

VOODOO BOB

We've seen Rocket Bobs' work before in these pages, in both a stunning Rocker commissioned for Oxford Harley-Davidson that made all-too brief an appearance in News, and their 'Pintail' Street Bob in our irregular series.

And the reason why we keep going back is that in a corner of South Oxfordshire is a custom builder who is not only turning out tasty, uncompromising customs, but is producing an original range of high quality parts from those bikes, as well as collaborating with some of the American manufacturers whose work doesn't get the exposure here that it deserves.

Something else that sets Rocket Bobs Cycle Works apart from a lot of the industry is that they've been championing the Dyna range, having been quick to spot potential within the lines of Harley's street swing-arm frame and aware that it has become the popular choice in terms of the custom big twin market; certainly as far as new bikes are concerned. That's not to the exclusion of all others, but other than the Rocker-C, Harley haven't listed an FX Softail for a second year, and that's going to make an impact sooner rather than later. >>





Less radical than their Pintail, they developed their Voodoo mini fender kit for the Dyna range at the start of 2010, and decided early on that the easiest way to get the news out there was to put together another Street Bob custom based around it, which was cool because Pete was looking for a new personal ride – now that the Pintail is now riding round in Dubai – so this is part development mule, part prototype ... but very much the essence of what Rocket Bobs is about.

Of course, anyone who has ever swapped a single part out will know that it's seldom that simple, and that's never more true than when you're trying to show the potential offered by a part, and that mini fender turned into a complementary range of parts. And having expanded the original brief, they turned their attention to other areas on the bike that had never really looked right, and had always bugged them. Like the swing-arm, centre console, battery box and the right hand side panel.

That doesn't necessarily explain the wheels, but Rocket Bobs' Pete Pearson has got a thing about the style of big front wheels, especially in slammed suspension – you get the impression he's only happy when the tyre kisses the bottom yoke with the forks on full compression. They were stripping the wheels anyway, to replace the spokes with stainless steel and powdercoat the rims, but they wouldn't have come out looking like this!

The original 19-inch steel front rim has been replaced by a seamless, dimpleless, lightweight 23x4-inch Apollo SL alloy rim, its perfect finish buried deep below a darker variant of classic hot rod red powdercoat, and laced to the original hub with thicker spokes secured by mirror-black nipples.

It's obviously not the original rear either, because you don't get away with doing that on a build at this standard, so it's a matching 17x6½-inch Apollo SL which has been given the same treatment.

The front wheel has been refitted to heavily modified oem forks, which now contain Rocket Bob's own dampers and springs to drop it lower than anything else on the market. The sliders have been shaved, too, before being blown over in a Flat Epoxy Black of Pete's own formulation, which covers much of the rolling chassis, and which sits well with the Diamond Like Carbon (DLC) coated stanchions.

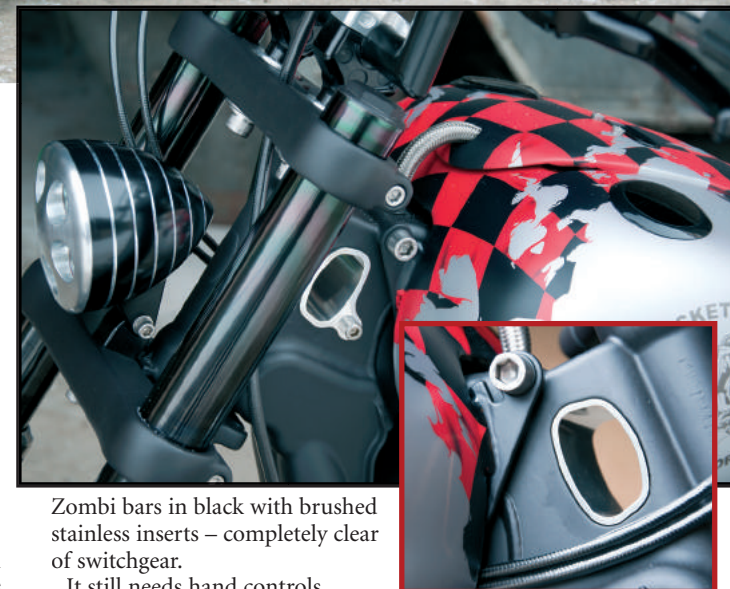
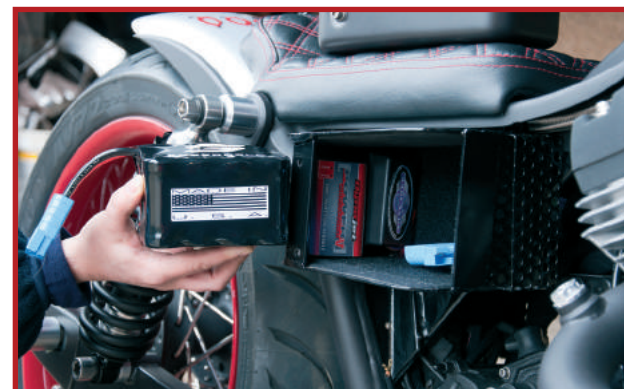
The what?

DLC coating is an ultra hard, ultra slippery surface, ideally suited to forks if you don't mind hacking off the bottom of each stanchion to protect the plastic ring at its base – which is necessary because it would be destroyed in the coating process – and welding them back on again, perfectly, afterwards.

The rear hub probably didn't recognize its new home either: a mini two-piston Brembo caliper is mounted on a small, unobtrusive hanger anchored by a stainless torque arm, and grips a small rotor. Both hanger and rotor were designed in-house to maximize the clean and open lines of the back end, but the major work has been in a full redesign of the swing-arm itself, which Pete reckons has always been badly proportioned, especially on later models which look even worse with "badly-styled adjusters and woefully thin spars".

Starting with the stock arm, they've stripped it of its mounts, recreated the box section with something much deeper, tapered at both ends to give an early '80s drag look, and then smoothed-out those unloved adjusters. The shock mounts are flush fitted, and on production swing-arms there will be triple mounts so you can easily adjust the ride height to suit – and they'll obviously be available with the smaller rotor and underslung mini caliper. The shocks are a pair of Hagon's Nitro units, selected for their stainless steel construction and fat 18mm rod, which have been stripped and modified by Rocket Bobs' suspension guru, emerging shorter and blacker, and exactly what Pete was looking for.

The oversized side panel on the timing side was next to come in for attention. Harley might have dressed up



their previously slab-sided battery box when they introduced the Mk2 Dyna mods along with the 6-speed gearbox, but it's still a battery box with its size and shape dictated by the battery beneath it. It made no sense to Pete and the crew to have such a featureless feature dominating the most visible side of the bike, so it had to go.

Rocket Bobs' response was to swap out the 14lb oem battery for a 1.1lb lithium ion Speedcell unit, which are expensive but are worth every penny as far as Pete is concerned. They're the size of a Coke can but will happily start a 2-litre plus big twin, and Rocket Bobs have designed a new battery box that takes the Speedcell and still has room for the Power Commander V ... and the Badlands 3 load equaliser, the alarm antenna and a couple of Mars bars. Over the top of that they slotted a left-hand cover, flipped upside-down. As soon as they'd done it, they knew they'd got it right because it looked like it should have always been that way, and now offer it as a bolt-on conversion kit.

It was about ready for the Voodoo fender kit now – remember that? – with its Weeli all-gel pad and hand-stitched leather seat. Off with the rear struts – old habits die hard – and on with the short mudguard and a seat pan which also contains three micro pushbutton switches. These control the dip switch relay and the indicators, and combined with a kill switch tucked beneath the right hand side panel, an old-school plunger-type starter button on the end of the starter motor, and a complete disregard for the need of an audible warning device other than the exhausts, keep the handlebars – a pair of their Rocket Bobs' own 4-inch

Zombi bars in black with brushed stainless inserts – completely clear of switchgear.

It still needs hand controls, however, which are Joker Machine's incredibly neat JX-series with mini smooth levers – all in a black hard-anodized finish – with old-school rubber grips and an uncharacteristically conventional push-pull throttle finishing them off. Well, that and a full complement of Harley's Diamond Black braided cables.

Having dispensed with the handlebar switches, they were left with a couple of awkward-looking and completely redundant holes in the backbone of the frame, plugged by a pair of unlovely rubber grommets.

They couldn't just leave them ... could they?

Of course not, and the Headbone was born.

Milled from a solid block of 7075 billet, Pete describes the Headbone as one of the team's favourite pieces, if only for the sheer lunacy of investing so much CNC programming time in creating a complex tube to fill a simple hole, but when fitted it adds a point of interest to an otherwise dull area, creating the impression of a contrast-cut frame ... which is handy.

Seeing as we're back at the headstock, we can deal with a glaring omission from earlier: mounted on a pair of early-type Street Bob yokes fresh from the Matt Black Epoxy bath, is Rocket Bobs' contrast-cut headlamp shell machined from another billet of 7075 aluminium, currently fronted by one of Joker Machine's



five light 'lenses' in a brushed aluminium finish that ties in with the handlebar inserts. Don't go looking for the wires: they pass through to the headstock through the headlamp bracket and bottom yoke. All other lighting is taken care of by Kellermann's mini LEDs – barely visible at the front, and completely invisible at the back in the main shots because they were fitted a couple of days after the shoot: check out the detail shots for them, and the billet bar that keeps them neat.

The tank's brackets were moved to drop it down closer to the frame, for a lower profile than befits the Motor Company's sense of aesthetics, while it was being de-seamed and de-tagged. It was then fitted with Rocket Bobs' flush-fitting console, which is part housing for the flush-mounted motogadget mini speedo and part cover for the electrics and the tank's breather, all of which exits from beneath its front edge in a single length of braided hose, straight into the frame's spine.

Flanked by Harley's flush filler and fuel gauge set, it barely disturbs the silhouette of the Fat Bob tank's sheet metal, or causes much of a ripple in Art Slade rendition of the Rocket Bobs tattered flag over a flat silver base: an extraordinary piece of work that can only really be appreciated close-up, where the detail is stunning, paying particular attention to picking-out the frayed fibres of the material.

Other than lopping off the rear struts, fitting the Headbone and creating a new swing-arm, the frame is largely unaltered, but there is another certain something that seems to define Rocket Bobs' Dynas. Something that defines the attitude of their bikes: these aren't laid back cruisers, but hard-core modern streetfightin' bar hoppers, and that seems to suggest mid-set controls rather than forwards.

That's certainly true of Pete's prototype, because the brackets that have been used by thousands of Street Bob owners – the one that allows a pair of forward controls to be bolted on – have been removed. This is a bike that has been built to be ridden hard, and the stock foot controls have been extensively reworked and reshaped to work with another of Pete's favourite bits: the Fat Pigs footrests, a pair of 42mm old-school ribbed style pegs milled from solid 7075, which are already available in straight black or a contrast-cut black anodized finish to match the timing and derby covers, although Pete's are still in the raw.



Of course, as a development mule, there's no real point in messing about with the engine other than a bit of dressing up, but then as Pete's personal ride for 2011 it was never going to stay stock. Like the wheels, it was coming to pieces anyway to get the finish they wanted – black bottom end and covers with unshaved silver/grey barrels and heads – so it made sense to put it back together better, stronger and faster. Well, a bike to ride hard with a stock motor? Where's the attitude in that?

The Power Commander 5 mentioned earlier was a bit of a giveaway, and is taking care of the revised fuelling needed by the Wiseco 103-inch pistons in bored-out barrels, breathing through flowed and ported heads courtesy of a local engineering firm with links to the F1 and general race industry. The valves are opened by a pair of gear-driven S&S 570G – 0.57-inch lift 'easy starts' – and with a free-flowing, contrast-cut Joker Machine air-cleaner makes sure it gets plenty of air, while Pete's current favourite pipe, a Vance and Hines Comp series – a symphony of satin black and brushed stainless, its closed loop O2 sensor ports beautifully plugged – gets the waste gases away.

As with any build of this complexity there are many more doodads and doowiggies involved in its creation, and certainly too many to list here, but Pete sends a big thank-you to Stuart the resident welding god, Trevor at Faringdon Precision Engineers, who he's pitching as probably the best engineer in the world; Ken's seat upholsterer and finally to William, without who Rocket Bobs would simply not exist.

Words: Andy Hornsby Pics: Pete Pearson

