

New Vincent?



FROM 1928 TO 1955, Britain's Phil Vincent designed and manufactured the most sought-after motorcycles in the world. Now, devoted motorcycle enthusiast and successful entrepreneur Bernard Li (of Eagle One products) has acquired the trademark and built prototypes for an all-new Vincent.

To design and manufacture the new bikes, Li has enlisted the aid of Roush Industries and noted inventor James Parker, both have an impressive list of credentials. And though even this team is a ways from being able to produce anything like a proprietary engine for the Vincent, the new company has a signed letter of intent from Honda, to provide the company's much-praised RC51 engine and drivetrain to power the beast.

The prototypes, displayed recently at Li's home in San Diego, featured a large, tubular steel, single shock chassis, forged brake calipers, alloy wheels and carbon-fiber bodywork. Yet despite the modern touches, not to mention the 130-hp Honda engine, the styling showed a definite retro flair, at least partially reminiscent of the original Vincents. The first model scheduled to be built is the Black Lightning (shown), with plans to later produce both Black Shadow and Black Eagle models (the company has running prototypes of both).

But there's still a lot to do in the way of financing, setting up a dealer network, parts distribution, etc., not to mention an actual manufacturing facility. The company seems to be on the right track, but don't expect to see any actual units for sale until at least 2004, at the earliest. We wish them luck.

For more information, see: www.vincentmotors.com.



FDNY Dream Bike

THE BIKE BEFORE you is the culmination of 15 months' effort, work that included large corporations, local shops and single individuals who gave up their own time and effort to complete this worthy project.

Of the 343 New York Firefighters who perished on September 11, 2001, this machine, a 1979 Honda CB750KL, honors one in particular: Gerard Baptiste, F.D.N.Y. # 782

This Firefighter, from Ladder Company 9 in the Bowery, had purchased it to restore just two weeks before that infamous September day. Costing only \$100, it was a virtual basket case. It was Gerard's dream to bring it back to pristine running condition and then to ride it wherever the four winds took him.

That dream might have ended as the Towers fell but for an article by Jeff Kurtzman, who spotted the bike in the corner of the Great Jones Street Firehouse, and wrote about it in the November 2001 issue of *Backroads* magazine. One *Backroads* reader, by the name of Dennis Ryan, read the article and came up with the idea of restoring the machine in Gerard Baptiste's name.

Many months later—here it is. If it brings a smile to your face, please believe us that we think a young Firefighter is looking down and smiling as well. This bike is for him.

This summer the FDNY Dream Bike will be auctioned on E-Bay, with all proceeds going directly to the Firehouse on Great Jones Street in the Bowery of New York City.

Brian Rathjen
Backroads Motorcycle Tourmagazine
www.backroadsusa.com

The undisputed "King of Supercross," **Jeremy McGrath**, has said goodbye to the sport that he has dominated for most of his career. The 31-year-old McGrath retires with 89 career wins, 72 Supercross wins and seven Supercross titles, plus a 250cc National Motocross Championship and a pair of titles in the 125cc class.

"It means a lot to me to be able to tell everyone about my retirement announcement in the right way," McGrath said. "Although I am announcing my retirement, the 2003 season can be looked at as my farewell tour—kind of a way for me to say goodbye over a four-month period. Although I won't be racing this year, I will be at all of the races. I will be expanding my autograph sessions and with Clear Channel's support I will be a part of the opening ceremonies at each event. It is my sincere

hope that with these efforts throughout the 2003 Supercross season, it will allow me to meet and greet with as many race fans as possible, and to thank as many individuals as I can for the many years of overwhelming and enthusiastic support I have received."

Most of you are probably familiar with the story of the **Rockford, Tennessee police officer** who was charged with vehicular homicide back in 2001 for allegedly pulling his patrol car in front of a speeding motorcyclist, resulting in the rider's death. This incident came only five weeks after the high-speed chase of another motorcyclist had resulted in another crash and serious injury, and involved another officer from the same department.

After evidence came to light at trial, indi-

cating a policy within the small department for "running speeding motorcyclists off the road," their insurance carrier dropped their policy, and the department was disbanded.

Well, the criminal case finally went to court, and guess what? Officer James Johnson was found "not guilty" of both vehicular homicide and negligent homicide.

The defense argued that the motorcyclist should have been able to stop in time, but his reactions were impaired by alcohol. An autopsy showed he did have alcohol in his system, though less than the minimum to be considered impaired under state law.

Despite the verdict, the rider's family has filed a \$7 million wrongful death civil lawsuit against former officer Johnson, of the Blount County Sheriff's Department, and the now-disbanded Rockford Police Department.

BMW Oilheads Get Dual Plugs

BMW HAS ANNOUNCED that all of its Oilhead Boxer models will now be produced with dual-plug heads, for "increased stability and constancy of combustion in all operation modes, even under difficult/unfavorable conditions." They go on to note that the modification is being made primarily to satisfy European Union emissions standards, though the "constancy of combustion...even under unfavorable conditions" statement is an obvious nod to the low-speed surging problems that have plagued these engines for over a decade. BMW also states that, "the efficiency of the engine is increased and mileage is also improved."

The new "Two-spark" (BMW's official nomenclature) heads started being phased in by model during production in January of this year, and will encompass all Oilheads, though interestingly, the R1200C cruiser (the only Oilhead that never seemed to experience a surging problem) will be the last model converted.

Hopefully, we've finally seen the end of the Oilhead surging problem.

2003 Chief Vintage



IN THE PAST, we have severely panned the new Indian Motorcycle Company in these pages, for a general lack of quality and performance in their products. As a recent launch of new models, they forthrightly admitted as much, and promise that those days are nearing an end.

With an all-new management team in place, the company now seems more intent on improving its bikes than on touting its history. The change in attitude at their most recent press event was highly-evident.

And, they are turning words into actions: The new Indian Chief Vintage looks like a big step in the right direction. Due to be available by around April of this year, the Vintage features the company's new "Powerplus" engine, quality Brembo brakes, a KW monoshock rear suspension, and an all-new Paoli dual-damping front suspension with progressive rate springs. All of these items, along with a stronger, reinforced frame, address the most serious shortcomings of the company's earlier models.

In addition, it seems that most of the minor nitpicks about the early Indians have also been addressed—by acquiring new vendors for outsourced parts that were previously, quite frankly, of inferior quality. These new pieces include chrome parts that are now die-cast, triple-chromed and hand-polished, original Fiamm horns, one-inch tubular steel engine guards, and seats and saddlebags constructed of premium, eight-ounce, full-grain leather.

It seems Indian is finally turning the corner and becoming a true motorcycle manufacturer. We look forward to their Chief Vintage model, due here about the time you read this.



First the Rune—And Now This?

Chrysler Group Chief Operating Officer Wolfgang Bernhard rides onto the stage aboard the Dodge Tomahawk, a V-10, 8.3-liter (505 cubic inch) so-called concept "motorcycle" at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. The Tomahawk leans when it turns and features four-wheel independent suspension. The engine, borrowed from the Viper sports car, can propel it at speeds of nearly 400 mph. Where will the madness end? And what genius decided that if you just narrow the track enough, it somehow becomes a motorcycle?

The Hammer Passes

Motorcycle road racer and flat track legend Dick Hammer, 63, has died after a 15-year battle with cancer.

Hammer began racing at the old Ascot Park track in Gardena, California, with his lifelong pal, former Triumph factory star Skip Van Leeuwen. Skip recalls, "He was, hands down, the fastest guy at the racetrack for eight or nine years. When he rode for Triumph, they had to redesign their road racers just for him. He just had so much bad luck. He was one of the toughest people that I have ever known or met, and he was one of the most competitive people, too. But in all the years that I knew him, and I met him when we were in the fifth grade, I never saw him do one thing out of line or questionable. He was a straight shooter—straight ahead. That's just how he was."

Hammer scored his first and only AMA Grand National victory in 1962 on a Harley-Davidson. Hammer was a top competitor in the Daytona 200 several times, often taking the lead, only to crash or get knocked out by mechanical problems.

Longtime friend Sammy Tanner said that he believes Hammer was the fastest rider to never win a National Championship.

Hammer is survived by his wife, Charlene; sons Mike, Mark and Richard; daughter, Michelle; and sister, Marian Vanderham.