

The gentlemen of custom



Carli Ann Smith takes a trip to Shaw Speed and Custom in Sussex, to get the inside line on its award winning bikes...

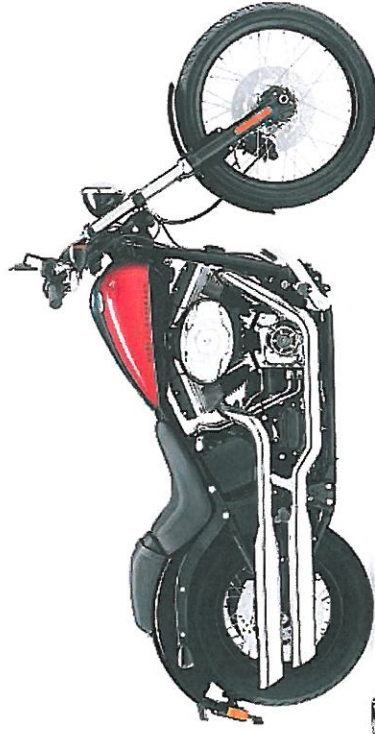


- Cream paint palette and art deco artwork

- Heavily modified tank. Sits low with underside cut out revealing knuckle-style rocker covers

- Signature oil tank

- Leaf sprung solo seat

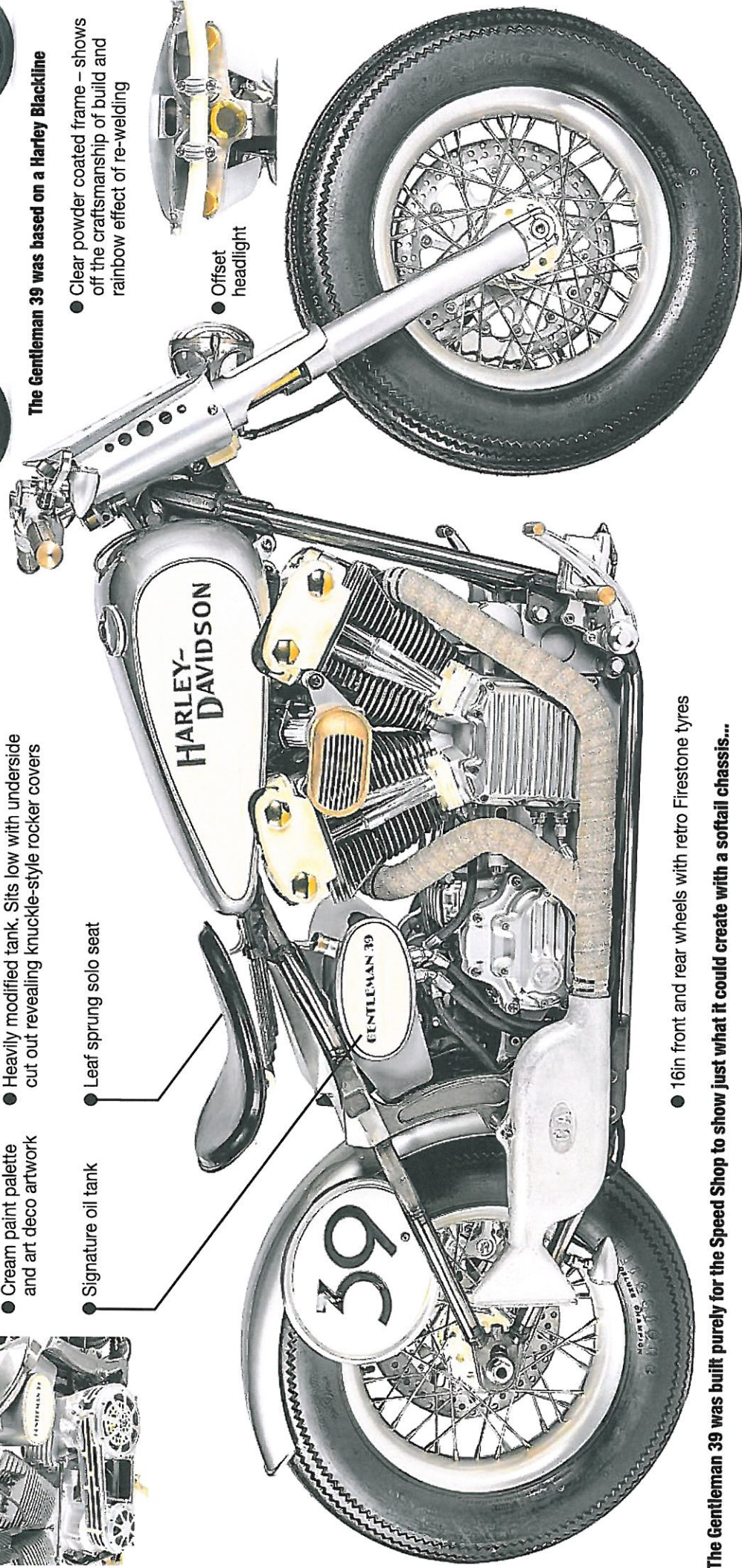


The Gentleman 39 was based on a Harley Blackline

- Clear powder coated frame – shows off the craftsmanship of build and rainbow effect of re-welding



- Offset headlight



- 16in front and rear wheels with retro Firestone tyres

The Gentleman 39 was built purely for the Speed Shop to show just what it could create with a softail chassis...

RIDERS HAVE been customising their two-wheeled machines since they were invented. While some may change handlebar grips or add on some decals in the quest for individuality, others take it a little further and completely rebuild them from the chassis up.

Customisation is ingrained within the brand of Harley-Davidson, and with thousands of parts and accessories to purchase and fit, owners have got a vast array of looks to choose from. But what if you're looking for something completely unique? Enter Shaw Harley-Davidson.

Opening in 2002, Shaw stocked Harleys and Buells, however after the discontinuation of Buell in 2009, the dealership experienced a hole in trade with half of its business, including bike sales and workshop time, essentially disappearing. While many dealers may have sat back with their hands on their heads, Steve Willis, dealer principal at Shaw H-D, found an alternative which complemented the core business.

"We wanted to take custom to another level, we'd been doing a few but now had the capacity to do more.

"There was an empty stockroom at the back of the technical department which we transformed into the Speed Shop. You can look down into the workshop and see the bikes being worked on; it's a great one-to-one area which gets people thinking about what they want from their custom machine."

You may think that Steve had a clear plan of action about the future of the custom shop, he didn't. "In 2010 we took part in the International Custom Bike Championship with Strike True II and won the category for Modified

Harley-Davidson. That gave us the golden ticket to go to Sturgis in August 2010 (Sturgis plays host to the AMD World Championship of Custom Bike Building final), where we won! The emails came flooding in, we built more bikes and it's gone on from there!"

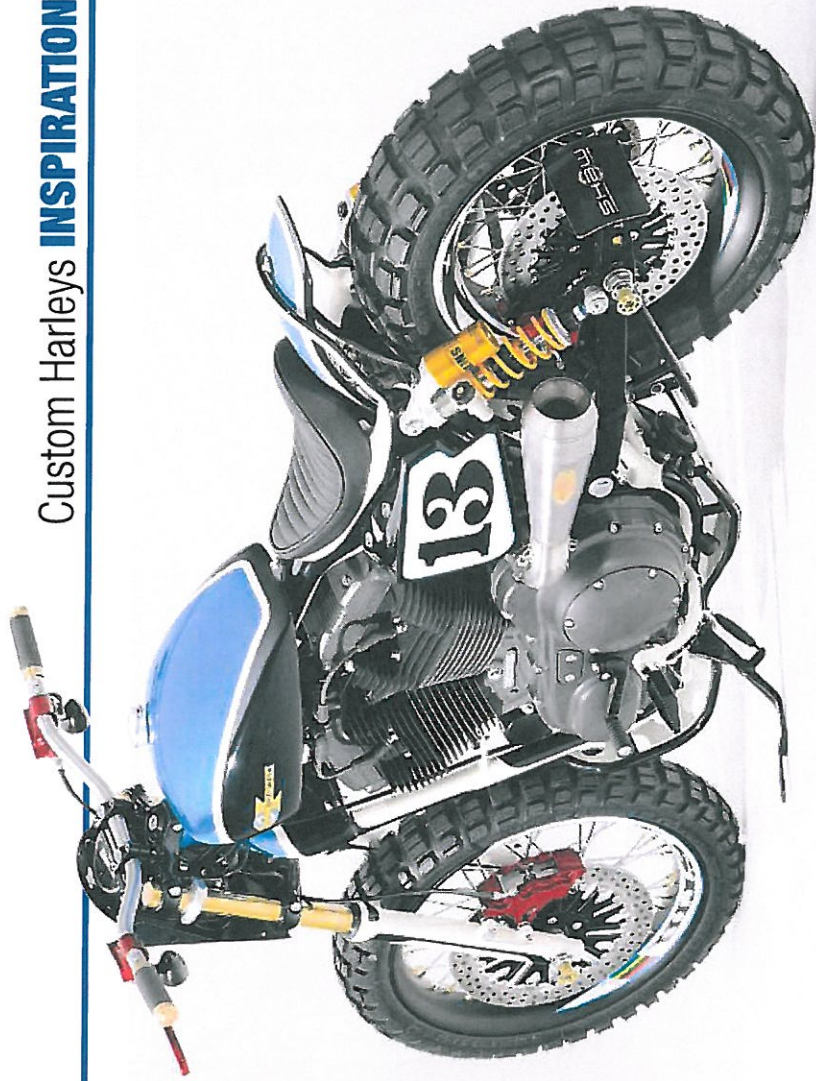
By working with big brands such as Bell & Ross, Ralph Lauren and Rockstar, the Speed Shop gained awareness and encouraged people who may not necessarily have thought about owning a motorcycle to think about getting their licence and starting their journey on two wheels.

While they make one-off pieces of art, the team at Shaw Speed and Custom understands what's at the heart of motorcyclists – the ability to ride – so makes nothing but 'rideable' customs. "It depends on the level of customisation that's required – one year we may have a number of super detailed customisations which go right down to the frame. The amount of time that takes restricts the number that we can physically do. But it tends to average out at around 20 a year.

"While the customising journey is different, we aim to make the end result the same for everyone – a bike that the customer loves, which contains elements of their personality and fits into their life. We have 75 bikes on the website so a lot of people come in with a favourite which forms the basis, we ask people to send in things that reflect themselves as we need to know what type of person they are."

Steve puts himself into the customer's shoes and looks at the bike with their persona to judge the build as they would.

"The bike has to be part of them, so



Based on XL1200N Nightster Sportster, the XLST3 was the third motorcycle to be built in the iconic Strike True family.

as project manager I become them. We keep in touch with the customer throughout the build, and send regular updates and images, but sometimes the customer doesn't see the whole bike until the unveiling when it's complete. There's a huge amount of trust with these projects."

With so many breathtaking customs on the website and an extra 20 being made every year, is it possible to have a favourite?

"It's often not about the finished bike, it's the whole experience. I'd say our first world championship bike, Strike True II, is my favourite. It ticks all the boxes and is timeless. We can take it to a skate park and the kids would love it or take it to a vintage rally and they'd like it. Everyone can visualise

themselves on it and find elements that they love."

Custom doesn't just have to mean a complete rebuild and can be any detail. Steve has his own analogy...

"It's like interior design. People have nice homes and want to stay but they want a change. This change could be putting new cushions on the sofa or it could be knocking down a wall. There are different levels and it's the same with customising a bike. Speed Shop is open for everyone, with all budgets, whether it's new handlebar grips, a chopped rear end or a full-blown rebuild.

"The retro vibe with a modern twist is always a winner. Styling from the 1930s and 40s always works, as do fat rear tyres. Recently there's even been

something of a motocross theme. Knobby tyres and chain conversions (replacing the belt drive with a chain) have been popular this year. We'll see if it's a trend that will stay!"

With further exciting and high profile projects in the pipeline for 2014, we can't wait to find out what they do next!

To check out a selection of Shaw Speed and Custom's work visit:
www.shawspeedandcustom.co.uk

Are you a fan of custom bikes or do you have your own? Why not post a picture of your dream machine on our Facebook page? [facebook.com/MotorCycleMonthly](https://www.facebook.com/MotorCycleMonthly)