



AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT ONE OF THE
LEADING FIGURES OF THE INDUSTRY

PETE PEARSON

Pete Pearson is the owner of Rocket Bobs Cycle Works and was placed 3rd in the 2013 AMD World Championship of Custom Bike Building with his 'Gas'd Rat' Shovelhead



AT WHAT AGE DID YOU GET INTO BIKES?

I went to school in Oxford, but other than that, all my time was spent in Cornwall. My old man ran a garage and, as I had a definite mechanical aptitude, I pretty much hung out with him full-time, working on everything from race cars to trucks to mowers. At the age of four or five, I sat on my Dad's lap in his MGB GT V8 as he said, "Now we're going to break 100mph". And he did—on the Oxford ring road. I was blown away. It may not be a good example by modern parenting standards, but to be inches away from the speedo and watch it glide past 100 was beyond exciting.

I got into skateboarding and was just old enough to comprehend the Dogtown articles in 'Skateboarder' in the early 1970s, a time when a newsagent in Polzeath called Stots was the only place I knew that sold the magazine. The Lords of Dogtown were a massive influence on me, but Stots also stocked surf

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mags as well as 'Street Rodder', all of which I consumed. About 1972 or '73, I started riding bikes and they became my main passion straight away. It was a massive learning curve, but a total obsession which has managed to keep me gripped to this day.

AND HOW SOON AFTER THAT INTO CUSTOMS?

I don't really know because it depends on how you define customs. My first ground-up build was a Moto Martin CBX when I was about 18. To me, that's custom—nothing on it was stock and I changed everything. I guess, technically, it wasn't a bobber or a chopper or whatever, and back then, we were all more or less inventing the streetfighter thing as we went, mainly under the influence of 'Mad Max'. My group of friends then were

London despatch riders and the 'Bloodrunners' cartoon strip was pretty much who we thought we were! In fact, I went on to ride in the Bloodrunners movie, doing wheelies, burnouts and all that.

I've stripped and redesigned almost every bike I've ever had. Despatch riding paid for my degree in Design & Engineering and I've dedicated myself to engineering, bikes, and my designs since then. I discovered Harleys around 1978—I'd been used to Suzuki dirt bikes—when I saw one on TV. It was so extraordinary that I wrote to Mr Davidson in Milwaukee asking for info and, well, a bike! The company sent me a huge tube stuffed with T-shirts, posters, loads of details and history and a very cool letter welcoming me to the world of Harleys. Well, for a 13-year-old, it was enough to hook me!



Despite a love affair with big Jap multis through the 1990s, I always knew I'd end up working on Harleys as (machinery wise) they were the main love of my life. My wife, Lisa, and I got married in Las Vegas on a cool black Fatboy at a drive-in chapel, and as we rode to the Hoover Dam for lunch, I knew that, with her support, it was time to start a business. Three years later, I'd done my research and figured out how I could get into the market.

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR INSPIRATION? WHO ARE YOUR HEROES (BIKING OR OTHERWISE)?

My heroes are the Dogtown guys, Gerry Lopez, SE Hinton, Holden Caulfield and stuff by Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Mike Hailwood, among others. But my influences are firmly rooted in hot rod culture, sk8, Mad Max, racing, surfing and my old man. We didn't talk much after I got into bikes (he's a bit like me in that if you're out of his loop, you're off the radar), but from the time I was four until I was about ten, he taught me everything about engines, the principles of tuning, carb work, etc.

WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE BIKE YOU'VE BUILT? AND WHY?

'Gas'd Rat' is my favourite because I didn't compromise on anything or think about what would work for a customer or in a magazine. Consequently, it's a bike that's garnered a lot of criticism, but it's stood up for

itself really well, it's got no reason to hide and it's taken on a life of its own. When I look at 'Rat, I don't even feel like I had any part in it. I'm just happy to have it with me.

As for other people's bikes, well, there's Cherry's Co, Fatech, Luck—the list goes on. Drop me in the middle of the Japanese scene and I'd die happy. JC at Three Two Choppers in Dallas is an amazing and underrated talent. Lock Baker is another mighty talent, too.

WHERE DO YOU SEE CUSTOM BIKE BUILDING GOING IN THE FUTURE?

I believe that those who say there is only so much you can do with two wheels and engine and a tank are those that have no talent, no imagination and no creativity. You may as well say that, with a few tubes of paint and a square piece of canvas, there's only so

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much you can do and that it's all been done before. Anyone who really believes that, shouldn't be in this business. The people who I think are the future of custom bike building are those who just work to develop their own style and don't worry about what other people or firms are doing.

I'm hoping that the days of bikes being unrideable and with zero performance are numbered, and that a rash of proper builds which actually work is coming through. In fact, I'm constantly worried that old friends of mine from racing will see this scene and jump in because the talent of engineers out there in the race scene, is freakin' massive and some of those bikes could be nuts...

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CAKE?

My favourite cake is currently my own recipe Dundee cake using cranberries instead of cherries and with Honey Jack—no water or milk. It's a mighty cake! ☘



Rocket Bobs Cycle Works is based in Faringdon, Oxfordshire and are custom Harley engineers specialising in commissioned builds and the fabrication of quality parts. You can phone them on **07714 205576**, visit at Unit 20 Avro Gate, Broadmoor Road, South Marston Park, Swindon, SN3 4AG or find them online at **www.rocketbobs.biz**