

CAL RE-BORN

British custom specialists Shaw's turn an XR1200R into this stunning tribute to US racing great Cal Rayborn



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Shaw Speed and Custom is an Aladdin's cave of expertly put-together custom bikes. It's not your run-of-the-mill custom shop, bolting-on chrome parts and painted dragons being ridden by half naked women on petrol tanks. Far from it, these East Sussex boys produce unique specials, ranging from conventional Softail customs to Steve McQueen/Husqvarna inspired Hogs.

This is its latest project. Called the XR1200TT it's based on an XR1200R and inspired by the KR750TT/XR750TT works Harley road racers ridden by the late, great, Cal Rayborn (see box right). The mix of old style and new tech really

WHAT'S THE STORY?

■ Cal Rayborn (see right) was one of the first US riders to win big on the world scene – and was the man our own Cal Crutchlow was named after. Now Brighton-based Shaw Speed and Custom has created this glorious tribute bike based on a Harley-Davidson XR1200R. MCN was given a go on the new £30,000-plus machine.

works and it's a machine that makes you stop and stare. In some ways it's a throwback to the '50s with its swooping lines. Look at how the bellypan flows right back almost to the rear spindle, reminiscent of finned American cars.

Twin side-exiting exhausts are cut

into the belly pan, again like a hot-rod from the '50s. Even the huge rev counter takes the same styling cues. Then you have the obvious Rayborn colours and big 1960s-style screen matched to modern wheels and suspension. The front mudguard, meanwhile, is a replica of that from Suzuki's MotoGP bike. To blend all these styles together must have been incredibly difficult, but Shaw has pulled it off, and then some.

The really impressive bits, though, are when you get up close and admire the details. Take the fairing, which was sourced from the States and previously used by S&S on a land-speed record attempt. Up close you notice the fairing's complete lack of joins – it's just one single piece!

The downside is, if you want to remove it you have to remove the fork first. When you consider the amount of times the bodywork was on and off for reshaping not to mention resizing to fit the exhaust it must have been a

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'The fairing was used on a land-speed record streamliner. Up close you notice the complete lack of joins'

nightmare job. To make life harder still, the indicators are flush fitting, as is the small headlight.

The tail unit, meanwhile, is a one-off again with flush lights and hidden number plate. Then, just when you think you have the smooth, bolt-free

bodywork fitted, you still have mirrors to fit, mirrors that would ruin the lines. Simon Pocock, Shaw's service manager, got round this problem by fitting a reverse camera instead. It's these details which really set Shaw ahead of the rest.

Underneath the bodywork there are plenty of modifications to the XR1200, too. The exhausts were made in-house by chief fabricator Dave Rollison using Akrapovic end cans from a BMW X6 car. With remapping and a breather to complement the exhaust, the XR1200 produces around 100bhp at the back wheel, very similar to their XR1200 cup bikes which used to support MCE British Superbikes.

Shaw has also used the knowledge gained racing its XR1200 in the BSB support series to get the handling right. So the machine is fitted with fully-adjustable Öhlins suspension units front and rear, with massive radial Brembo brakes up front. Shaw has

One-piece fairing from a land-speed bike, modified exhaust from a BMW X6 car, and paint to echo Rayborn's original racer



MYKEL NICOLAOU



Fat-numbered tacho is mated with a racy shift light



Projector light and a twist on Rayborn's No3 plate



Spirits rearsets and a modified Harley XR1200R engine

also replaced the standard XR wheels with lightweight Dymag items, while adjustable Spirits rearsets and clip-on bars add to the racy feel. Shaw has even converted the bike to chain and sprocket instead of belt-drive.

A huge number of man hours have gone into this project, which is why the asking price is 'in excess of' £30,000, which makes riding it on the road rather intimidating. However, having raced in the XR1200 race series, this special should handle similarly.

It's all about the feel

You'd never describe the XR1200TT as a sports bike, not even in the loosest terms. It's long, slow steering and heavy. The ingredients are there for sporty handling, but the Öhlins set-up needs a fettle to sharpen the steering. It's not bad, just a little old-school as the Harley isn't sat on its nose like a modern sportsbike. I'm sure after some tinkering we could improve the

basic set up and get it steering a little quicker and feeling livelier.

The brakes are impressive, though: so strong they take you by surprise at first. Never has a Harley stopped so well.

Engine-wise, the performance was never going to be breath-taking, nor impress as much as the brakes, but there's still more than enough grunt. Tap down one for fast overtakes, give it a handful and listen to the roar of the twin exhausts. Lovely. Tuck in, meanwhile, and it takes you a little by surprise. For a big bike, this Hog has a deceptive turn of speed.

But if you're after something light and flickable, which will work on track, you need to look elsewhere and are totally missing the point of this bike. Instead it's all about how it makes you feel. I couldn't stop smiling throughout my ride, constantly checking my reflection in every shop window while the rear view camera was addictive. I loved it. If bikes are designed to make you feel

America's first world-beater

Calvin 'Cal' Rayborn (1940-1973) was arguably the first world-class American racer.

Beginning in dirt track, he excelled even more in road racing and won consecutive Daytona 200s, in 1968 and '69, for Harley-Davidson aboard the KR750TT (the track variant of its ancient, ironhead flat-tracker).

In Britain, however, his greatest moment was when he joined the US team at the second running of the Transatlantic Trophy Match Race series in 1972. Aboard the still underpowered XR750TT, wearing the No3 plate and

on tracks he'd never seen before, he won three of the six races.

In 1973 he switched to Suzuki but was killed in a crash after his engine seized during testing in New Zealand.



good, then Shaw has once again hit the nail firmly on the head.

Verdict

I would have hated to have been involved in this project. It must have been a nightmare to put together. So you can't help but admire the workmanship and time that has gone into it. For example, most custom builders would have cut the bodywork into two to make life easier, but not Shaw's. Others would have bolted mirrors to the bar ends; Shaw's fitted a rear view camera instead.

And no, it's not much of a sports-bike, but the ingredients are there to make it handle. The brakes are impressive, it's reasonably quick and it sounds great.

But I don't think its new owner will be too bothered about the handling. This bike is all about the looks and how it makes you feel and for sheer smiles this XR scores ten out ten.