

Back From The Dead



PART 5: IT CAN TAKE MORE THAN YOU IMAGINE ■ BY STEVE LITA

IT SEEMED LIKE A SIMPLE QUESTION. WHAT WOULD IT take to finish this darn project? The answer got a little long-winded, though. For starters, an air compressor, air tools, a belt sander, bulk steel, a metal lathe, a body shop, a welder, a well-stocked hardware cabinet, a sandblaster, a drill press, and plenty of gasoline to chase all the parts you need, to name a few. And don't forget the skilled craftsmen like painters, welders, machinists, assemblers, and plain old good friends who will give up their free time to help you meet a deadline. Overall, we took a wrong and made it right. There were so many cobbled, hacked, and downright dangerous parts on the original bike that it would take another two articles just to list them all in detail.

There are some lessons to be learned from *RoadBike's* project BSA chopper. Lesson one: Some things should be left for dead. When a purchase is made from grainy pictures on eBay, don't be surprised if the project turns out to be bigger than it seemed and more trouble than it's worth. Take a look at our chopper frame, for instance. Pretty simple, right? Then why did it take 16 hours of weld shop time to sort it out?

When you take on a project like this, you become an overnight expert on obscure part sourcing, salvaging stripped threads, and restoring hardware. Remember, our BSA came with Whitworth fasteners, and those don't grow on trees these days. Virtually nothing was bolt-on, and modifying parts became a daily duty.

Did we make mistakes? Yes. Were there parts that had to be re-done a few times? You bet. Was there a lot of scalp scratching going on? Uh-huh. So here's some hard-earned advice for making your own back-from-the-dead project go more smoothly, should you decide not to heed my advice and take one on.

First, document everything with photos. And keep an organized filing system for your research and documents, even if you don't think you're going to need it in the future. Make friends with the guys at the paint shop, metal shop, and auto parts store, since you never know when you're going to need their services and machinery. Plus, the older friends will remember how they did it back in the day.

Was this project worth the trouble? From a sensible standpoint, the chopper is just eye candy. It doesn't handle well or ride nicely. It requires some physical effort just to start it, and braking is poor. And when you consider that we probably spent more on gasoline chasing parts than the bike is worth on the open market, it's hard to justify. However, if you grew up watching *Happy Days* and absolutely have to have a cool non-American chopper that grabs stares at the gas station, then all of this would be considered a labor of love. **RB**



1

The proverbial clean slate: a freshly media-blasted frame ready for some weld repair and gusseting. It's best to take it down to bare metal to get rid of all the old paint and bondo and see what you're working with.



2

Shannon is the man behind the frame mods and welding, but just call him Shoe. Here he takes a grinder and welder to make the frame right again.



3

One of Shoe's trademarks is putting a horseshoe on every bike. He snuck this one in under the steering head as our new steering stop. It's sturdy and works great!



4 Check out the new brake stay tab on the frame. The old one is shown alongside it. It made us cringe to think someone would use a tack-welded carriage nut to hold the only brake on the bike.



8 The original front wheel had no center bearing spacer. Kenny Buchanan made us promise we'd tool one up before we reassembled his beautiful wheel. Another wrong set right.



12 Another work of art from Fabricator Kevin. Our bike came to us sans oil tank. Kevin built this one from scratch using just faxes, e-mails, and phone calls for reference.



5 These new seat posts came from Fabricator Kevin and saved us from having to make them ourselves. After a little grinding to match the contour of the frame, Shoe welded them on in perfect alignment.



9 I cut a small slot in the original upper triple clamp to hold the tang on the genuine H-D Big Twin steering stem lock washer. This install is clean and secure and cost only \$2.50.



13 In keeping with a minimalist look, we hung a simple headlight and taillight from J&P Cycles. I ground an angle onto the back of the sissy bar to make sure the taillight pointed straight back, not down.



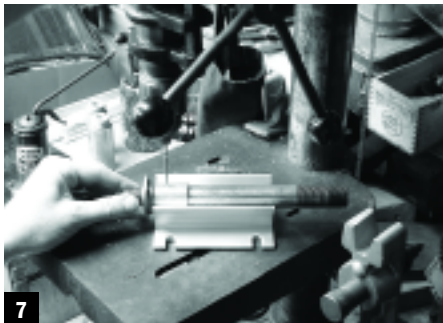
6 Check out the high-tech RoadBike carport spray booth. All it took was a plastic drop cloth and a staple gun. Total cost: \$3. I used PJ-1 frame epoxy paint in gloss black finish.



10 Since you're not going to find one of these on the shelf at the hardware store, I filed down the rounded flats of the original rear axle retaining nut.



14 Basic bodywork needs a basic paint job. We sprayed the tanks and fender with Dupont Centari GM Silver. A set of Licks Cycles knee pads on the tank completed the early English look.



7 Because the springer front end was American and the BSA steering bearing races were metric, we had to fabricate a custom steering stem bushing. Here, we drill the bushing and pin it to hold it in place.



11 After slipping the motor into the frame rails, the next step was assembling the new shortened springer front end. The procedure was align, tighten, realign, and tighten some more.



15 The electrics for the chopper all fit in this little lunchbox. Sorry, no room for a thermos for coffee. But, at this point, we needed one. The bike was finally...



...finished! If it were the '60s, we could have found some hippies to be in this photo. Peace, man. RB

SOURCES

Media blasting
AMERICAN DRY STRIPPING
 203/876-9876

Cleaning and respoking of wheels
BUCHANAN WHEEL
 626/969-4655
 buchananspokes.com

Vintage bike parts
COMPETITION CYCLE
 203/375-8589

Machine shop work
D&L ENGINEERING AND MACHINE
 203/375-5856

Oil tank
 Seat posts
FABRICATOR KEVIN
 586/291-4798
 fabkevin.com

Welding, fabrication, and moral support
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 908/352-3002
 hotshoecustoms.com

4 1/2" mini headlight
 Showlight taillight
 5" universal rear fender
J&P CYCLES
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 jpcycles.com

Seat
 Tank knee pads
LICKS CUSTOM CYCLES
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