

FORUM

Forum/The substance of style/Fall 2008

PREFERRED
CUSTOMER
GIFT
CARDS
INSIDE
(SEE PAGE 33)

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Fall '08 Fashion:

Riding in Style

Day into Night Dressing

The New Slim Suits

Speed by Robert Haynes-Peterson

AMERICAN HERITAGE



In some ways, it's a tough time to be an American, what with a weak dollar, a lending crisis and poor Q-ratings around the globe. On the other hand, it's a great time for American motorcycles: Harley-Davidson is celebrating its 105th Anniversary this August, the Indian brand name is being resurrected this fall, Victory has exploded onto the scene, and high-end custom shops like Confederate and Big Bear are thriving despite intense overseas competition.

"The genesis of the idea was to create a statement about what American design can be," says Matt Chambers, CEO of Confederate Motor Company. The affable Southerner infuses peace-driven politics with a strong anti-establishment philosophy. "When we founded the company in 1991, Harley had really moved into the mainstream, and abandoned their rebel status. They've done a great job, and they are a great company, but you can't be a rebel and have Senator John Kerry ride your bike around Jay Leno on *The Tonight Show*."

While Confederate bikes are designed with the independent spirit in mind, for those who revel in the small business model which Chambers says is the core of the American spirit, it doesn't mean they come cheap. The B120 Wraith, which launched this year in a limited edition of 250, runs about \$90,000 (if you can find one). The 390-lb. carbon-fiber and aluminum bike features a 1,966 cc 45-degree twin-cylinder engine. Like its predecessor, the Renovato, the futuristic bike seems more Terminator-meets-Tron than roadbike—but the beast flies. "The evolution that brought about the Wraith brings the overall aesthetic of the bike closer to an organic form," says Chambers. "It has a slightly greater holistic read than our Hellcat, plus dynamic benefits like a more rigid chassis and more strength up front. We developed a brand new, non-weld carbon fiber frame just for it."

The company, which now manufactures in Alabama, unveils its next model in September on the Bonneville Salt Flats. Chambers (who grew up in New Orleans, and lost his entire company to Katrina) is uncharacteristically silent on the details. "It's called the Fighter, which is an irony," he explains. "It may be the toughest American statement yet. It's a product that our designer Ed Jacobs just knocked the ball out of the park for."

The new Indian Motorcycle company is taking a bit of a different tack, according to chairman Stephen Julius. With the first Indian-branded bike in five years hitting the market as you read this, Julius is pleased he was able to bring back a piece of American heritage. The original Indian Motorcycle Manufacturing Company (which is a couple years older than Harley-Davidson) had its heyday in the first half of the 20th century, and went bankrupt in the late '90s. A Gilroy, California firm crafted the label for a few years until 2003. The new backers specialize in resurrecting iconic brands, and are determined to make a stand via name recognition and qual-

ity. After two years of "teases," the first Chiefs roll off the line this fall.

"It's extraordinary to buy America's oldest bike company," says British-born Julius. "Harley-Davidson is a great company, but it's a strange market where there's really only one brand in the heavy cruiser market. We aim to change that."

In May, the company allowed the first real peek at its initial model, the Chief, at its North Carolina flagship. With retro stylings and the signature deep-drawn fenders, there is no mistaking this tough-yet-elegant rebel with a cause. A muscular pan, studded black seat and wide tank mark this as a bike to reckon with.

"We are very much an American company, made in America," says Julius. "It's something we pride ourselves on." He says the Chief will launch with accessories, apparel and variations. The base model runs between \$31,000 and \$36,000. "During the latter part of 2009, we hope to come out with a second model, the Scout—another historic Indian name."

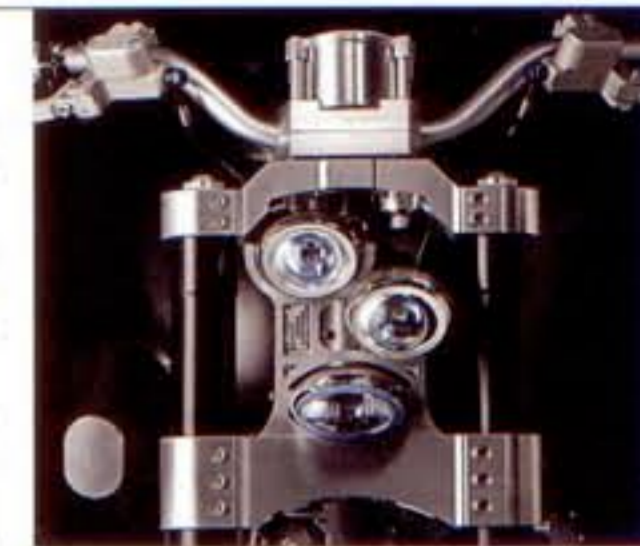
Meanwhile, Harley-Davidson—the ultimate in American Motorcycle labels—continues to shine, despite recently witnessing its first dip in profits in several years thanks in part to increased manufacturing costs. The company celebrates its 105th anniversary with a blowout event in Milwaukee at the end of August, the opening of a Harley-Davidson museum, and the continuing expansion of its breakthrough women's market—a truly 21st century American approach. "We're gonna rock Milwaukee," says H-D's outreach marketing manager Ken Ostermann, "so you definitely don't want to miss this once-in-a-lifetime event."

Why buy American in the first place? Confederate's Chambers would argue buying anything quality from an independent company in an age of Wal-Marts and Starbucks is a symbol of participating in a bigger philosophy, whether you're getting a made-to-measure suit from us or a Fighter from him. Stephen Julius at Indian has an even more pragmatic approach.

"We live in a world now where being differentiated is absolutely critical, whether you're talking about a bike, a car or a coffee maker. In terms of the quality, engineering and materials we're using, they're the best you'll get. The whole bike is full of gorgeous details. It's a high-performance piece of technology, but it's also a piece of jewelry. A bike has to appeal to the emotions, it's got to create an urge." You really can't get more "American" than that!

Any way you slice it, American bikes stand for something bigger than simply dual wheels on the open highway. They stand for what was, what is, and what can be in American manufacturing at the highest levels.

"I believe it is a possibility in design to change the way people think."
— Matt Chambers, CEO Confederate Motor Company



Bikes like Confederate's B120 Wraith (above) and Harley's new Softail Cross Bones (left) combine edgy style with beefy American manufacturing.

