

SUCKER PUNCH } KNOCKOUT } →

A TATTOO ARTIST MEETS HIS MATCH!

STORY BY KEN CONTE
PHOTOS BY JEFF COCHRAN



Knuckleheads are among the most sought after of vintage American motorcycles. They command high prices and as the supply dwindles, the prices keep going up. Knucklehead motors were manufactured from 1936 through 1947, before the design—in both 61” and 74”—made way for the Panhead (also available as 61” or 74”) in 1948. Typically most Knucklehead motors that come with original numbers and a title are treated to a ground-up restoration, some builders even going so far as to find NOS parts to make as period-perfect a bike as possible. That was not the kind of Knucklehead that Emerson Forth dreamed about.

Growing up in South Beach, Florida, Emerson found work in a local shop during the early '90s, and that's where he saw his first Knucklehead. "The look of the engine blew my mind from the first time I saw it. The style of a Knuck is so distinctive, I knew I had to have one when I saw that rat bike Knucklehead," said Emerson. Ironically, at about that same time he got out of the bike business, using his creative talents to begin a new career as a tattoo artist. But he never forgot that Knucklehead, and he always had a bike to ride as his escape from the every-

continued



105 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LANDMARKS

1932 - Joe Petrali



1935
Petrali Sweeps
AMA

1936
Knucklehead
Engine Debutes





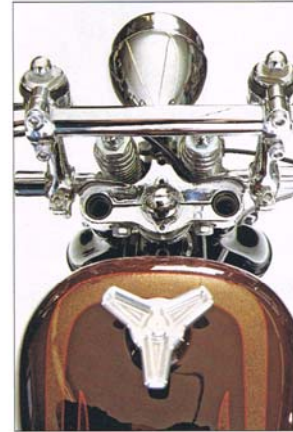
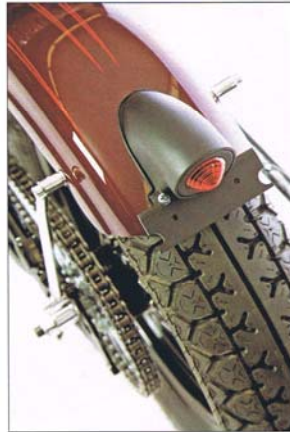
day world. After he opened his own tattoo parlor (Tattoo Circus Parlor and Apparel) he began harboring thoughts of owning his own Knucklehead bob-job. A fan of Sucker Punch Sallys, his plan was to call the Ohio-based shop when it was time to “knuckle down” and build a bike.

Emerson’s quest for a good Knucklehead motor began on-line where he found what seemed like a gem on eBay. He called Jeff Cochran at SPS who looked at the listing, which indicated the engine had been in a museum and hadn’t been run in years. Moreover, the numbers and title were intact, but Jeff cautioned that it might be too good to be true. Knucks, Jeff told Emerson, are hard to find. Emerson bought the engine, then had it shipped directly to SPS.

As soon as the engine arrived Jeff and his business partner Donny Loos tore open the crate and found a dusty Knuck in need of some serious TLC. Donny started to check it out and found that several of the parts had just been shoved into the crate, and not even installed. After a full assessment, Donny called Emerson to let him know the cases and numbers were good but everything else was junk. Even though he has rebuilt his share of Knucklehead engines, Donny considers himself more of an expert on Shovels, Pans and Evos. He wanted this engine to be bulletproof since it was going to be run in the hot Florida climate, so he sent it out to Advanced Cycle Machine.

With the engine work secured, it was time to talk about what Emerson envisioned for his ride. Emerson sent Jeff some pictures of certain bikes that boasted features he liked, with a note attached telling the SPS crew that he wanted the bike painted blood red. The remainder of the build was entrusted to Donny and Jeff.

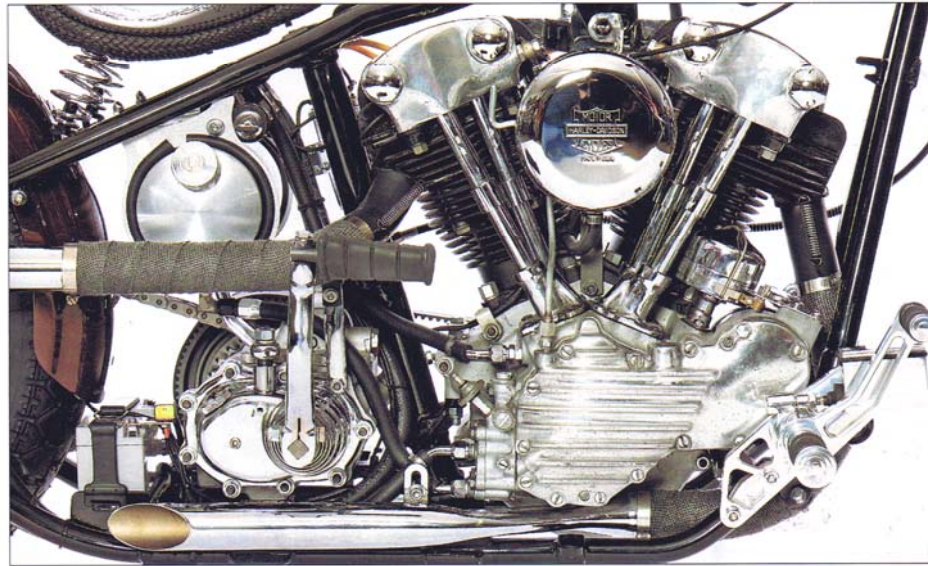
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105 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LANDMARKS

1936 - Knucklehead engine debuts

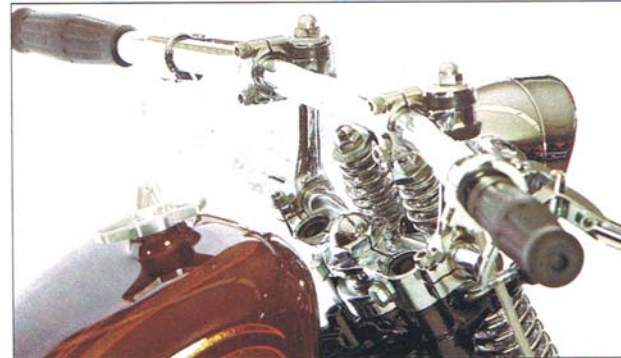
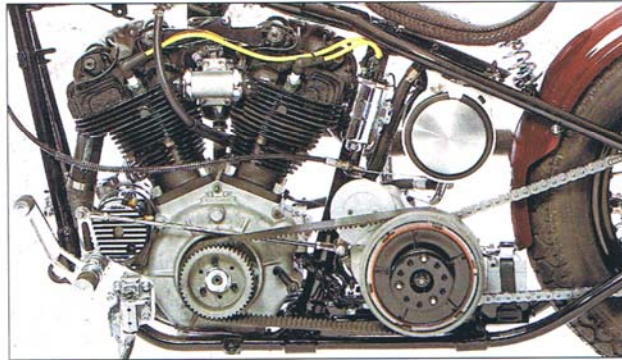
ironworksmag.com



1938
First
Sturgis Rally

1944
G.I.'s Return
Home





These types of builds, where SPS gets to interpret what a customer wants, are the projects that really get Jeff's creative juices flowing. He gets full artistic freedom and in the end gets to see a customer's jaw drop when the bike is revealed. For this job Jeff took a 1954 H-D frame and used several vintage parts that he knew would make the bike stand out. He wanted the bike to stay true to the bobber tradition, yet it had to portray some of the "cool" that SPS bikes are known for.

Jeff took a stamped CCI Sporty tank, mounting it high on the backbone to give the illusion of a slight stretch in the downtubes (although they're stock). The rear fender was crafted from an old front fender that Jeff reworked, including some hand-bent fender struts to give it added strength. He stuck with the vintage theme for the taillight and license plate mount, using a CCI Sparto repop on the rear fender, painting it black so it didn't take away from Brandon Armstrong's paint job. Jeff

kept the bike's styling as simple as possible, using chrome and black accents to further complement the paint job. He chose an H-D black springer and blacked out the wheels to match. The iconic Mooneyes oil bag made a nice addition, and Jeff installed an outboard oil filter to increase oil capacity and to aid with the cooling. Sucker Punch's resident leather worker, Dave Theobald, put together a seat with exceptional stitching, plus tooling that shows praying hands.

Emerson was blown away when



he saw his bike for the first time. It was exactly what he'd hoped for and more. Being an artist, he took in the little things that set it apart from other bobbers, and appreciated it for the final art form that it represents. Like a good tattoo, this Knucklehead bobber is a one-of-a-kind bike. **iw**

See more at www.ironworksmag.com

Resource

Sucker Punch Sallys
 Cleves, Ohio
 513-703-2157
www.suckerpunchsallys.com

►► SPEC SHEET

Emerson Forth
 South Beach, Florida
 1947 Harley-Davidson

HUMAN FACTOR

Fabrication Sucker Punch Sallys
 Assembly SPS
 Painter Brandon Armstrong/
 Armstrong Design
 Plater Brown's Plating
 Engine Builder Advanced Cycle Machine

ENGINE

Year/Model 1940 H-D
 Displacement 61 cu. in.
 Ignition H-D
 Cases H-D
 Heads H-D
 Cylinders H-D
 Pistons H-D
 Cam H-D
 Carb Linkert
 Air Cleaner V-Twin
 Exhaust Paughco/SPS
 Transmission H-D 4-speed
 Primary BDL 1 1/2"

BODY WORK

Gas Tank CCI Sportster

Front Fender None
 Rear Fender SPS
 Seat SPS/Dave Theobald
 Hand Controls GMA
 Foot Controls Thunderheart
 Handlebar CCI
 Headlight CCI
 Taillight Sparto
 Dash/Instruments None

FRAME

Year/Model 1954 H-D
 Rake Stock
 Backbone Stretch 4"
 Downtube Stretch 0"

FORK

Type H-D springer
 Trees H-D
 Rear Shocks None

WHEELS, BRAKES & TIRES

Front Wheel DNA 21"
 Rear Wheel DNA 16"
 Front Brake None
 Rear Brake CCI/SPS
 Front Tire Avon 3.00-21
 Rear Tire Continental MT90-16