

Rocker's retreat

It was amazing when I think about it. At the height of Smokie's fame, we could go hardly anywhere without being followed by screaming girls.

I have a video of us playing in Essen and you can see thousands of fans going crazy. The band had a lot of success in Germany and when we toured here, I always felt at home.

Smokie were on Top of The Pops 40 times and had 12 top 20 hits in the UK, but we were more popular in Australia and Scandinavia.

I'm from Yorkshire and met Andrea, my German girlfriend, when she was staying in England. Her parents are from nearby Hille and so we decided to move here.

Our American-style house is up in the woods near Lübbecke, which is a bit different to where I was living in England. You can hear the birds twittering and it's great in the summer. People say it looks like a pop star's home.

I sometimes walk into town, but people don't recognise me around here, only in the big cities.

We've been in Germany about a year now but I spent five months of 2007 on tour with the Alan Silson Band. I was in the Ukraine over Christmas and Sweden is next. I had a gig recently in Denmark and bumped in to old friend Suzie Quatro, who was also touring.

I had a nice home recording studio back in England, but it was old-fashioned equipment and the move to Germany was a good excuse to sell most of it and start again.

Guitarist Alan Silson was one of the original members of 70s band Smokie, famous for the hit Living Next Door to Alice. He lives near Lübbecke in a luxury villa with girlfriend Andrea. Here the musician tells Phil Welsh why he moved from Yorkshire to the Lippe region



Classic Smokie, from left: Alan Silson, Pete Spencer, Chris Norman and Terry Uttley; and inset: Alan at home in Germany

Chris Norman, Terry Uttley, Pete Spencer and I were the classic line-up of Smokie. We had all met in school and had great harmony. As lead guitarist I admired Jimi Hendrix and Ritchie Blackmore.

Living Next Door to Alice was our biggest success. It was written by hit-maker Mike Chapman but when he sang it to us in the studio, none of us liked it; we thought it was corny. But our record company saw the potential in it and released it as a single.

It was a Dutch band that first added the famous swearing line to the song, and when we heard their version, we thought

Smokie should do the same, but with Roy Chubby Brown saying the words, so we wouldn't get a bad reputation.

When we sing the original version in concert, people always shout that rude line at us.

I called it a day playing with Smokie in 1996, as I felt we were going round in circles. That was soon after the band was involved in a serious car accident. The minibus we were passengers in went off the road, up an embankment and landed on its roof. Luckily I only received cuts and bruises, but the then lead singer, Alan

Barton, the only one wearing a seat belt, was killed.

I'm still in contact with Chris Norman. In fact, he played rhythm guitar on my new album, *Solitary Bird*, which is selling well. It's country rock and has received many good comments. I've been told it's better than the Eagles' new album.

My favourite Smokie song is, *If You Think You Know How To*

Love Me, because that was the band's first hit, in 1975.

The music business seemed more exciting back then. We were four lads from Yorkshire and nothing like the boy bands of today. And we didn't dance.

www.alansilson.com

When we first heard Alice, we thought it was corny

