

FULL TEST! VICTORY JACKPOT



Motorcycle **Cruiser**

WORLD'S
BEST
METRIC
CUSTOM



APRIL 2006
\$3.99 USA \$4.99 CANADA
DISPLAY UNTIL APRIL 18, 2006

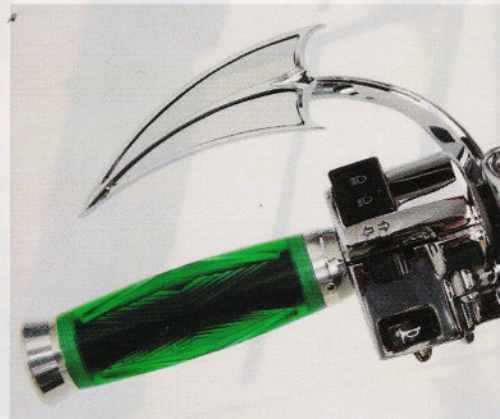
PLUS:
SEVEN-BIKE COMPARO
FIRST RIDE!
YAMAHA STRATOLINER
ROADSIDE TIRE REPAIR
TOURING THE NORTHEAST

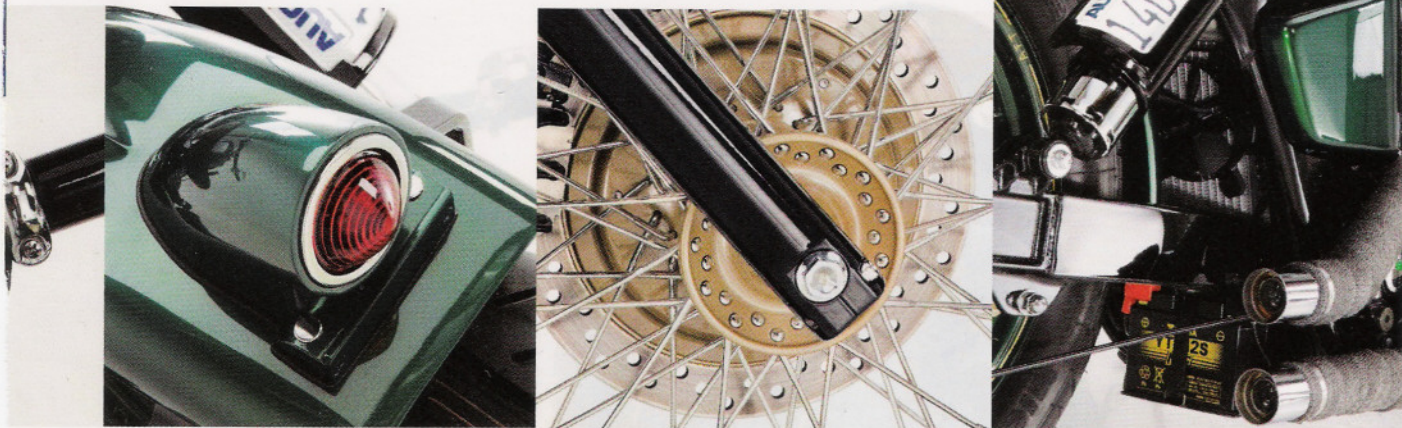


APRIMEDIA Publication

AND THE WINNER IS...

BY MARK ZIMMERMAN
PHOTOS BY MIKE CHASE PHOTO





Obviously any custom worth the name needs to meet certain criteria before it can be considered a trophy winner. Without a doubt it's got to have curb appeal, but beyond that opinions vary. Me, I want a bike that's actually rideable, and I mean 300 miles at a clip, not just a 30-second toot in front of a TV camera. I'd like to think that the builder has some concept of how a motorcycle actually works, and I find it particularly interesting when the constructor sneaks a diverse styling element into the build or otherwise demonstrates some knowledge of motorcycling that transcends the custom/billet bike niche. As a side issue, I don't think it ever hurts when it looks like the average Joe might have built the bike in question, if he'd the resources and dedication.

Apparently, I'm not the only guy to feel that way. When the votes were counted at the 2005 World Championship of Custom Bike Building, a show featuring 160 of the world's top customs,







assembled by 112 builders from 19 countries and 20 states, the winner of the metric class was this sweet Honda bobber from Amador Fine Tune Customs. What's most impressive is that the voting at this little competition, held in conjunction with the Big Twin West show (November 17–20, 2005) at the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas, isn't done by the general public or a panel of judges but rather by peer review, meaning that only the entrants themselves are permitted to vote. These guys, arguably the most talented and respected custom bike builders on the planet, are all extremely competitive, so when they picked this little green gem as best in class, you can bet your bottom dollar it was way more than a popularity contest.

Jim Giuffra, builder of the bike known simply as "The Green Bobber" and proprietor of AFT, has been involved in motorcycles for most of his life. His professional career began in 1977 when he took a job as a line mechanic at one of the country's largest multi-brand dealerships, his main interests at the time being motocross racing, sportbikes and, oddly enough, customizing Gold Wings. In 1987 he struck out on his own, opening Amador Fine Tune, a shop devoted to repairing, modifying and customizing everything from dirtbikes to full-boat touring models. The shop soon became a well-regarded builder of quality customs and, if you plan to roll

your own, the parts needed to do it. Eventually Giuffra decided to spin that end of the business into a separate entity—AFT Customs.

Giuffra, in collaboration with Ron Abel, a master fabricator with a reputation for innovative design and fine craftsmanship, wanted to build a bike that would showcase AFT's talents and products, but almost as importantly, they wanted to create something that was fun to ride, reasonably priced, and could be duplicated at home by anyone who had the will, and AFT's address.

The first step was to enhance the normally poky VT's mill with some bolt-on pony power. Design Performance supplied a set of 11:1 high-compression pistons and matching cams, while Thunder Mfg. provided the air filter. A set of Cobra-supplied, AFT-modified exhausts



It's all about the details. The shift lever/clutch combo eliminates the foot pedal, tidying up the left side of the bike, and check out the turn signals placed discreetly under the seat (opposite page). The curved license plate bracket is another AFT special touch.

direct the spent gases, the heat wrap adding a suitably hot-rod look to the pipes. The mods didn't make the bobber a rocket ship, but they gave it enough juice to get your attention, and the mill remains as reliable as an anvil.

Feeling that extensive modifications to the frame's geometry would make the formerly pleasant-handling Honda a lot less pleasant, and that radical frame surgery would push the build beyond what the average owner might care to do, Giuffra decided to keep the chassis more or less stock. Less being the key term: out came the grinder, and away went all of the extraneous mounts and brackets, including the rear footpeg mounts, bobbins in general being considered a solo form of transportation. While the grinder was hot, they also bobbed the rear fender struts and cut away the radiator mounts before commencing reassembly.

As you'd expect, all of the crucial bits were fabricated in-house, starting with the fuel tank, which features an inset speedometer and is detailed with period sheet metal flourishes. The oversize 8-inch headlight—another AFT signature piece, and one it tries to incorporate on all of its show bikes—is another eye catcher, and certainly a practical addition to any bike that's expected to be ridden. My favorite piece is the trick, off-road-style single-pull right-angle throttle, which eliminates the unsightly cable droop found on too many customs and pays homage to Giuffra's days as a motocross racer. The throttle, along with the 1-inch handlebar, was of course fabricated in the AFT shop, as were the license plate holder, which is formed to fit around the rear shock; the suicide shifter with integral clutch; and the brake pedal, turn-signal mounts and carburetor cover.

Last but not least, and perhaps most important from a customizing standpoint, is the AFT-designed and -manufactured radiator relocation kit that moves the water box from the front downtubes to its new home under the seat.



To get that low, squat look, a set of 11.5-inch Progressive Suspension FL-style shocks were installed, sinking the rear of the bike by 1.5 inches. The front fork had its legs shaved, and an AFT lowering kit installed. To complete the transformation, the stock Honda hubs were powdercoated gold before being laced to a matched pair of 17 x 3.5 rims finished in the same shade of green as the rest of the bike. Buchanan polished stainless steel spokes are used to fasten everything together and matched Michelin Macadam 130/90x17 rubber keeps the rims from dragging on the ground.

Since a chain is messy and maintenance intensive, and we wouldn't want to dirty up that stylish rear wheel with any unsightly chain spray, the links were ditched along with the sprockets for a Scoot Works belt-drive kit, a move that reduces noise, dirt and maintenance in one fell swoop.

With the bike more or less roughed in, the detail work began in earnest. To direct cool air through the radiator, S&S velocity stacks were installed in the OEM sidepanels, a neat solution that eliminates any potential overheating problems. All of the electrical must-haves—the battery, fuel pump, horn and rectifier—were moved to locations that were as unobtrusive as possible. The battery ended up under the frame, the idiot lights were relocated to the triple clamp, and along the way all of the wiring was hidden. Kuryakyn accent lights reside under the tank, something most early bobbers managed to do without, but that works just fine on this modern incarnation.

After the rough build the bits and pieces

requiring polishing, painting and powdercoating were sent off to the respective experts. Scott Hultquist at Riff Raff Customs laid down the PPG custom-blended green where it was required, while Mark Gallardo coated the frame and engine covers with gloss black. Chrome work was handled by Ernesto Dominguez, and the powdercoating was applied by Dynamic Coatings. Duane Ballard Custom Leather created the vintage tractor-style seat; the hand-stitched brown leather perfectly set off by the emerald green paint.

To keep the eye candy at an acceptably (high) level, Cat Eye Customs furnished translucent green grips and footpegs,

along with the brake pedal toe piece and matching shifter handle. While it might have looked gaudy on something less polished, the overall effect on this bike is just right, adding a nice period touch to an otherwise thoroughly contemporary bobber. Other suppliers read like a who's who of the custom biz: Paul Yaffe supplied the fuel tank cap; Arlen Ness the mirror and radiator hose mounts. The limp sausage taillight, a bobber fixture, came from Custom Chrome, as did the rear fender.

What makes this bike so appealing to me, and presumably to the builders who voted it the World's Best Metric Custom, is that Giuffra and Abel have managed to seamlessly combine current technology with a decades-old look, and in doing so created a flawless and timeless classic. When you factor in the workmanship, which is superb, it's obvious that you've got a World Class Show Bike. Even better, at least from my perspective, is that the bike is extremely capable of handling day-to-day riding chores and could quite conceivably be built by anyone willing to round up the parts, the majority of which AFT will be happy to sell you, and put in the required effort.

In fact, if you'd like to own a little chunk of history, they'll even sell you this very bike, although I don't think the world championship trophy goes with it. See, Giuffra and Abel have already started building next year's entry, a mind-blowing Honda VTX1300, and kind of figure that a pair of matched trophies would look rather nice in their shop. After seeing what they're capable of creating, I won't be going to Vegas to bet against them. **MM**

RESOURCES

Builder

AFT CUSTOMS

www.aftcustoms.com

(209) 223-3848

Paint

Scott Hultquist

RIFF RAFF CUSTOMS

www.riffraffcustoms.com

(925) 997-7686

Seat

DUANE BALLARD CUSTOM LEATHER

www.dbcustomleather.com

(603) 781-7505

Belt-Drive Conversion

SCOOT WORKS

www.scootworks.com

(919) 269-0986

Grips, footpegs, brake pedal

CATS EYE CUSTOMS

www.catseyecustoms.com

(479) 890-3007