy McGrath has done in the States.

In the high profile sports, there aren't many sportsmen who, when you look into their eyes, want to win like I do. They might want to do well, but they don't want to win. The ones who really wanted to win are people like John McEnroe. He had the same spoilt brat type of bad-tempered attitude when he wasn't winning. I'd have thrown my racket down if I'd been a top tennis player. If Ayrton Senna didn't win he had a face like thunder and punched people. Tiger Woods is like a big kid whenever he loses. In football, there's Roy Keane. He has the kind of determination to win that I can relate to – to try and score a goal and then to make sure he's back defending.

And I've only seen it in just a few other riders. Mick Doohan would sulk and blame something if he didn't win. I've seen it in John Kocinski and Scott Russell. And I'm starting to see it a little bit in Colin Edwards, who made a pig's ear of trying to take my title.

It's that special something that separates you from the other guys who just enjoy being out there, getting paid good money. If they win, then it's a bit of a bonus. I didn't care about the money. I would have done it for food if I had to. Sure, there are times when I sit back and think 'You've done bloody well for yourself'. Racing is a cut-throat world that was very difficult to break into and I had a lot of other bad injuries and set-backs early on. So I'm not ashamed to celebrate the fact that I was the best.

I wear a gold number one earring and a necklace with a gold number one pendant. My car was a Porsche Carrera with a personalised number plate, FOG IE. My official web site is [www.foggynol.com](http://www.foggynol.com). My famous 'Foggy eyes' logo is tattooed on my right shoulder. Some people might think all that's flash and big-headed. But I don't care what people think. If you take 100,000 people, 95,000 might think I'm ace and 5,000 might hate my guts because I'm outspoken. There might be people who are upset by some of the things I say in this book. All I can say to them is that they are the honest opinions I held at those specific points of my life.

I've actually no idea what the other riders thought of me. There's a lot of jealousy and back-stabbing in racing because it is an individual sport. There were not a lot of people, even the riders, who I could trust. They might have said nice things in public and then, behind my back, made up some excuse about why I've always won – such as the fact that the Ducati is a better bike. That also used to annoy me. And it used to upset me when I got criticised. But I grew to quite like it when I wound people up and it didn't bother me when riders moaned because the same thing was always said about other champions.

They said that Valentino Rossi's Aprilia was miles better than everyone else's. They said that Doohan's Honda was miles better. They said the same thing about Barry

Sheene, Kenny Roberts, Giacomo Agostini – all the top riders. But the people in second, third, fourth and fifth have to say that. If they said ‘He’s better than me’, their team would just get rid of them. The only person who ever said that about me was Troy Corser, who last year admitted that nobody could beat me at Assen. A month later he was dumped by Ducati!

I genuinely feel that I was very rarely beaten on equal terms on a dry track. I admit that I was not as good as some other riders in the wet. If the day had come when a rider did beat me in the dry without having a better set-up on his bike, then I would have just said ‘Shit, Foggy, you rode really well but you were well beaten.’ I was honest enough to do that. But that day never came so it might appear that nothing has ever been my fault. But it never was! If I lost a race because a fly splattered into my visor in Assen, what was I supposed to say? That it didn’t happen?

Even as a kid I hated the fear of losing. When I raced other kids at the back of our house I always had to be first. They treated it as a bit of fun but I always had to have the last word – that I’d won. And if anyone asked me when I was 12 or 13 what I was going to do when I grew up, the answer was ‘I’m going to race motorcycles’. Even when I was motocrossing, I knew I would never be good enough to win, so it was a question of filling time before I was old enough to satisfy my addiction for road racing, at which I always knew I could be the world champion. It’s strange, because my dad was never a bad loser when he was racing. If you beat him at snooker or darts or dominoes, he hated it. But racing was just a hobby for him. He was nothing like me.

So I suppose it’s just how you’re created. I was born with this desire to win. If you put six or seven guys in a 100 metres race, one will go faster than the others and go on to be a good runner. I grew up around bikes and I happened to be faster than the other guys. I was crap at everything else in life. When I won, I wanted to win more and more until I became such a bad loser that I would say things about another rider or criticise his bike. There’s been many a time that I’ve cried after winning an important race or championship. But I’m not ashamed about that, either. Why shouldn’t everyone see just how much it means to me? Yet crying is not something I can do at other emotional times like after a tragedy. It shows just how dedicated I am to winning.

I just don’t see the point in doing anything unless you are going to be the best at it. Whoever came up with the saying ‘It’s the taking part that counts’ was obviously someone who couldn’t win. That’s an attitude that can make me a bit of a monster. And there are definitely two sides to my personality. People who used to meet me thought I was some scary highly tuned idiot who just went out to win races and didn’t care what it took. They found the other person, who wanted a quiet life at home and who was still probably a little bit shy and embarrassed at being called a superstar.

It’s nice to be recognised, but a lot of the time it can be awkward. The way I see it is that I’m no different to anyone else just because I can ride a bike fast. It’s one of the reasons I didn’t enjoy racing any more. I just didn’t have my own space. The organisers needed to take some lessons from Formula One. I had no area where I could go in the paddock to get away from it all. And when I had to think about winning, I needed to have some room. I couldn’t stand it when people leaned into the Ducati hospitality area and asked for my autograph. So, at a race meeting, I was the worst person in the world to be around.

I didn’t like talking to anybody and I was snappy with people, even with those

closest to me like Michaela and the mechanics. I wanted to win so much that I just didn't have time for other people. So, when people tried to get at me all the time, I was very ignorant and bad-tempered. You look at all of sport's winners, they are always difficult characters. But the fans do get to see the other side of me as well.

After I had won two races, then I would sit down at the back of hospitality and sign autographs and drink beer with them. But, until that point, I was just a focused machine, who would say anything or do anything to get my own way.

In any case, I never wanted to be the good guy. When I won the first world title there was a lot of aggression building up and it stayed there when I had to prove that I could retain it. Sure, I've changed as I've got older. When I won, and won again, I could relax a bit. There was no need to call people names. I'm now a lot quieter and more thoughtful about life. I can now devote more time to other hobbies and business interests. Before, I was so wrapped up in my racing that I couldn't break off to go and do something in the garden.

But I just loved sending so many people home happy – not just myself but my family, Ducati and the fans. I could never have imagined that I would attract such a massive following. Having 120,000 people at Brands Hatch last year scared me in a way. And nothing will ever replace that feeling of climbing onto the middle step and listening to the crowd go mad.

I've worked really hard for that success, so I deserve some time to myself. I don't even know this country that I live in, so there's so much to see and do. I will always live in England, that's for sure. Whether we'll stay in the north is a different matter, because it's always wet and rainy. But I need to be speaking English and eating English food, near to my friends and family.

In some ways I couldn't wait to give up racing so that I could do other things and spend more time with Michaela and the kids. I'll probably be a fitter person, too, as I'll have time to go into the gym, to go mountain-biking or enduro riding in the Lake District. At the minute, I've no time to do any of this stuff because I'm pulled from pillar to post doing promotions, interviews, prizegivings and official functions.

But there is no way I'm just going to fade away into the background. I've talked about signing a new deal with Ducati to do some promotional work and help bring on their talented young Spanish rider Ruben Xaus. There is already talk of me setting up my own team for the 2002 season. I've also had offers to drive in the touring car championship, although I can't see myself going down that road. There's talk of a Carl Fogarty Race School at Brands Hatch and I'll probably be involved in television commentary. There's even talk of a movie deal, a bit like Vinnie Jones in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, although it's still very hush-hush. In fact I've been busier since people guessed I might not be returning to the track than I ever was while I was racing.

People have asked me if I'll miss putting my knee down on a corner or going at 190mph. But all that adrenaline buzz stuff means nothing to me. Sure, I've always liked anything with an engine, where I can push a button and have power. I drive fast, so I suppose I quite enjoy being on the edge. But I never even really enjoyed racing. I enjoyed winning. Ask me what it's like to win a race and I'll tell you that there's nothing like seeing that chequered flag. The feeling when I was first to cross the line at Assen in 1999 was exactly the same as when I won that first race on the fields behind

my house.

So that's what I'll miss. Because winning has been the story of my life ...

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Cock of the North*

Let's start with a confession. I was born at Queen's Park Hospital on 1 July, 1965. Yes, 1965. Not 1966, and not even 1967. The confusion is my fault but I've no idea why, or when, I decided to subtract a year or two whenever I have been quizzed about my age. I'm sure I'm not the only sportsman who has ever lied about their age and racers are particularly notorious for doing this. But it reached the point when it became too awkward to backtrack. So you can guarantee that now, whenever my age is quoted in newspaper or magazine articles, it's almost always a year or so out.

Dad, George, made his money by basically working his balls off from the day he left school. When I arrived, he was a panel beater for East Lancashire Coachbuilders, but at night he would earn a few extra quid by clearing rubbish from people's backyards. Together with his brother Phillip, they scraped enough together to buy a truck and slowly moved into the demolition business. Before too long, P&G Fogarty owned another truck and then needed a warehouse for storing equipment. So dad packed in his day job to concentrate on the business full-time, which was soon successful enough for us to move from a terraced house on Linley Street, in a working class area of Blackburn called Mill Hill, to a semi-detached – 595, Livesey Branch Road—in the Feniscowles district. That was the scene of my first ever bike accident at the age of three, and I still have a small scar on my forehead to remind me of the time I rode my three-wheeler off the edge of the patio and split my head open. I've been reminded of the incident so many times by my mum, Jean, that I've almost formed a mental picture of the scene, although I'm sure that I've no actual memory of it.

But one thing about that house has stuck in my mind. My bedroom backed onto the back garden and at night, as I tried to fall asleep, the shadow of a highwayman, wearing a hat and cloak, would creep across the wall. Dad tried to tell me that the effect was caused by the headlights from passing cars. But there were no roads at the back of the house. So I had to just turn over and try to ignore it. I didn't mention it to anyone until a couple of years later when my sister, who also used that room, said she had seen the same things. To this day, I still believe in ghosts a bit.

My days at Feniscowles Junior School are also something of a blur, so much so that I don't even remember being in too much trouble! I might have had to stand outside the headmaster's office a couple of times, but Mr Painter was a really nice man, who died shortly after I left, and not the type to go over the top with punishments. I had a big crush on a girl called Donna Pickup, but was scared to death of saying anything to her. My only contact with the girls at junior school was hitting them with rubber dinosaur toys tied on elastic under the desk. The monsters were confiscated, but that was as far as the teachers went.

I vaguely remember thinking I was fourth 'cock of the school', the honorary title given to the best schoolyard fighters. The undisputed cock was Paul Dinham, who I

got on okay with most of the time. For some reason, I once roughed up one of his mates, who went running to Paul for protection. Paul stuck up for him and tried to sort me out but, instead of giving me a pasting, struggled to land his punches as I was too quick for him. And, while he was off balance, I sneaked in a few kicks, which wound him up even more. I was saved by the playtime bell and ran back into the safety of lessons while the going was good and, luckily, he didn't come looking for revenge.

The school was so easy going that the football team's fixtures were limited to two friendly matches a year against the two neighbouring schools, St Paul's and St Francis's. We beat St Paul's about 7-1 – I scored four or five – but Mr Painter did not think that was fair and, when we played them again, he took out all the best players, me included. We only won that game 2-1, which was how he liked it. I was gutted in my second game against St Francis's when, after leading 1-0 at half-time, we lost 2-1. Even at the age of eight, I did not like to lose one little bit.

Those reasonably happy memories were in total contrast to the start of secondary school at Darwen Vale High School. The place was huge, the older pupils were huge and I was absolutely crapping myself on the first day, despite the fact that a few of my classmates from junior school were starting at the same time. I was devastated when we did not receive a carton of milk at 10.30 on that first morning and I hated the place from that first day until the day I left. The teachers were stricter and I found it very difficult to keep up with the work. To be honest, I did not fit in at all. I had always been shy with new people, even though I was quite loud around any bunch of lads that I knew well. Maybe a few of the other kids in that class mistook the shyness for being spoilt. Mind you, I didn't help my own cause when we moved to a bigger house called Verecroft, on Parsonage Road, in the fairly affluent area of Wilpshire, when dad's business started to really take off. Thinking it would be cool and clever, I bragged that our new house had a swimming pool. But instead of impressing the other kids, it backfired and they thought I was a cocky git. When anyone came to visit, I bullshitted that we had to have the pool filled in, so that we could extend the lawn.

That typified the way that I tried too hard to be in with the in crowd. There were times when the other lads would tolerate me, but I was only ever on the fringes of the main group and, all of a sudden, they would give me a slapping to put me back in my place. If I'd had a fraction of the confidence that I have now, I would have turned round and hit one of them so hard. That would have earned their respect. And I'm sure I could have beaten any of them. Instead, I sort of curled up into a ball and took whatever abuse was coming my way. I wasn't picked on, but the boys that I wanted to mate around with would pick and choose when to include me, and when to drop me like a stone. It didn't help that the rest of the lads lived in the Darwen area, whereas I was now at the other side of town and pretty isolated. I could have moved to a school nearer to home but I was far too shy and insecure to try and meet a totally new set of friends. I would have cried my eyes out if it had been suggested.

In a nutshell, I just hated school and counted down the minutes of every day to when I could get home and ride my bike around the fields. Ever since the age of 11, I had been inseparable from the couple of Honda XR75 field bikes that I rode on a stretch of Tarmac near the poultry cabins at the back of our house. When I was around 13, dad bought me my first proper motocross bike, a two-year-old second-hand RM100 Suzuki, and we started to visit some local motocross tracks on the outskirts of

Blackburn.

Until then, my only taste of racing had been to follow dad around the country watching him race. He was a good rider even though he didn't really have a decent bike until towards the end of his career. Still, he beat some big names and the thrill of the racing circuit made a big impression on me. Even at that early age, I somehow knew that was what I wanted to do.

I also found that I could hold my own against the older lads down at those tracks near Blackburn, which whetted my appetite for racing. Later that year, I dropped down to a smaller bike, a very fast Honda CR80, which I could ride really hard. Dad rented one of the fields behind the house and invited four or five other lads down one night, to ride their 125cc bikes against me. I absolutely blitzed them. It was my first taste of racing against other riders, and I loved it.

There was nothing at school that I loved. In fact, there was only one subject which interested me – and no prizes for guessing that it was PE. But I even lost interest in that. For the first couple of years I played football for the school on Saturday mornings as a tricky left winger, but only for the 'B' team which pissed me off. When I was eventually picked for the first team, the game was on a weekday after school. But I could not stand the thought of hanging round school one minute longer than necessary, so I told the teacher that I had an appointment to get my hair cut. When I turned up the next morning with my hair still all over the place, it didn't take him too long to realise that my commitment was less than 100 per cent. I was never picked for any side again after that.

I absolutely loathed maths and couldn't understand why I had to sit through English lessons when I could already speak the language. The attitude of my parents wasn't helpful, either. Neither of them ever checked whether I had done my homework; they just didn't seem to care. So I got away with murder. I tried to keep up for the first couple of years but, after that, I can't remember doing one bit of homework. The more I fell behind, the more pointless it was actually turning up and I started nicking off school altogether. I spent many a day just wandering aimlessly around the nearby canal and Witton Park, or mucking around with my mates who had also played truant. Nobody seemed to bother and the teachers never rang my parents to tell them that I hadn't been at school. I just caught the bus home at the usual time and was never found out. And the more I got away with it, the more I would do it.

So, when it came to exams in the fourth and fifth year, I was moved down a class into one of two groups of lost causes, along with one of my best friends, Andrew Shepherd. It didn't bother me because I was also back with some of my mates from junior school. And I was out of the way of the bigger lads from my previous class, who I had grown to hate. So, while they were doing their O-levels, me and Andy were sent out to a local mental institution, Calderstones Hospital, to gain work experience for some kind of City and Guilds qualification. It was the best week of my school life.

We were given all the shitty jobs, literally. As well as taking a few patients out for walks and exercise, we also had to take them to the toilet and bath them. We realised that one particular guy needed a lot of help which obviously led to an argument.

'I'm not taking his pants down,' Andy said.

'Well, I'm not bloody well going anywhere near him,' I argued.

But I drew the short straw and undressed him before he sat on the toilet. What we

didn't realise was that he didn't know that he had to lift the toilet seat. So he sat on the lid and, before we knew it, there was shit everywhere. We were splitting our sides laughing, but we had to get him back to the ward.

'I'm not wiping the mess,' said Andy.

'Well there's no way I'm going to do it,' I argued.

In the end, we both pulled his pants back up, without cleaning him, and it went all over his back and his clothes. When we had calmed down enough, we returned him to the nurse, still stinking the place out.

Another of the patients never spoke, but you could tell when he was pissed off because he grumbled and muttered loudly. When it was our turn to bath him, we soon cottoned on that his level of grumbling rose when he was splashed with water. So, neither of us wanted to scrub him and he didn't get much of a wash. Then came the problem of drying him, as he wasn't capable of doing it himself. His shoulders and legs were no problem, but we weren't keen on towelling his bollocks. So we devised a method with Andy holding one end of the towel and me holding the other, rubbing it between his legs as if we were sawing down a tree. We must have been a bit rough, though, because his grumbling was deafening. The noise attracted the attention of a nurse who suddenly burst in. She was furious when she discovered friction burns in a particularly sensitive part of his body.

It was hilarious at the time, and still quite funny looking back, but typical of the cruel streak that I've still got. And, as the week went on, we became quite skilled with these patients. Not at looking after them, but at winding them up! As well as the grumbler, there was a woman who used to scratch her wrists so hard that she needed bandages for the wounds. Then there was a man who would swear violently at the slightest thing. And, finally, one of the inmates would just slap the nearest person when provoked. So, if you lined them up in the right order, it produced a spectacular chain reaction – like a line of dominoes toppling over.

Andy lit the fuse by slapping the slapper round the back of his neck. He turned round and slapped the swearer. 'You fucking bastard, you fucking bastard,' he shouted, which upset the grumbler no end. And that made the woman scratch her wrists furiously. All the time we were almost pissing ourselves laughing.

Part of their exercise routine was in a kind of bouncy castle. But, when we put them in the middle of the room, they just sat down and refused to bounce around. So we jumped around the edges, which made them clatter into each other – with predictable results. Slap. 'You fucking bastard.' Grumble, grumble. Scratch, scratch, scratch.

The frightening thing is that, three years later, someone told me that I had passed the course!

One year on and Andy was dead – the first person that I knew really well to be killed in a bike accident. I had been the one who actually got him involved in motorbikes, as he used to ride on the fields behind my house. He was very frightened the first time he sat on a bike, but soon became quite quick. Then, when we left school, we drifted apart. He lived on one side of Blackburn and I lived on the other. In June 1982, the year after we left school, he was riding with a pillion passenger during a lunch break as a trainee mechanic. The bike ran in the back of a van carrying eggs. Andy's passenger was also badly injured. I didn't even find out until a week after it happened. At the age of 17, death didn't mean much to me and I didn't even attend the

funeral. It didn't really sink in for a year or two, when it suddenly hit me that my best mate throughout my time at school was dead.

On my last day at Darwen Vale, I turned up in my school uniform, but all my mates were in their normal clothes. I had a Harrington jacket, with a tartan lining, so I turned it inside out to show that I was a rebel as well. Nobody was going to learn anything on their last day so we just roamed around, disturbing other classes and trying to cause trouble. The headmaster, Mr Strafford, tried to chase us off the premises and my last contact with a teacher was telling him to fuck off. So much for an education.

I left school, in 1981, having never sat a single exam. I had sneaked through a back door of the system and the whole education thing just passed me by. It was amazing how it had been allowed to happen. And it was wrong. At the time, it seemed brilliant that I got away with doing so little but, looking back, I wish my mum and dad had made more of an effort. Dad was always late home from work and would then start messing with his bikes in the garage. Mum was never strict enough with me, even with little things like checking if I had brushed my teeth. She had lost a baby girl, who was stillborn a couple of years before I arrived. I didn't find out until I was 10 years old and it wasn't something that was often talked about. Maybe it caused her to spoil me, and my sister Georgina, a bit.

Whatever the reasons, they didn't push me to get involved with anything, inside or outside school. I would have kicked, screamed and cried if they had made me go to the cubs, or for extra football training or for swimming lessons, but I would probably have enjoyed it in the long run. Maybe it's because I was left to my own devices as a kid that I pushed myself so hard later on in life. When you are older, you realise when you've got the opportunity to do something with your life. Sometimes it's too late and the chance has passed. Luckily, when I realised that I had a talent for riding bikes, I still had time to be successful at it. But all the way through school I was quite happy lying in front of the fire watching *Scooby Doo* or *Grange Hill* on the telly, or getting into mischief with my mates.

At first that mischief was all fairly harmless teenage stuff, like pinching apples and pears from the garden of a grumpy old git who lived quite close by. On one occasion, he caught me and two other lads red-handed, marched us back into his house and rang the police. It was a complete over-reaction but they turned up and took our details. It was no big deal for me, but one of the others was about three years younger and, when the copper asked for his date of birth, he broke down in tears because it was his birthday. 'Don't lock me up, I'm supposed to be going out with my mum and dad tonight,' he blubbed. We were also crying – with laughter, until the policeman said he would be visiting our parents the next day. Stupidly, I believed him and spilled the beans to mum and dad that night. It earned me a few days in my room although, of course, the copper never turned up.

That punishment must not have made much of an impression on me though, because a few weeks later we were in deeper trouble. The day started off in all innocence – four 14-year-olds cycling into town with nothing much more in mind than to kill time in the summer holidays. I'm not even sure whether anyone actually made a conscious decision to go stealing. But, in any case, we tied our bikes up and headed for the big newsagents, Lavell's.

There was no big plan of action, no look-outs or decoys. We just wandered around

the store filling our pockets with pens, lollies, sweets, a torch and some batteries. Then we scarpered back to the bikes and started pedalling furiously back in the direction of home. We had got away with it. 'Let's stop and have a look at what we've nicked,' I shouted to the others.

Me and my big mouth! On the outskirts of the shopping centre we were sifting through our haul when a woman strolled casually up. 'That's a lot of stuff you've bought there, lads,' she said. 'Have you got receipts for it all?'

Just our luck. We had been rumbled by an off-duty store detective, who worked for Boots. 'I think you had all better come with me,' she said.

Not bloody likely.

We made a dash for it and I managed to wriggle out of her grasp, but one of the lads was collared. As the store detective marched him off to the police station, it was obvious that he would grass us up. So me and a lad called Les McDermott rode as fast as our legs would pedal. The direction was not important, as long as it was out of Blackburn and away from home.

We did not pause for breath until we were in the Mellor area, near to where I live now, about three miles away. 'I'm not going home, no way. I will be in for a huge bollocking. I'm going to run away,' I told Les.

It seemed as though there was no other option. It was at this point that we started thinking like desperados. It had been a warm summer's day but the evening was closing in and it was starting to get chilly – and we were starving.

We spotted a small general store near to the Fieldings Arms pub and entered, pretending to be buying some sweets. But, by now, we were a couple of artful dodgers and, while I bought the sweets, Les sneaked away with the cheese and bread, and a newspaper to discover whether our crime had made headline news.

The next move was to find somewhere to sleep for the night. So we cycled a bit further into the countryside and through a tiny village called Balderstone, in a pretty well-to-do farming area. Just before the lane ended, in a farmyard near to the river, we spotted a tree house at the bottom of a huge field. I remember the exact tree to this day. The tree house was impressive with a proper roof but, after hiding the bikes and climbing up, we discovered the floor sloped badly. It would have to do, though. Having tucked into the food, which was impossible to eat because it was so dry, we tried to catch some sleep. But the temperature was falling rapidly and, even though we wrapped ourselves up in the newspaper, it was too cold to sleep. And, to add to the discomfort of the sloping floor, the noises of the countryside gave me the creeps. I could not have slept for more than a couple of hours all night.

By daylight, I was really thirsty and heard a milk float stopping further down the lane. So, adding to the growing list of crimes, we nicked a couple of pints and climbed back up the tree. We were starving again and absolutely filthy. It didn't take too long to realise that the outlook was pretty bleak, so we decided to head for home with our tails between our legs. To cap it all, I had a puncture a mile or so away from my house, and had to stop off at a phone box and ring my mum. 'Carl, is that you, love?' she answered. 'Where are you? We've been out of our minds with worry.'

I was lost for words and broke down crying and, when mum turned up in the car a couple of minutes later, she was in tears and couldn't stop hugging me. The police had been in touch and told mum and dad about the theft. They had been up all night,

ringing round hospitals. Mind you, my dad couldn't have been all that bothered because he had gone to work as normal that day. Mum rang him to say that I was safe and well. So, while I was having a bath and restoring some feeling to my fingers and toes, dad marched in with a face like thunder. 'You're in so much trouble, boy,' he snarled. I knew I was in no physical danger, as dad never once hit us. But, even so, he could be pretty scary when he wanted to be.

We were forced to attend the police station that night, where I got away with a stern lecture before dad grounded me for ages. My only other scrapes with the law, apart from motoring offences in later life, were all bike-related. Some of the neighbours would ring the police if a few of us were hanging around outside their houses on our mopeds. I think they found us a bit menacing.

In many ways, it's quite fortunate that I didn't go off the rails completely because, for as long as I can remember, I was pretty much left to do as I pleased. The same applied to our pets. When we lived in Feniscowles, we had a beautiful Alsatian dog called Sheba, who lived in a world of her own, and was allowed to wander off whenever and wherever she wanted. Before too long, she roamed off and was never seen again.

Her replacement was my favourite pet, another Alsatian called Rebel, who was named after the dog in the *Champion The Wonder Horse* telly series. He was a typical man's best friend who used to go everywhere with me and do anything I wanted him to. He was very obedient where people and kids were concerned – but loved to kill other animals. I've always been an animal lover, but I hated cats. And I had that warped sense of humour of a typical teenager.

Behind our garden there was a poultry farm, so cats ventured into the garden quite regularly. As soon as I saw one, I would let Rebel out. Eight times out of 10 he would catch them straight away but, if the cat escaped up a tree, I threw stones or shot at it with my 177 airgun, which I had for hunting rabbits. When the cats tried to run away, Rebel would grab them and shake them so hard that they were dead within seconds. It sounds horrible, looking back, but it seemed perfectly normal at the time.

We also had another dog, a fat little scavenging mongrel called Trixie. She thought she was the boss and started all the trouble, only for Rebel to bail her out when the going got tough. On one occasion, Trixie squeezed through a gap in the fence of a pen, which contained a few sheep and two big, mean geese.

The geese fancied their chances against Trixie, until Rebel jumped over the fence and tore one of the geese to pieces. I got him out as quickly as possible and ran back home, acting all innocent. Then the phone went and the owner of the pen wanted £20 from my dad for his dead goose. Yet another bollocking – and we didn't even get to cook the goose!

Rebel loved our midnight poaching expeditions to the reservoir and would sit loyally next to me for hours on end while I fished for trout with little fluorescent floats. One night, the peace and quiet was shattered when a warden pulled up and scanned the banks with his searchlight. I grabbed Rebel and tried to sit perfectly still, hoping he would not spot us. It took me a while to realise that the lights had cast a shadow of a young boy and his dog, 20 times their normal size, on the wall next to us. We fled down the steep banking, again thinking I had given the warden the slip because I was out of the light's beam. Unfortunately, though, I was still carrying my