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S N E A K E R S
K I C K S + W E B S
S T R I D E S + S O L E S
C R E P S + B E A T E R S
T R A B S + T R A I N E E S**

Whatever you call your footwear, there is a particular tribe who are obsessive about theirs.

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We talk to the man behind Sheffield's vintage trainer festival about his love of classic trainers and cars

with **@steelcitytrainerfest**

KO: Lets get the ball rolling, tell us a bit about you.

SM: This will be the least interesting part of the interview for the trusty readers. Where do I start? Born and bred in Barnsley (1980). I found my obsession of Trainers and Classic/Retro cars by working as a Mechanical Contracts Manager for a large firm in Rotherham. Started my working life as a qualified Plumbing and Heating Engineer. Bought my pride and joy at 18 years old and over the next five years built one of the best standard VW Mk1 Golf GTis in Europe (very proud that Volkswagen UK borrow the car to promote the launch of new Golf GTis so I must have done something right). Took over the running of a VW show in my early 20s and have grown the show to the extent we even have cars now attending from Holland/Belgium and Denmark, with attendances well over four thousand people a year. If I'm not at a car or trainer show you'll probably find me hanging out at the various retro BMX shows throughout the country or at my unit working on another VW/Retro BMX... Ok enough about me.

KO: Where did your love of trainers come from?

SM: As a teenager being brought up by my grandparents to them fashion was not important. They were born in the 1920's and lived through the war years so it was a necessity rather than looking good. Being a young lad I just wanted to fit in with friends and the other

kids in school and part of that was wearing the right gear. To my grandparents' trainers and clothes needed to be functional and not about style or what was popular at the time, but to me fitting in to avoid being bullied was number one priority. From their point of view it was never about the money things cost or not being loved or cared about, just basically the generation gap. However nearly 30 years later my gran does compliment me on my trainers, so maybe now at 98 she has an idea of style after all.

Once I started working, I could finally afford to buy and choose my own trainers the world was my oyster. And finally, I could fit in with friends, but the funny thing is once I could afford those delights, I wanted something different, to stand out, to be unique, which is how I have really lived my life ever since. But, looking back, I wouldn't have had it any other way.

PO: When did you start 'Steel City Trainer Fest'?

SM: Our first event was held in October 2019 at the fantastic venue of Trafalgar Warehouse in the vibrant Devonshire Green area of Steel City, AKA Sheffield. I never really thought about organising my own trainer show, and even after attending Laces Out in Liverpool for most of their events it never crossed my mind about my own show until we decided to see what the fuss was about regarding Crep City. In early 2019 I made a short trip over the Pennines to Manchester

and little would I know that the following few days would spawn Steel City Trainer Fest. Manchester as most people know is a great place to visit, there's some great shopping/eating and drinking to be done so with a hotel booked we were soon excited to be in the queue for the show. As a proud Yorkshireman there was no early bird/ultra-tickets purchased just a case of waiting my turn with the endless amounts of people in front of us. After nearly 3.5hrs we finally made it into the venue, but we were in for a big shock. Although the venue was amazing the lighting was poor, stall holders were complaining and it was a little overwhelming with not a lot of space or variety on offer. Thirty minutes later we had surfaced back into the light, slightly bemused at what had just happened. Later that night in the middle of sampling the delights of Manchester, the cogs had already been turning and before the evening was over, it was decided that I was going to have a shot at organising our very own Trainer Show, and as they say the rest is history.

KO: What does trainer life look like in Sheffield?

SM: Sheffield's trainer life is very much split into two cultures. With the city having a high population of young students from all over the world there is a large following of modern styles. It's obvious too that there are vast cultural influences from all over the globe (which of course is a good thing). This section of the trainer community

has a loyalty to brands such as Air Jordans, New Balance and Supreme to name a few. What is good for these groups and the city itself are the local independent shops catering for their needs both with trainers and the fashion. I fall very much into the other half of the city which follows a much more traditional/retro terrace style with heavy influence from Sheffield's football and musical history. However again this is well catered for and somewhere in the middle we all have a mutual respect for each other's passions and styles and appreciate each other's choices of fashion and culture which is what makes Sheffield a fantastic place to live and work.

PO: The North is heavily influenced by terrace culture. How different is Sheffield from other cities like Liverpool or London?

SM: Sheffield is a lot like Liverpool and Manchester, it was and quite possibly still is a Northern Industry Powerhouse, so the area is very working class, and you have many stereotypical towns within a short radius of one another. With this comes the terrace culture of the various small proud football teams that all contribute to a fantastic fashion hub that is glued together with the cities famous musical influence and heritage.

KO: Who are the key individuals from the sub-culture you want to represent at Steel City?

SM: For us here at SCTF there's

a few things we are very proud of and happy to promote. One of these is the small independent businesses that exist in the trainer world, and we have the pleasure of highlighting these fantastic companies. As a once self-employed person it's important that these guys have the best chance of making it in the retail sector because with everything going on in the world these guys need all the help they can get and if in our own little way, we can highlight their business and bring them a little more trade its mission accomplished from us. We also love the fact that a lot of the traders who attend the show are local, and it makes us proud of what South Yorkshire can offer the British Trainer industry. In fact, we spent a Saturday earlier this year promoting the show in Sheffield, and it was brilliant visiting the different parts of the city and meeting the different trainer/fashion cultures. Not to mention the cracking food we had along the way. This also makes it obvious why the show also attracts business's from outside the region which is a credit to the city and the wonderful Yorkshire welcome.

KO: What we wear on our feet is an expression of who we are - what are you wearing today?

SM: Well unfortunately work won't allow me to wear my favourite trainers in the office so the daily pair are Timberland Chukka boots in dark brown (sorry to disappoint).

KO: Do you remember your first pair?

SM: My very first pair of trainers were purchased in 1993. They were a pair of adidas Equipment Tennis Clay Court made in France. This was the first pair of trainers that I was allowed to choose and buy myself with pocket money saved and without my grandparents having their opinion. In the early 90s I was really into sports and for whatever reason these trainers drew me in. They were bought from a sports shop in Scarborough when we were away on holiday, but sadly I no longer have the originals and been trying for years to source a pair, to me these are the holy grail as they bring fond memories of my childhood and happy times.

PO: Do you have a favourite piece of footwear? We heard that your favourite was a pair of 1976 black and yellow adidas Oslo, made in West Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall - is that so, and why so significant?

SM: That's correct - the Oslo were the first real pair of trainers I purchased from someone in the trainer community. Up until then I just dabbled on eBay but with this pair I spoke to a fellow collector and gained valuable knowledge and contacts so that's why the Oslo are one of my favourites as it opened a whole new world that I had not really had much knowledge of. The Oslo colour way of black and yellow has always appealed to me and there are

CONTINUED:

IN CONVERSATION

with Simon McNamara



and Kayla + Paul @sole_magazine

NUMBER
NINE

ZINE



"the best decades for me are the 70s and early 80s... the styling of this time in my opinion, is timeless both in the automotive and of course in the trainer world."



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so many twists on the theme such as the original adidas Copenhagen release of yellow and black which is another favourite of mine.

KO: Would you say that you are a collector?

SM: All depends on what people class as collector. Yes, I collect trainers but there is a method in my obsession, for instance I will only collect a trainer that can be worn by myself so even if a holy grail pair came available if these were not in the right size there would be no money changing hands. Also, to be totally honest one of the main things for me is I must like the trainer, just because its rare or an important piece it still needs to be appealing to me.

PO: What do you think was the best decade for trainer culture or design?

SM: For me it is the 70s and early 80s, this is for lots of reasons and not just the trainer culture. I've been a massive car fan, my Mk1 Golf GTi was one of the must have cars of this era so these two decades are a huge part of my life and the styling of this time in my opinion is timeless both in the automotive and of course in the trainer world. The trainer silhouettes and technical advancements in the actual products through to the massive influence of the terrace fashion culture that perfectly suited the trainers of that era. I'm a big football fan and was lucky enough to have experienced the 80s football scene, so without knowing it at

the time I was there, and looking back these were awesome times. Coupled with my love of the music from this era, all adds to my favouritism of the 70/80s.

KO: What does the Trainer community mean to you?

SM: For me its two words 'Friendship' and 'Help' When we started the show obviously it was a completely new world to us, however literally within weeks we were meeting new people who shared the same passion, and it was quite clear that the trainer scene is a lot like the car scene that I have been hugely part of for the last 25 years and we are now honoured to class a lot of people as friends. The help is also there within the community, whether this is promoting the show or helping track down that elusive pair of trainers. It's also fantastic how the different traders help each other out even though I suppose potentially they are rivals for the same business, so to me that's what it is all about because if we stick together and help one another this scene will only go one way and that's up.

PO: Is Steel City Trainer Festival purely for enthusiasts to buy, sell and view vintage trainers or is there a deeper significance?

SM: Obviously the show is built around people buying and selling trainers. But what is happening are the traders are networking and ultimately feeding off each other. So, if we were the catalyst for getting them all together to help each

other out and using each others services, I think its mission accomplished for us here at the show.

KO: People can see work by restorers, and customisers who hand-paint artwork on to trainers, is it important for you to support craftspeople within the sub-culture?

SM: Absolutely, restorers are basically artists who are preserving works of art. I have had a few pairs of my own brought back to life and that's so important as they could have basically been thrown away and lost forever, but now they can be worn and enjoyed again as they were intended. I have always been a fan of individuality and its great to see people are contributing to the community and offering a different take on the trainer scene with the customisations. A good friend of the show has even made customising their full-time job and fair play as there will always be the need for people to match a pair of trainers to their favourite football club or band and even crossing into the car scene. It's great and we 100% support it as it's such a cool way of expressing a love or loyalty towards people's passions.

KO: Is promoting vintage footwear from a sustainability point of view a big part of Steel City Trainer Festival?

SM: Yes of course, we pride ourselves on the fact that 80% of our stall holders sell vintage footwear. When you are into this sort of passion/hobby/business it's inevitable that you will have

to deal with pre-owned footwear. We all want the dream of a pair of Brand New In Box trainers, but realistically this hardly happens so if you want to own and wear a pair of your favourite trainers you are purchasing second hand. All the shows promotions highlight pre-owned/vintage and some of our biggest stall holders make a living from dealing in this sector.

PO: What's been the biggest effect of the pandemic? How do you see Steel City Festival progressing? Do you have plans for future developments?

SM: We like most events have really suffered. I think people forget that when this pandemic started, we had already laid out money on venue hire/insurance and promotions. That's all gone with nobody bailing us out financially. Together with Steel City Trainer Show and the Elsecar at the Races Car Show we organise, we lost thousands of pounds of our own money. This is the side people don't see, all the stress and hard work that goes into organising and funding events with no financial back up. So not only were the effects financial but when we were allowed to have a show, numbers were massively down, and that's fully understandable as people were still scared and unsure regarding their health and that of their loved ones. Going forward the plan is to increase the size of the show. The venue is such a fantastic place with lots of room for growth and we really do see Trafalgar Warehouse as Steel City's spiritual home. Regarding the future we are hoping to

establish the show as one of the country's premier trainer events. There are a few plans in the pipeline at the minute as we are hoping to offer people who attend something different that they would not normally associate with this type of event, so watch this space.

KO: Fashion has a big impact on the planet - and it is struggling to sustain us, we consume too much, there's waste and pollution that comes with manufacture, transportation and disposal of trainers. Could Steel City Trainer Festival encourage or change consumer behaviours and change the 'new purchase' to a culture of re-use, re-store, re-love?

SM: 100% the show can help people change their behaviour towards the culture of throw away and buy new. Here at the show, we have numerous traders who specialise in breathing new life into old trainers or selling on a pair that may have even had a few owners along the way. Used trainers is a lot like the Classic Car scene where once a person for whatever reason has come to an end with their ownership, they hand on their prize possession for the next owner to carry on enjoying/showing and using. In their own little way here at the show they are helping do our bit for the environment and if we can pass a pair on for somebody else to enjoy and use, we have done a little bit to help this fragile world.

Instagram:
@steelcitytrainer
Size:
7.5/8
First Pair:
adidas Equipment Tennis Clay Court made in France 1993
Latest Pair:
adidas Spz SL80
Holy Grail:
for sentimental reasons first pair as above!

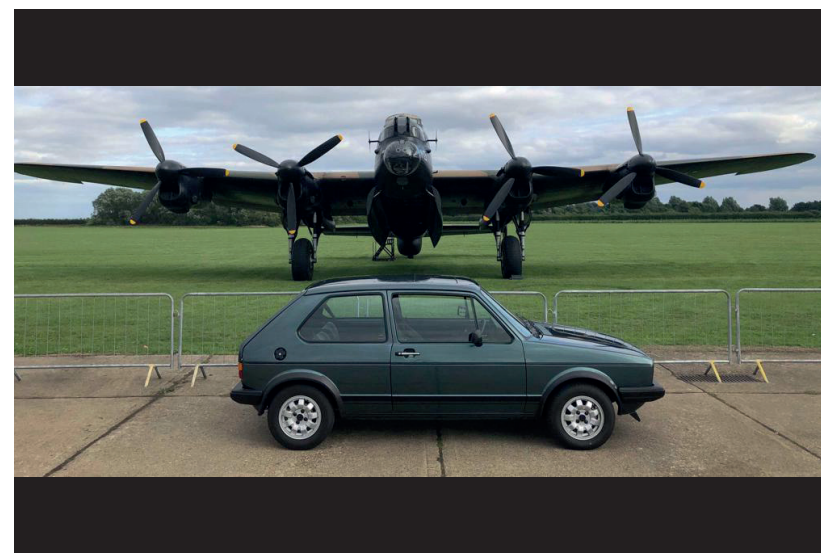
PO: Would you say that trainer life and culture is more important than the marketplace?

SM: I think any forum that allows people to buy/sell trainers is important. It is great for people to use specialist sites as there is vast knowledge out there which is so easy to obtain. I'm biased but still for me there is no better feeling than picking up a pair of trainers in the flesh and having a chat to the previous owner or the seller, and I hope this continues as there is nothing better than chatting trainers to fellow enthusiasts.

PO: Simon, it's been a pleasure talking to you today. There's certainly something special happening in the Steel City right now.

KO: Yes, thank you, we're looking forward to seeing you in real life at the festival again.

SM: No problem, thank you, I've really enjoyed chatting to you both.



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