

Painter's passions for stamps and motorcycles unite for new collection

For a Suffolk painter with a passion for motorcycles and stamps, it is hard to imagine a more fitting commission.

Graham Crowley, a former professor of painting at the Royal College of Art, now living in Wickham Market, has designed six stamps for a set titled The Great British Motorcycles.

Commissioned by the Isle of Man Post Office, it celebrates "TT greats of yesteryear".

Mr Crowley, who has ridden motorcycles since he was a boy, attended 40 TT races on the Isle of Man, and has even built his own bikes, said the commission combined his twin passions of motorsport and stamps with his work as a painter.

"For a stamp collector to actually design their own set of stamps, it's a bit of a slam dunk," he said. "I wouldn't have been able to plan to include it on a 'bucket list', but I am really incredibly grateful I had the chance to do it."

His six contributions to the 12-stamp collection celebrate "some of the most innovative and important engines ever designed".

They include the iconic Norton 'Manx' from the '60s, the four-cylinder, supercharged, air-cooled V-four AJS and the Excelsior Manxman, a machine at the forefront of racing in the 1930s.

As a regular visitor to the Isle

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of Man with his wife, Sally, and two sons, Robin and Pearce, Mr Crowley, who is 68 today, said he wanted to reflect the spectacle of the "world's greatest road race".

Growing-up in Romford "just a stone's throw" from Dagenham's Ford factory, Mr Crowley said he developed an early passion for motor vehicles. As an art student, he realised that while the cars he watched at Brands Hatch may be out of reach, motorcycles were a more attainable dream. "Pound for pound, they deliver a lot more thrills," he added.

His stamp designs offer a nostalgic nod to that era, with a duotone colour scheme referencing motorcycle magazines from that period.

Alongside the stamps, a series of commemorative pieces have been produced, some printed at Ipswich's Healeys Printers – praised by Mr Crowley for their high quality work.

Mr Crowley moved to Suffolk soon after finishing his professorship at the Royal College of Art - and has been impressed by its thriving arts scene.

The stamp collection, which launches on May 17, is available to buy online at www.iompost.com/motorcycles



Graham at work in his studio.

Graham is a stamp collector himself.

Graham with his 1949 Vincent HRD 1000cc. He is wearing a cardigan that was knitted in 1977 and has a map of the Isle of Man and the racetrack on.

Pictures: SARAH LUCY BROWN

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