

This is not a tale of a professional big bucks show build full of CNC bling and carbon fiber out . Nope, it's about two geezers in a glorified shed doing something neither had ever tried before.

Back around the turn of the century, my buddy Neil and I took a few long road trips, like coast to coast long. I don't recall the exact missions but certainly they were about buying or hauling bikes. I do remember each trip included at least all nighter. As we were wont to do there was much discussion. Somehow this turned into one extended design session for a café racer. Now both of us had restored cars and motorcycles, and had in ancient times road raced production sports cars, but we'd never freestyled a no-rules hot rod kind of vehicle. We had no thought to build one so this was pretty much a mental exercise to keep awake. But by the second trip, with the realization that we were nearing retirement and would have time, the plans became a little more concrete, like maybe we could do this.

We both had been BMW owners for quite a while, there were virtually no BMW café bikes around and we thought a short wheelbase /5 would be an appropriate base. We also fancied building it with mostly BMW components and high performance while retaining a classic "British café" look. This was still a pipe dream until I found a derelict 1972R75/5 toaster tank under a porch about 50 miles from home. Selling the motor and gearbox to an AHRMA sidecar racer, and the tank, fenders and assorted junk on ebay, paid for the bike.

At this point I was semi-retired in Florida while Neil was still working in New Jersey. So my assigned task was parts acquisition. Over the next couple of years I found a set of Morris superbike magnesium wheels, an R100/7 front end with Brembos, a Grimeca rear brake rotor and caliper, Magura bars and levers, a larger /7 fuel tank, a Luftmeister 2-into-1 exhaust, San Jose triple lamp, and a bunch of other stuff. Meanwhile Neil found a crashed GS, we kept the motor and sold of the rest of the salvageable parts.

Eventually Neil retired and moved into a small home in a nearby town. He had a metal garage erected and we set to building it into a shop. There was a housing boom down here and we availed ourselves of the finest of dumpster materials to build benches and shelving. We then fitted it out with a Chinese lift, a build table made of recycled butcher block, a 50 year old Sears lathe and an even older pillar drill. Half way through the subsequent build we splurged on a Harbor Freight belt sander.

Finally, after three or four years, we were ready to begin work. The /5 was stripped to the bare frame and put up onto the table where it would reside for the better part of two years. The rear subframe was discarded and all the various tabs, mounts and hangers were cut off. Our plan called for the shocks which previously hung from the subframe should mount directly onto the main frame, the subframe being only a support for the seat. After measuring the length in the new position and the angle of the shocks, and a few calls to the engineers at Works Performance, we had a pair of custom made shocks made to order (at a cost that ensured we needed to finish this bugger). The subframe was prototyped using PVC and fabricated from recycled bicycle tubing. More tubing and flat gussets were used to brace the steering head, the frame front and swing arm pivot area. A CC Products swing arm brace kit was modified to fit. Finally, a set of rose jointed adjustable diagonal frame braces were fabbed and fitted.

Fitting the front suspension, wheel and brakes proved a real challenge. Working top down. The triple clamp needed to be bored out to 38mm to accept the larger fork legs. That done, the forks were trimmed down externally, and Camber Compensators were modified to fit along with Progressive springs. The later front end's larger axle necessitated making spacers and sourcing new bearings to fit the /6-style Morris wheel. Then we found the Brembo rotors would not fit the wheel, a question of four vs. five bolt pattern; drill the wheel to fit, more spacer issues. Next the calipers wouldn't line up so we machined down the mounts to suit and finally the front end was on.

The rear was comparatively easy once we modified the brace kit. Wheel mounting required only modifying the axle and cutting some spacers. We made up a torque arm that allowed the Grimeca caliper to mount beneath the rotor for a cleaner look. A Honda master cylinder attached to the caliper with a custom HEL stainless line.

Neil did the motor work, rebuilding it from the crank up. We used RT heads, mildly ported, Black Diamond valves, and dual plugs. The barrels were shaved for 10.3:1 compression and an S cam installed. The 38mm Mikunis proved a bear to get right. They were off an older two-stroke, we replaced pretty much everything internally eventually tuning them as though for a 500 single. The Luftmeister was modified to fit on the later motor. High capacity coils and electronic ignition completed the engine. A 13mm spacer was made and fitted to the sump to increase oil capacity. The standard GS transmission was retained connected via a light flywheel and new clutch.

We removed the air box and above the gearbox fitted a custom made aluminum box. We wired the bike with all the relays, fuses, etc. in the box. The ignition, starter button, and a BMW power outlet are on the side of the box. We hung a similar box beneath the gearbox, this one houses the gel battery on its side. Were we to do it today we would have used a tiny lithium job, but alas they were not available ten years ago.

The rearsets are made up of Honda and custom parts. The headlight is a small chrome unit on a hidden bracket, instrumentation is electronic and minimal, the alloy fender "hangs" from the fork brace, the taillight is a Lucas pattern mounted on the license plate holder. To keep the handlebar area as clean as possible, an R90S master cylinder is mounted beneath the tank.

The late model tank was smoothed over, and a flush mount knurled gas cap made up. The seat tail section is a Ducati 90SS pattern part modified to fit, with a custom Sargeant Cycle seat. At this point the only original, unmodified part on the entire bike was the swingarm pivot bolt.

After the dry build, the bike was taken apart, the frame went off for a powder coating in Midnight Pearl over Black. We're nothing if not subtle. Actually the plan was to finish it in silver and blue, traditional BMW colors, but with a modern twist. A friend with a body shop and a custom painting hobby did the tank and seat. The Roundel is airbrushed with ghost flames emanating from it ala von Dutch's flaming eyeballs.

Subsequent reassembly was only moderately horrid and scary with just a few glitches. Road testing and tuning were a bit more trying (see: carburetors, above).

We had it bolted together and running, after a fashion, loaded it up into U-Haul trailer and took it to Barber for the 2006 vintage weekend. We'd been fairly secretive about the project, not discussing it or showing it even to fellow BMW club members, so it made a bit of a splash when we unloaded it for the Motorcycle Classics show. We were two very happy geezers when it was announced our project was the best 70's bike at the show. We showed it a few times after that, winning Riding Into History's Specials Class and a couple of local shows, then retired it from competition. The fun was in the design and build. And the riding; because this baby motors. Weighing under 400 lbs, and with short gears it accelerates really hard, its 1100S quick up to about 90. The suspension is spot on, it turns like no old airhead should, and the unbaffled Supertrapp makes all the right noises too.

We've moved on in our lives but the BMW remains, just looking at it brings a smile and a recollection of a fun couple of years in the shed.