

Star interview Jo

PICKO 'W' N

KUNGS vs Cookin' on 3 Burners sounds like a barbecue that has gone drastically wrong.

It is, in fact, a French DJ with an Australian funk band whose tune 'This Girl' is Josh Pickering's choice of race-winning song at Edinburgh.

This serene, soulful dance track is a perfect illustration of his Jekyll and Hyde character on and off the track.

Once aboard 500cc, Picko's a pocket rocket. Blasting the boards, twisting, turning, buzzing around back wheels, like an angry wasp urgently seeking a sugary sting.

However, remove the lid and kevlar, and revealed is a charming, chilled and focused young man. Yet that face full of friendly freckles has piercing eyes that simply can't hide the fierce desire for success.

Just 11 months ago, this Wizard of Oz admitted to me on the pages of *Speedway Star* he was disappointed to not have been snapped up in the UK top flight.

Sheffield then swooped for the remainder of 2021 followed by King's Lynn for 2022 and fans of both clubs rave about this out and out racer.

His elevation to the big time was underlined by a spectacular paid maximum against Ipswich just a fortnight ago.

In the meantime, he continues to be a star at Edinburgh, banging in the big scores home and away.

It was always a mystery as to why Pickering remained the best kept secret of the Championship in the Scottish capital. Now he must be delighted to be making his mark in both leagues? Typical of the man, it's a measured and calculated response.

He told me: "When you work hard for something and when it doesn't happen for you, it's disheartening but drives me on even more.

"My focus and the pressure I put on myself has shifted. All I wanted last year was to do good for Edinburgh.

"I'm everywhere I want to be right now. I've changed my focus now on managing to score consistently in both leagues. The pressure has lifted which is nice. But there's a different pressure which is a lot more controllable.

Flying Josh Pickering is ready for a push into the racing big time. By PHIL LANNING.

"That's why I've been having some good meetings. I'm still entitled to have some bad ones, that's speedway, you can't win them all.

"As long as I'm more consistent than I'm not, that's the most important thing and all I'm looking for from this year.

"I've now got individual goals for what I want to achieve and where I want to be in the Premiership and Championship averages.

"I'm in the top league now and I want to prove my place why I'm there."

When Pickering wasn't included in Sheffield's team plans for 2022, it's fair to say that more eyebrows were raised than at a Roger Moore James Bond convention.

Even more so when he was then swiftly

signed by King's Lynn and immediately made team captain.

Stars team boss Alex Brady has admitted he spotted something special about his character in the pits last season. It was an inspired piece of scouting with the Norfolk side a force to be reckoned with this term.

Pickering added: "People are now probably understanding the qualities I've seen in myself for some time.

"Obviously with speedway you can never worry about what people say about you in the bad times. I just like to go about my business. If someone's got something nice to say, it's appreciated. But if it's bad, I don't really care.

"It used to worry me what people think and that's sort of shifted now. I know in myself I can't do more than I'm already doing. If someone's got an opinion they are entitled to it. Whether I agree with it or not, I've just got to accept it.

"There's no point getting upset about it. I've just got to focus on what I've got to be concentrating on.

"I'm just happy to be where I am now. It's been a hard few years.

"I was okay during the pandemic, everyone was in the same boat. If everyone else was riding and I was missing out, that would have made me feel behind the eight ball.

"But everyone else was in the same situation, so I wasn't singled out. If anything, I thought it might be to my advantage.

"Sometimes when others are not on the bike, they lose focus and energy. But with me I can be sat away for a few months and I know I can pick up from where I left off.

"I'm just thankful now I'm in the position I am. I ride for two great clubs and I'm respected within both sides and have great team-mates around me.

"The pressure is just down to individual races. It's not down to impressing anyone like beating a certain rider because he's in the Premiership or whatever."

Pictures: TAYLOR LANNING

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