

HELMET ART

John McGuinness has one of the most recognisable – and unusual – helmet designs in motorcycle racing. When he first appeared with the original design in 1999 TT fans were mystified by the colour scheme and even today many people are unaware of its origin. The design has a special history and although there is no doubt that John is drawn to the unique swirls and waves of the pattern there is more than a hint of superstition in his choice.

'When I was racing at Daytona at the start of 1999 I crashed in practice and wrote off the helmet I was wearing. I was sharing a garage with a pretty eccentric bloke called Jack Silverman. Jack has a big collection of Pueblo and Navajo Indian artworks in a museum he runs in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and his helmet designs are based on this Indian art. He gave me a helmet to replace the one that I smashed and I won the 250cc race at Daytona. The rest of the 1999 season was the most successful that I'd had in racing up to that point – I won the British 250cc championship, the Scarborough Gold Cup and my first TT – so I stuck with the Silverman design and I've used it ever since.'

John wore Arai helmets until 2005 and then switched to the Shoei brand.

Unlike many motorcycle racers, John keeps almost all of the leathers and helmets that he has raced in throughout his career. He also collects the race gear of other riders.

'This is the Arai helmet I wore on the Hondas in 2002. It is very similar to the original Silverman design that I started using in 1999. The chip on the chin came from cracking it on the fairing after jumping Ballaugh Bridge.'





'I wanted a fancy glitter helmet and I had this painted in 1999. Every time I wore it I had a breakdown or something went wrong. I broke down in the Formula One race when I was wearing it in 1999 and then my mechanic jammed it on my head during the Senior TT pit stop in 1999 after the visor broke on my original lid and I ended up with a bad result. The final straw came when I lent it to Woolsey Coulter in a British championship round and he crashed, so after that I retired it!



This helmet was worn by John when he won the last ever Singles TT in 2000. The scratch is from a short circuit crash.

The voodoo doll on the rear of the 2005-6 five-time TT winning Shoei.



'This helmet was originally worn a couple of times in practice in 2005 on the AIM Yamaha but I never liked it and then changed it because I felt it was too far away from the original. Any time I came away from the original design it felt like I had no knickers on.'



'This was the third helmet that Jack Silverman sent me and I liked it. I decided to wear it at Oulton Park in 2000 for the first time, went out of the pits, got to Shell Oils hairpin, accelerated out of it, high sided, crashed and broke my leg - it had been on my head for three minutes! That sealed the whole deal about sticking to the original design that Jack had given me. It's weird - I blame the helmet but I know that it really has nothing to do with the helmet. No matter what, I always revert back to that original design though.'



2005 was the first year with Shoei and this particular helmet was worn in both '05 and '06 to win five TTs - a double on the Yamahas in '05 and a treble on Hondas the following year.



This is the helmet that John wore to win the Superbike TT in 2009. He was also leading the Senior TT when the chain broke in Ramsey. 'I had set the current outright lap record (131.578mph) before the chain snapped and the helmet has never been worn since I took it off that day.' There are also a lot more commercial logos on this helmet as greater television coverage of the event, including the use of a helmet camera, has increased the opportunities to raise sponsorship.



'I had the same design on the Arai in 2003 and 2004 but I don't have the original helmet that I wore when I won my first big bike TT in '04 because I swapped it with Michael Rutter for one of his. I was wearing this particular helmet when I crashed the Hawk Kawasaki at Scarborough during the Gold Cup in September 2004 and wrecked it.'

John kisses the voodoo doll on the back of his helmet before the start of the Superstock TT in 2011. 'I didn't always kiss the doll but I started doing it about five or six years ago and once I start doing something like that then it becomes a habit. The idea of the doll isn't to bring luck, though, it's to ward off evil spirits.'



The Superbike and Senior TT winning Shoei helmet from 2011.



The helmet John wore in 2012 on the Shinden electric bike in the TT Zero race. The helmet was only used for one lap of practice and one racing lap.



The Shoei helmet that John wore when winning the Superbike and Superstock TTs in 2012. The red, white and blue colours were incorporated as part of a celebration of the 2012 London Olympics.



'Petrol's going up and lap speeds are going up!' On his way to setting the fastest ever lap of the TT Mountain course, John has no time for a comfort stop on his HM Plant Honda in Union Mills.

A disconsolate John with the lap speed plaque from the ancient TT scoreboard that lines Glencrutchery Road. It was his only 'trophy' from the Senior TT after his HM Plant Honda snapped its chain on the fourth lap of the race. The new outright lap record speed of 131.578mph still stands today.

