



'It spoils you having success so young': Bird, top left, with the Lambrettas, 1980

JEZ BIRD

Mod revival singer who led the Lambrettas to chart success

In the spring of 1979, the Mod revival was gathering momentum. In Brighton, *Quadrophenia* was being filmed, and in the East End of London the Bridge House had been holding regular Mods Monday nights which culminated in a "Mods Mayday '79" event and live album. In June that year, the Lambrettas made their live debut on Hastings Pier. "We weren't even advertised to appear. They just stuck us on the bill and we went down so well," recalled Jez Bird, the lead singer of the Brighton group that was named after the iconic Italian scooter. "This guy said: 'I'll be your

manager'. He got us some gigs in London and within about a month we had a singles deal. It was very quick from nowhere to getting somewhere."

Nine months later, the Lambrettas scored the biggest hit of all the Mod revival bands when their ska-infused cover of "Poison Ivy" sold 250,000 copies and reached No 7 in the charts. Signed to Elton John's Rocket Records, the Lambrettas appeared on *Top of the Pops* and had further hits with "Da-a-a-ance", "Another Day (Another Girl)", and their 1980 album *Beat Boys in the Jet Age*. However, when the Mod revival bubble burst

and *Ambience*, their proto-Britpop second album, flopped, they broke up, in April 1982. Bird remained a popular face around his home town of Lewes in East Sussex, still performing in pubs.

Jeremy Bird was born in 1957. He sang and played guitar in a rhythm'n'blues band called Shakedown with the guitarist Doug Sanders, before they formed the Lambrettas with the bassist Mark Ellis and the drummer Paul Wincer. Their debut hit was issued on 2-Stroke, in a sleeve which pastiched the 2-Tone singles, replacing the pork-pie-hatted silhouette with a parka-wearing Mod. (The band later toured Europe with Madness, proving there were no hard feelings.)

The Lambrettas' first single, "Go Steady", which originally appeared on the 499 2139 compilation issued by Rocket Records in 1979, had been produced by Pete Waterman, who also suggested they cover "Poison Ivy", but the eclectic all-rounder Peter Collins oversaw the group's first album. In August 1980, Bird had a pop at *The Sun's* Page Three glamour models with the Lambrettas' fourth single, originally called "Page 3", but the band had to ditch the sleeve and change the song title to "Another Day (Another Girl)" after the tabloid threatened legal action.

In 1982, for their eighth and final single, an ill-advised cover of Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody to Love", they ditched the Mod look for more casual clothes. "In those days, the image was gone so quickly. It was always on to the next thing. Fashion seemed to be much more associated with movements then," recalled Bird, who stayed in music, formed Rave On Jack with Sanders, and later led his own band.

Reflecting on his brief flirtation with the charts in 1980, Bird was philosophical. "There was a vacuum at that time in the music business. You had the big bands, the punk thing had shot its bolt and there was this gap, and it was the Moddy, power-poppy type bands that filled it up. We were just lucky really, because we just got the Lambrettas name to get people to our gigs in Brighton," he said.

"I'm still a Mod at heart. I've still got the suits, the Harringtons, the DM shoes. In a way it spoils you for real life having so much success so young, but I wouldn't change it."

Pierre Perrone

Jeremy Bird, singer, songwriter and guitarist: born Lewes, East Sussex October 1957; married (two children); died Lewes 27 August 2008.