

V-TWIN VISIONARY'S INAUGURAL SMOKY MOUNTAIN TOUR BROUGHT
OUT LOADS OF CUSTOM BUILDERS THAT PUSH THE LIMITS OF PERFORMANCE

A SMOKE-FILLED MOTORCYCLE COMMUNION

Words by Kali Kotoski | Photos by Kotoski and Chris Rossel

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It had been nearly 11 years since I stared down, with a disorienting sense of anxiety, the barrel of the Tail of the Dragon at Deals Gap. At the time I was on the first leg of a 23,000-mile motorcycle trip with my little brother across the US and Canada. We were sleeping dirty in the woods and often on soft mud to avoid ridiculous camping fees, surviving on a dangerously high sodium diet of ramen noodles chased by fireside gulps of Kentucky Gentleman, once a week showers, a couple bare-knuckled bruises from bar and brother fights

(remember bro when you knocked me out cold in that church parking lot after I saved you from a bar fight? I 'kicked' him in the face the following weekend), and no idea where we were going except chasing the Fall colors down the East Coast and avoiding Hurricane Ida. This was our way of literally riding out the Great Recession—homeless and jobless.

So we stashed our combined nearly 200 pounds of gear near our last campsite, covering it with brush for good measure, and ripped our Honda and Suzuki motorcycles back and forth across those 11 miles of curves all day. It was intense and we felt alive, and a raccoon raided our food stash when

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A Screamin' Eagle-powered V-Twin Harley taking a short nap at Deal's Gap.



A pit stop at the Bushy Mountain penal facility while riding the unforgiving and rugged Devils Triangle in Tennessee. No not *that* type of Devils Triangle, which likely originated in Tennessee.



Natalie Kliener and her 1994 FXR leading the pack on the twisties.

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we were away, taking the hot dogs we planned to have for a victory dinner.

This time I was on a company junket with a plush hotel bed, much better whiskey and a hot 2019 Harley-Davidson Low Rider courtesy of Smoky Mountain Harley-Davidson. Surrounded by performance-oriented custom-bike builders with much more power on tap, 30 of us carved smooth-

ly through the well-shaded twisties, switchbacks and hairpins of Tennessee and North Carolina. It was a homecoming, a communion of sorts, and for a few short minutes when I pinned the throttle I was genuinely happy.

And for veteran editor and custom-motorcycle enthusiast Jeff G. Holt there must have been a sense of homecoming as well. As former editor of Hot Bike, Baggers and Street Chopper (now all sadly defunct print publications), Holt had brought the Hot Bike

Tour to Smoky Mtn. H-D two years ago. After nearly a year of plotting and scheming, with some spirited prodding from Smoky's owner Scott Maddux, the inaugural V-Twin Visionary Tour in this lush and lurid corner of Tennessee was under way.

Three days of riding and shit talking and amazing bikes on display, with late night conversations at Hooter's that revolved around past relationships, children, future ambitions and what was happening in the motorcycle industry, was one hell of a way to spend Labor Day Weekend.

"Motorcycle shows have changed from the flash and chrome and big red, and now are more performance-orientated. It's about something that you can ride," Holt explained in the VIP burlesque-styled room at The

Shed, a bar and concert venue on the grounds of the Harley dealership. He added that while the bar-hopping, women-chasing choppers and baggers are still in vogue, a demographic shift was underway, largely driven by financial constraints of younger riders that idealize Harley's sporty FXR models.

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As the gateway to some of the best riding in America, Smoky Mtn H-D is a destination unto itself with bikes and beers.



Scott Maddux, owner of Smoky Mtn H-D sketches out Saturday's ride. A ride in which he kicked our ass on his hometown turf.



It looks like a bunch of functional bikers ready for a morning ride, but in reality everybody was barely standing after the bar at The Shed stole our money.



Professional grifter and charlatan extraordinaire Jeff G. Holt on the outside of a prison for once. Congrats!



“We were excited when we heard they were bringing out a new Sport Glide,” said Denton, “but when we actually saw it we were a bit disappointed. So I wanted to build what the Sport Glide should have been—a motorcycle that would do everything that the Motor Company is trying to do to compete in other competitive markets.”

Their Low Rider puts out 138 hp with a rubber-burning

148 ft/lbs of torque thanks in part to a 124-inch S&S Big Bore Kit, nearly double the horsepower I thoroughly enjoyed on a stock Low Rider, which seemed perfectly fine for my needs.

“It has great street manners and drivability with that much power on tap,” Denton explained. “You can go from cruising to having the tire up and it rides almost like a stock bike. When in reality there is so much engineering time spent making everything work together.”

While the custom bike show was the main event on Saturday night, with a turnout of 800 people ogling the bikes and jamming out to The Georgia Thunderbolts and The Kentucky Headhunters, it was really the focus on riding that made the show so unforgettable.

Above is Buddy Stubbs H-D's SR93, a modified 2019 Fat Bob, followed Tpj Customs then Maddux's War Wagon by 40 Cal Customs and a sporty build by Blue Ribbon Cycles.

Minnesota native and Nashville transplant Natalie Kliener said it perfectly. “Tennessee is definitely mind blowing with what it has to offer,” she said. “The huge lush green rolling mountains and the kudzu everywhere and these twisties and it is just amazing. The riding was super fun and also very humbling.” Kliener road her souped-up and trimmed 1994 FLXR.

For Smoky Mountain owner Scott Maddux, the thrill of the show is really about getting to meet new builders from across the country, because “if you just breath your own fumes you are not seeing how far people are taking things on the performance side.

“To the end it is really about having a higher-caliber motorcycle that goes faster, turns harder and stops quicker. And I like that in motorcycle. It is a hammer and it is a tool and I am not going to sacrifice a performance-oriented machine for the



sake of looks,” said Maddux who was a longtime Road King rider until Jesse Rooke turned him onto Harley’s more sporty bikes a few years ago.

V-Twin Visionary has already locked down a five-year deal with Maddox to continue show, as well as a four-year deal with Sturgis’ Buffalo Chip, so expect Holt to be around kicking for a while, or as he puts it, “I hope to be putting on Smoky Mountain until I die.”

“For people to even want to be associated with me, and having hundreds of people hanging out and going on rides and eating amazing food, is really a crazy fucking thing and I love it,” Holt said.

We love it too, Holt, and look forward to attending your shows in the future! ⚡

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“It was important to me that the show encompassed what V-Twin Visionary is, and more importantly, allow fringe builders and pro builders the chance to come to Tennessee and get down and do their thing,” said Holt.

Which is exactly what happened. Builders from Blue Ribbon Cycles, Buddy Stubbs H-D, TPJ Customs, Dirty Dixie Performance, 40 Cal Customs and Death Metal Racing are just a few of the big names that attended the four-day event.

Johnathon Denton from Dirty Dixie Performance showed up with what I considered the coolest custom motorcycle at the show, simply because it was clean, fresh and looked like it could have ridden out directly from the Harley plant. But that look was all smoke and mirrors.

With what started as 2019 Softail Low Rider, DDP created what they call the Real 2019 Sport Glide.



Dirty Dixie Performance's Real 2019 Sport Glide with a cool 138hp.



This 1955 chopper by 40 Cal Customs took home the people's choice award. It wasn't a chopper show. It was a performance show. Democracy...



Scott Maddux loves music and loves bikes. And he owns a dealership. Pretty cool.