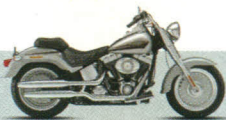


LIVING WITH A...

Cruiser



Bike: *Harley Davidson Fat Boy* Rider: *Colin Overland*

Pictures John Noble



Champion of the world - the award winning Strike True II



"It's all a far cry from horticultural machinery"

→ Somewhere in Britain there's a completely standard Harley-Davidson being ridden about, but I haven't seen it yet. In the months since I became an honoured guest in Harley's kingdom I've started paying a lot more attention to the details of the old and new Hogs I see and I'm increasingly amazed about the time, effort and imagination that's gone into the best of the modifications.

And then I walked into Shaw Harley-Davidson, a dealer in Sussex, and had to completely recalibrate my idea of modifying. Every bike was outstanding, and some were so far from standard I had to ask what on Earth I was looking at. And that's just the showroom. You should see the workshop out the back.

A bike built by Shaw won the Modified Harley class of the AMD Official World Championship of Custom Bike Building - a huge international custom fest at Sturgis in the US. Called Strike True II and based on a Crossbones, it has unique paintwork, a hand-made rear mudguard and 1940s-style handlebars. It had previously won the UK heat held at the Ace Café in London. Another Shaw bike, Goldtop, won the

Professional Custom Class in the South of England Rally, the country's biggest Harley get-together.

What's going on? It's a combination of location, personnel and relationships. The relevance of the location is that Shaw's is not far from Brighton, which is a hotspot for Harley and custom activity - and not short of customers with a bob or two to spend. The personnel? Dealer principal Steve Willis has a strong artistic streak, so he's very keen to encourage his team's customising ambitions, in particular those of Neil Francis. And the key relationship is with Roland Sands, a former road racer who is now revered as a custom deity in the US and beyond.

The dealership opened eight years ago, selling, servicing and modestly

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accessorising Harleys. But they soon started doing paintjobs, then Steve in particular got an interest in accessorising. "That quickly got more radical. Then three years ago we got involved with Roland and it went to another level."

The Sturgis award is huge - a doubly surprising victory for a UK outfit on the international stage, and for an official Harley dealer, in an area traditionally dominated by independent mavericks. It's a far cry from the dealership's origins. Owner John Shaw previously ran a horticultural machinery business and, on little more than a whim, asked Harley if they wanted to talk about a new franchise. To his surprise, they did.

Now they're one of the country's hottest Harley outlets. They're not content to rely on Harley fans and guys having a midlife crisis - they actively court Brighton's bright young things recently hosting a party in a nightclub, and spotting the connection between BMXers and potential Harley ownership.

"Custom is a great showcase," says John Shaw, "and gives people an extra bit of confidence in our ability: if they can do that, then they can do a good job of servicing my bike."

FACTS

Start mileage: 369
Current mileage: 4524
Costs this month: £44.80
Average mpg: 44.2

WHAT I'VE LEARNT

Not all Harley dealers are the same

I love my bike

There's more to Harley world than first meets the eye