



Hairy Vampire

WORDS: BEN, HAIRY BUSH BIKE BUILDERS
PIX: KING RAT

Once upon a time I used to be an engineer. I've worked in machine shops all my life and put myself through all sorts of qualifications but, after getting made redundant five years ago and being unable to get an engineering job that suited me, I retrained as a brick layer.



Yep, that's right, a brick layer – it seems that in Britain these days everybody wants brickies while our engineers, without whom this country would never have achieved what it has done, don't get proper rewards for their talents.

I've been into bikes for years and I was going to build myself a chopper no matter what. I had some slightly off-the-wall ideas and, of course, everyone said I wouldn't be able to put them into practice so that just inspired me to get on and do them. I'd got fed up with watching a certain Discovery Channel programme (you can probably guess which one ...) and thinking, 'That's not custom bike

building, that's custom bike assembling – I can do better than that, bloody monkeys!'

Anyway, I bought a War Eagle (www.wareaglemotorcycles.com) softtail frame off eBay and a (nearly) two litre Ultima El Bruto engine and right side drive six speed 'box and a load of other bits too (wheels, calipers, forks etc etc) and slotted them together, and I was just trimming up the back mudguard that came with the frame when it hit me – 'Shit', I thought, 'all I need to do is put on a bit of weight, grow a handlebar moustache and wear a vest and I'll be as bad as those talentless comedians on the telly'. I'd slagged them off for just assembling custom bikes and here I was doing exactly the same thing. I immediately stripped the bike back down again and threw

away all the aftermarket parts and set to making them all myself.

I got a sheet of 2mm steel, a mallet and a bag of sand from Travis Perkins and started forming metal the old fashioned way until I was happy I was actually making something and not just assembling parts. I made templates from card, traced them onto the steel and cut, hammered, welded and ground away at them for about three days to get the tank just right, and then set about doing the same from the front mudguard, the rear mudguard and the side panels. After a hell of a lot of work, I finished them, fitted them and stood back at looked at them – all my own work and much more satisfying than buying them off-the-shelf.

Specification Sheet

Engine:

Ultima El Bruto 120 cubic inch (1966cc) Competition Series, Force Dominator air-filter, Barnett clutch with extra plate, Ultima drag primary with 85mm Goodyear belt & outer bearing support, Ultima six speed right side drive gearbox, programmable digital ignition, one-off handmade 2-1 exhaust by owner, 130bhp at rear wheel, 135 ft/lbs torque

Frame:

War Eagle Motorcycles softtail, 46 degree rake, six inch stretch in backbone, two inch under downtube, billet forward controls

Sharp End:

18x8.5" spoked wheel with 250 tyre, Ferodo stainless discs, four pot callipers, 58mm inverted forks, one-off handmade alloy yokes with internal lock stops, braided stainless brake lines by owner, one-off handmade handlebars by owner, Ultima master-cylinder

Blunt End:

War Eagle Motorcycles swingarm, twin softtail shocks, 18x10" spoked wheel with 300 tyre, polished stainless disc, four pot caliper, 1.25" Kevlar-reinforced drive belt

Tinware:

One-off handmade front mudguard by owner, one-off handmade fuel tank by owner, one-off handmade seat by owner, one-off handmade rear mudguard by owner, one-off handmade side panels by owner

Electrics:

Solid state with auto trip switches, Tribal headlight with peak, catseye rear light on one-off handmade side-mount number-plate holder by owner, bullet LED indicators

Paint:

One-off mix by Micky 'The Brush' at Custom Paint Studio (01902 609088 or www.custompaintstudio.com)

Engineering:

All work by owner at Hairy Bush Custom Builders (07790 017224 or www.hairybushbikebuilders.co.uk)

Thanks To:

'Micky at Custom Paint Studio; Ste for wires; & Surfboy for the loan of his missus (??) ...'



'BUILDING THIS CHOPPER REMINDED ME HOW REWARDING ACTUALLY WORKING METAL WITH YOUR HANDS IS SO I'VE SET UP IN BUSINESS BUILDING BIKES NOW'

I had the yokes made for me at first but, when they came back from the person who made them, I wasn't at all happy with the machining. I hadn't got a miller to shape yokes, and most millers that will fit in a garage won't go wide enough to do what I wanted anyway, so I decided I'd have a go at casting them up myself instead. I made a furnace from a gas bottle and an oil drum filled with concrete, and melted down a ZXR750 frame that I'd bought (again off eBay) to give me the raw material to make the yokes. It took more than a few attempts to get both the consistency and the shape right – I was worried about making yokes with big air bubbles in that might crack or break so I'd make a set and then cut them up to check their composition, modify the mixture and then cast up another set and so on and so on. In the end they came out exactly as I wanted them, but I wouldn't recommend you try doing it this way as it's bloody dangerous – the red-hot molten mixture spits like hell when you pour it into the moulds – but never let it be said that it can't be done 'cos it can.

Had a bit of trouble finding the right diameter metal for my 'bars so, after hunting high and low for some, in the end I cut some table legs up and welded them together with some tubing from another bike frame and reinforced them with the gussets you see to make the stronger. I was paranoid about them breaking, you see.

I didn't have a tube bender then so everything had to be cut with a hacksaw and welded up (I didn't have a chopsaw either). It took me a whole day, for example, just to make

the front indicator brackets that clamp onto the forks as I didn't have the exact tube size so I ended up cutting and reshaping/flapwheeling larger diameter tubing until it fitted just right.

I even bought a lathe just to do my wheel spacers and herein lies a tale. I bought it off eBay (what would we do without eBay eh?) and went to pick it up. They loaded it into my Transit at their end with a forklift and it wasn't until I actually got home that I realised that I couldn't unload it. It was in my van for two bloody weeks! I couldn't use the van 'cos it had the lathe in the back and no-one would lend me a forklift because of bloody Health and Safety or the problems associated with getting one to my house. In the end I eventually (desperately) went up to some guys at a local factory unit up the road, jumped on their forklift and said airily, 'Mick said I could borrow it for a second' – who Mick was I have no idea! By the time I'd got the lathe unloaded and took the truck back they were still running around trying to work out who Mick was, so I parked it and made a quick exit. At least I got the lathe out!

Building this chopper reminded me how rewarding actually working metal with your hands is so I've set up in business building bikes now – the company's called Hairy Bush Bike Builders (www.hairybushbikebuilders.co.uk) - and I can't wait to get onto the next project. It's unfortunate that I've got to sell this bike to finance the next one, but that's just the way things go, isn't it? Ring me on 07790 017224 if you can see yourself riding it or would like me to build you something similar. 📞

