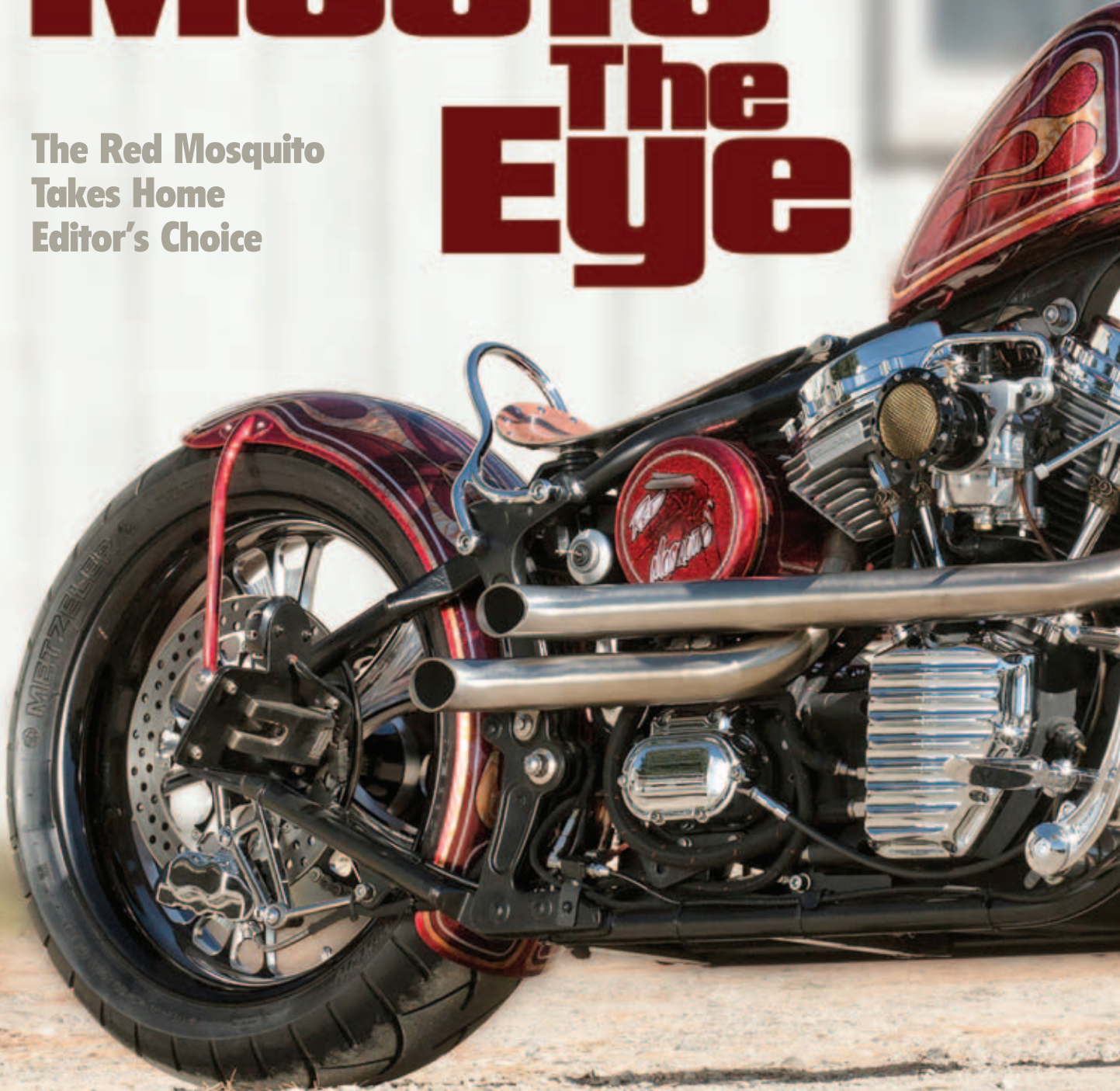


More Than Meets The Eye

text by
stephen long
photos by
mark velazquez

The Red Mosquito
Takes Home
Editor's Choice





Owner Bert Marinaro took us out to a horse farm to show off his Editor's Choice winner. Appropriate given the 105 ponies his bike pounds out.

B

eneath the massive tent that



houses the show bikes at the 2016 Dream Ride, one man stands out from the rest. His salt-and-pepper beard, trimmed yet full, his overalls cuffed to just below his calves, and his flip-flops exposing his toes to the subtle summer breeze set him apart from most other attendees, myself included, in boots with worn left toes and protection-less jeans. Yes, on this warm August afternoon, Chris Donaldson's outfit truly belied the voracious young builder's latest accomplishment. His craftsmanship on Bert Marinaro's 2004 Night Train led to the bike's designation as the Editor's Choice winner, and yet, amid photos, trophies, and an interview, he is inundated with humility, true to form for a man in cuffed overalls.

Chris patiently and meticulously walks me around the bike, excitedly pointing out the multitude of pieces that required extra attention and dedicated work. Every piece of this drastically reworked motorcycle has Chris' fingerprints fossilized into it, with this build essentially taking three years to finally be a complete, fully functioning, everyday rider. Owner Bert even rode to the Dream Show in Farmington, Connecticut, the day of the event, a fact made all the more refreshing while standing next to the builder amid a sea of trailers and hitches.

"This bike was built to be ridden," Chris says. "There were several instances when the owner found it difficult to appreciate some of the one-off creations until they were visually appealing, but first we had to conquer functionality." That helps explain the lengthy build time. But so does the meticulous eye with which Chris turned his attention to the foot controls, hand controls, front end, motor, gas tank, frame, oil reservoir, seat...you get the picture.



Let's start up top,

where the bike sports a supremely minimalist design. Chris opted for a set of highbars from Exile Cycles with risers from Roland Sands Design, which include an internal throttle assembly that helps set the stage for the ultimately clean system. Aiding in the effort to remove all the hubbub

around the bars, Chris designed and manufactured a one-off remote master cylinder, which is operated by a modified clutch cable, and a bell crank system supplied by a remote



reservoir. It's a fresh design, and one that only entices the eye to look even closer at the minute details sprinkled throughout the body of work.

The gas tank is a modified king tank (note the crown gas cap) designed for Sportsters. Chris cut and lowered the tunnel to mount the tank higher on the backbone. The fuel petcock was relocated to the rear. The oil tank is also a custom-made piece, a mild steel cylinder with integrated battery box, ignition switch, and high-beam switch, the latter two components complementing the clean look on the handlebars. We'll revisit the oil tank soon, as the paint and decal remain pertinent to the build. One of owner Bert's favorite pieces of Chris' work is the beehive oil filter located on the left side, just behind the BDL primary. Made from a single piece of 6061 aluminum, this is a fully functional oil filter with an integrated Harley filter, and the addition of



copper supply and return lines accentuate the retro styling.

Bert wanted the bike to remain relatively modern, while achieving the appearance on an old school bobber. The springer front end was handled by Thompson Choppers from Ozark, Missouri, a well-chosen piece in the appeal to elder aesthetics. The chassis rolls on two Performance Machine (PM) Gasser Contrast wheels, 21" up front and 18" behind, wrapped in Metzler rubber, a tastefully modern look that meshes with the springer and other vintage-esque pieces scattered about. But Chris and Bert had to compromise on a few other parts, including the West Coast Choppers Jesse James rear fender, which Chris did not want hugging the tire nor too far forward. But Bert remained adamant about both this and having baffles in the exhaust, which was another Donaldson original made from .125" stainless steel. The seat is custom-made, a steel pan with a support bracket

and rear fastening system that allows for quick access to the battery. Bert did meet Chris in the middle, however, especially when it came to including the sissybar that not only adds another visually pleasing aspect (this was Chris' take), but functionality, too. Now, both men can attest to the bar adding necessary support, especially "when the rider launches from a stoplight with 105 hp."

Speaking of those 105 ponies, Chris beefed up the motor as well, as he worked with supreme autonomy from Bert. "When it came to the motor and mechanical aspects, Chris had free reign," Bert says. With room to maneuver, Chris punched the 88" Twin Cam up to 95", and opted for S&S Cycle 570 gear-driven cam, Screamin' Eagle (SE) pushrods with .569" of lift ("a perfect fit"), SE 10-1/2:1 forged pistons, and S&S Super E carburetor. The transmission remained untouched, but he did go with a BDL primary and clutch.

The foot controls come from PM, but those presented another challenge for Chris. They had to be greatly modified in order to be pulled back to compensate for Bert's limited leg reach.

And how about that paint? Both Bert and Chris came to a consensus on who would handle it: Robert Pradke of Eastford, Connecticut. A quick glance through Robert's Instagram is all the evidence you need to understand why the two went with his tightly controlled vision, but you needn't log online to figure this one out. Pradke laid down a base of red metal flake and hand-painted the gold and silver leaf flames flowing along the tank and fender. The Red Mosquito was influenced by the Pearl Jam track of the same name, which happened to be rocking across the airwaves when Bert was in Pradke's shop. The caricature painted on the oil tank is curled in such a way that it almost mimics the aggressive style with which one would ride, buzzing through the wind at breakneck speed, riding the high.

After walking around the bike several times, round-trips filled with crouching, leaning in, stepping back, Chris' wife, Carolyn, comes to collect him from the Dream Show tent. "She really runs the business," Chris says with a hearty chuckle. "She flicks the lights in the workshop on and off to let me know it's dinner time." Donaldson Fabrication is as grassroots as it gets, as Chris works closely with his father on most projects they take in, and it's not Chris' full-time job, either. "We are a small shop focusing on the quality and individuality of each and every bike. Our goal is to fit the motorcycle to the owner while maintaining his or her original vision and to create a functional work of art," Chris says.



After taking home the Editor's Choice award, Bert says, "Yes, it took the better half of three years to complete, but it worked out for the best."

And so Chris heads off, and I make a few more rounds, snapping some photos and picturing myself in the leather-bound saddle. When I first arrived at the show tent, the glistening red custom was my personal choice for the award, yet I thought it stood little chance of actually being chosen given some of the other bikes that were entered in the contest. I kept returning to it, and after speaking with Chris, he puts into words the reason I felt drawn to it. "The beauty of this bike is found beyond the initial walk-by, and it isn't really recognized until one takes the time to slowly examine each of the custom pieces as an individual element. It's then that the bike really comes to life," says the man in the cuffed overalls. This bike truly is one to be celebrated. **AIM**

TECH SHEET

Owner	Bert Marinaro	CHASSIS	
Builder	Donaldson Fabrication, LLC	Frame	Harley-Davidson FXSTC 2004/Donaldson Fabrication
Year/model	2004 Harley Davidson Night Train	Front Forks	Custom-made by Thompson Choppers/Donaldson Fabrication
Build time	Three years	Front Wheel	Performance Machine Gasser Contrast 21" x 2.15"
Chrome	MECLEC Metal Finishing, Fresno, CA	Rear wheel	Performance Machine Gasser Contrast 18" x 5.5"
Painter	Robert Pradke, Eastford, CT	Front Tire	Metzler 90/90-21"
Color	Red metal flake, gold leaf, silver leaf	Rear Tire	Metzler 200/50-18"
		Rear Fender	West Coast Customs Jesse James/Donaldson Fabrication
		Fender Struts	Donaldson Fabrication
POWERPLANT		ACCESSORIES	
Engine, year/model	2004 Harley Davidson Twin Cam 88	Taillight	Modified, side-mounted Drag Specialties/Donaldson Fabrication
Builder	Harley-Davidson/Donaldson Fabrication	Fuel Tank	King tank modified by Donaldson Fabrication
Displacement	95"	Oil Tank	Donaldson Fabrication custom-made mild steel cylindrical tank
Cylinders	Harley-Davidson 1550	Handlebars	Exile Cycles/Donaldson Fabrication
Pistons	Forged Screamin Eagle (SE) 10-1/2:1	Risers	Roland Sands Design
Heads	SE MCR 79cc chamber	Seat	Donaldson Fabrication
Cams	S&S Cycle 570 gear drive	Upholstery	Mark Kalinowski
Pushrods	SE .569"-lift	Pegs	Performance Machine
Carb	S&S Cycle Super E	License plate	Donaldson Fabrication
Air cleaner	Roland Sands Design/Donaldson Fabrication	Mirror	Todd Cycle
Exhaust	.125 wall stainless steel by Donaldson Fabrication	Hand controls	Exile Cycle/Donaldson Fabrication
Ignition	Daytona Twin Tech	Foot controls	Performance Machine/Donaldson Fabrication
Cam cover	Roland Sands Design		
Transmission	Harley-Davidson stock five speed		
Primary	BDL/Donaldson Fabrication		
Clutch	BDL/Donaldson Fabrication		