

built
handcrafted motorcycles



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Cafe Racers **Ø** Trackers **Ø** Scramblers **Ø** Bobbers

ISSUE 28 COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Photographs courtesy of MB Cycles

MB CYCLES
HEIDELBERG

INSANE
13
M H B D

In a German city well-known for its precision mechanical engineering, lies a top-class custom bike builder.



MB

Cycles Heidelberg is well known for its top class custom builds and the driving force is Martin Becker. He's not one to talk up his successes but after a few glasses of wine he offers some insight to his somewhat chequered past: "I grew up in a small town in Germany. My dad died when I was seven years old. My mother was heartbroken and not in good health so I was pretty much on my own with my elder brother which led to a few crashed bikes and cars, some little explosions and other stories I'd rather not get into right now!"

Inspired by the lads around him and his brother who already wrenched and rode motorcycles, Martin started customising bicycles as a kid then at age 13 he got his first moped. "It was a gift and since I didn't have the cash for petrol, I made it run on turpentine or other flammable liquids," he says.

When he was 16 Martin scored an apprenticeship as a motorbike mechanic which he broke off six months later. "I wasn't really interested in any kind of work at that time. I ended up completing an apprenticeship as a carpenter, not because that's what I wanted to do for a living, but because I knew I had to do something. My masterpiece for the final exam was to produce a coffin, in my measurements, to use as a wardrobe." As you do.

Being qualified and in full-time work allowed him to buy an XT500 which of course he pimped. "It was nothing special, just a cut-down rear fender, loud pipe, lowered suspension."

Then he somehow lost track with bikes for a while. "I opted out of military service – it was horrible to imagine being forced to be up at 5am, and spending the whole day being told what to do by some idiot in a stupid cap. Instead I took the community service option and, when that was done, bought an old Mercedes postal bus and lived a hippie life working on Christmas markets for a couple of weeks every winter to earn money for trips to India, Burma, Nepal and Thailand.

"I'd sleep on the floor of trains next to stinking toilets for nights on end to travel to these countries. I was robbed by apes in India, saw dead bodies in the streets and rivers of Calcutta, experienced the poverty of these countries and their impact on human life. But I also enjoyed breathtaking beaches, wild parties and a life without obligations in a clay hut at sunset. I rode through southern India for weeks on a rented Bullet 500.

"On my last trip to Rajasthan/Pushkar I met some locals with surprisingly cool custom bikes and most of them were of course Royal Enfields. I bought two 500cc Bullets, rebuilt them with the help of some Indians and imported them to Germany."

He announced was starting his own business as a motorcycle mechanic. For the first six months he rented a small garage and worked on mostly Japanese motorcycles. Then he moved into an old freight yard, repairing delivery scooters and distributed party flyers to earn some extra bucks.

Then, gradually, clients came in. "In 2007 the German magazine Custombike got interested in my work and what was known as B-Bikes turned into MB Cycles and my workshop – and workload – grew over the next few years.

Since 2001 I've gone from scratching living to being able to a decent wage by building custom bikes. "I like variety so it's choppers, racers, bobbers... whatever! Some of my bikes are hard to define. I don't want to customise them to death... they just get this very indefinable look that makes you wanna race the shit out of them!"

"I like V-twins and love the bad-boy image of Harleys. I love the sound they make. I love the imperfection. But most of all I love the feeling of riding one – especially a vintage one with an original rigid frame. Why? It's simple and the restrictions in Germany are getting worse. Old Harleys allow me to build bikes with a certain amount of freedom."



Fatso GS

This project all started with my friend Marcus Wala. He asked me if I could help one of his old 'Wala Hardcore Cycles' customers. Little did I know that this would be the beginning of a good friendship and the start of one of my coolest collaborations.

This guy, Guido, came to my shop and I liked his 'Dragstyle' and slowly we built a really good connection, which was kind of strange because he's a high roller in business and I'm this greasy-haired, sloppy-jeaned scruff. We could not be more different except in how we think of motorcycles.

Slowly he delved in to my kind of bikestyle and is no longer interested in bikes with big great tyres. He sold of one of his 'drag' bikes straight off and wanted a cool MB Cycles build - hence Fatso GS. GS standing for Guido Sommer, his name. Not only that, he's already ordered a second bike.

SPECS

FASTO

Owner: Guido 'Socke' Sommer
Builder: MB Cycles
Year/model: 1950
Wishbone: Hardtail
OHV: Harley
Engine: S&S
Shovelhead: 93ci
Carb: S&S Super B
Exhaust: Hand-fabbed
MB Cycles 2-in-1
Ignition: S&S
Coils: S&S
Wires: Accel
Charging system: Accel
Regulator: Accel
Oil pump: S&S
Transmission: S&S
 five-speed in four-speed case
Case: S&S
Clutch: BDL
Primary drive: BDL
 Shorty with integrated starter
Final drive: chain
Starter: Accel
Frame: 150 Wishbone
Rake: 30°
Front forks: U&W
 Springer replica
Front wheel/tyre: Harley Fatboy 3.00-16 with Coker 5.00-16
Rear wheel/tyre: Harley Fatboy 3.00-16 with Coker 5.00-16
Front brake: Senwel two-piston with 8.5 disc
Rear brake: Senwel two-piston with 8.5 modified disc
Rear fender: Lowbrow Customs Stingray with integrated tail light
Headlight: PW 4.5in
Taillight: Mini LED from PW
Fuel tank: NSU moped from the 60s
Oil tank: Aluminium by MB Cycles
Handlebars: Sportster shortened 4in
Controls: Kustom Tech
Seat: Easyriders Japan
Footpegs: Custom chrome
Speedo: Motogadget tiny
Battery: Antigravity lithium
Powder coat: Black
Paint: Chikos pinstriping
Colour: Black & gold



MIND OVER METAL
 With his nose fully charged, Martin can then stare metal components together





Starr Wars

"At the end of every summer there's the Giesbeck 101 race weekend in southern Germany called. One of the races is called 'Starr Wars' (starr is the German word for rigid or hardtail) and was founded by a friend of mine, Roll Reich from Kraitmotors."

"In the middle of August 2017, Roll came to my shop and told me that there are two more entries open for Starr Wars and talked me into hitting the throttle in three weeks. Five minutes later, a Buell I that I'd had in the showroom for ages was on one of my bike lifts."

"I worked three weeks, day and night, on this project. Luckily, I already had most of the parts I needed laying around in my shop, left over from other projects."

"Three days before the race I had the bike built but wasn't even sure the engine was going to run. But everything was good. And not only did the engine run great, it was also very fast - fast enough to place fourth in the 16-rider line-up."

"Directly after the race a guy called Andy, a customer, rang and bought the racer. Perfect!"

SPECS RIGID "BUELLRACER"

Owner: Martin Becker
Builder: Martin Becker, MB Cycles
Year/model: 2002 Buell Lightning S3
Engine: 2002 Buell Lightning S3
Carb: Mikuni HSR 42
Exhaust: MB Cycles
Ignition: Dyna S
Coils: Aftermarket
Transmission: Five-speed
Clutch: Muller Easy Clutch
Starter: Electric, No kick
Frame: V6 Netherlands hardtail with cast steering head and axle plates
Rake: 32-degrees
Forks: Buell USD shortened by two inches
Front wheel/tyre: 2.50x21in 60 Spoke Single Hub DNA with MH 90-21 Avon Cobra
Rear wheel/tyre: 8.5 x 18in 60 Spoke Dual Hub DNA with 250/40 R 18 Avon Cobra
Front brake (make

and style): Buell
 4-piston with Buell 10in disc
Rear brake (make and style): Honda
 2-piston with 8.5in Honda disc
Rear fender: MB Cycles with integrated turn signals and rear brakelight
Headlight: Chinese bullshit - with MB Cycles windshield
Night Rod style
Taillight: Paschburg LED
Fuel tank: 1970s Indian with OEM paint and decals
Oil tank: Aluminium MB Cycles aluminium oil tank - Heller-style
Handlebars: ZXR Kawasaki two-piece
Seat: MB Cycles in red vintage leather
Pegs: Rear-mount MB Cycles pegs
Numberplate bracket: Handmade aluminium
Hand controls: ISR 9/16 aluminium
Paint: Chiko's Pinstriping
Colour: No chrome, no powdercoat, no polish, just rusty raw iron



Streamliner

"A guy called Jürgen Potocnic came into my shop and said he was thinking about commissioning a cool hardtail custom - but wanted one with a crappy 'messed-up' look. He liked the rough style I'd created with a other MB Cycle builds I'd done - but was also honest enough to tell me that he wasn't sure if he wanted the bike from me or another Germany-based builder."

"I didn't hear from him for at least a month then out of the blue he walked back into my shop and told me I was 'the chosen one' to build this 1949 Harley FL Knucklehead 'streamliner'."

"We discussed details and Jürgen said he wanted an old style bike, built with a new engine and transmission - plus an electric start. Jürgen is not the kind of guy who likes to wrench, he just wants push the button and ride."

"The project took six months to complete, a bit longer because MB Cycles also moved to a new, bigger shop but Jürgen was patient and didn't stress me."

"The plan to build a rough styled bike turned into a silver and chrome beauty. Don't ask me why. Sometimes you don't get what you ordered but the good news is that Jürgen loves his silver 'Streamliner', so I'm really happy too!"

SPECS STREAMLINER

Owner: Jürgen Potocnic
Builder: Martin Becker, MB Cycles
Year/model: 1949 Harley FL
Engine: S&S 93cui Knucklehead
Carb: S&S Super E
Exhaust: MB Cycles
Ignition: Dyna S, Single Fire
Coils: S&S
Wires: Accel
Charging system: Accel
Regulator: Accel
Oil pump: S&S
Primary cover: Open, battery between the sprockets
Transmission: Five-speed cluster in 4-speed case
Case: RevTech
Mods: Self-made clutch arm
Clutch: BDL
Primary drive: BDL
Shorty pin
Final drive: Chain
Starter: Electric, No kick
Frame: 1949 Hardtail Panhead
Rake: 30-degrees
Forks: Replica Springer by W&W Cycles
Front wheel/tyre: 2.15 x 19 Harley
Rocker C with 4.00 x 19 Coker deluxe
Rear wheel/tyre: 2.15 x 19 Harley
Rocker C with 4.00 x 19 Coker deluxe
Front brake: Two-

piston caliper with 8.5in disc
Rear brake: Sprocket brake Kustom Tech
Rear fender: MB Cycles
Headlight: 4in mini spot
Taillight: Mini led
Fuel tank: Modified 1970s NSU
Oil tank: Modified Moon Eyes aluminium
Handlebars: LSL Clubman aluminium on Biltwell risers
Controls: Biltwell Whiskey throttle, Kustom Tech levers, PW, Germany mirrors
Seat: Hand-made MB Cycles with Biltwell bracket
Footpegs: Jaybrake with modified Biltwell pegs and controls
Speedo: Motogadget mini
Battery: Lithium mounted between the primary pulleys
Chain tensioner: Skateboard wheel
Chrome and polish: By Dot Mechler
Powder coat: Messerklinger
Paint: Chikos Pinstriping
Colour: Silver-chrome





The Great Escape

The concept began when Triumph announced a competition called Custom Aces and called me to see if I'd like to make a draft of a custom Triumph I'd like to build. I agreed and made it to the final six drafts.

The voting for the winner was to be done on Facebook over 12 days and I got the most likes, right up to the final day when my only rival for the first prize enlisted the help of one of those so-called 'influencers' which meant they got 300 extra likes in the final two hours and won the competition.

Triumph said they had no problem with what happened so I thought, 'fuck this, I don't need this company to build a cool bike,' so I went to my local dealer and bought two brand new 1200XE models. My plan was to eventually build a series of 11 bikes with five different colour options. I made my own promotional package, brochures, flyers etc but two months later the dealer called me to say Triumph wouldn't allow them to sell me any more bikes. They're not interested in small businesses like mine who modify their bikes.

I still believe in my 'Series' concept so I'll do it anyway, but with a different manufacturer."

SPECS ESCAPE ARTIST

Owner: Martin Becker
Builder: Martin Becker, MB Cycles
Year/model: 2014 Triumph 1200XE
Engine: 1200cc liquid-cooled, eight-valve, twin-cylinder, ABS and traction control deactivatable.
Exhaust: Headers shortened by 30cm, MB Cycles heatshield
Power: 90bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque: 110Nm @ 3950rpm
Drive chain: X-ring
Transmission: Six-speed
Swingarm: Handcrafted aluminium
Fork: Showa upside-down fork, shortened by 170 mm by Zupin Motorsport
Shocks: Ohlins 'Black Line', 170mm shorter than stock
Front wheel/tyre: 36-spoke, 21 x 2.15in aluminium wheels with Conti TKC 80 90/90-21 tubeless tyres
Rear wheel/tyre: 32-spoke, 17 x 4.25in aluminium rims with Conti TKC 80 150/70-B18 tubeless tyres
Front brake: Brembo MCS lever with adjustable ratio with Brembo M50 radial monobloc calipers.
Headlight: Mini 4.5in headlight with Kellersmann Atto Mini LED Turn Signal and taillight
Fuel tank: Bonneville with integrated instruments
Handlebars: ABM Multiclip from a BMW
Controls: ABM Multiclip Tour clip-on handle, aluminium black anodized, Motogadget iNview Glass bar end mirror
Seat: MB Cycles
Footpegs: OEM Black powdercoated with folding shift and brake pedals
Speedo: stock, relocated in the gas tank
Battery: stock
Powder coat: Black wrinkle
Paint: Chiko pinstriping
Colour: MB British Racing Green



Minimalist Monolever "MBMW"

"Normally I specialise in V-twin motors, and mainly Harleys, but this was a favour for my girl who wanted me to build this 1987 Monolever BMW R60 for her. The bike was totally ripped apart right down to the bare frame. Both wheels, forks, triple trees, frame, everything was worn out or broken and had to be replaced. Unfortunately, this knowledge only came once I'd stripped everything down!

"I started to rebuild the rolling chassis, shortened the forks, tossed the original rear frame and replaced it with a hand-made minimalist unit which included the tail light and turning signals.

"It wasn't easy to find a cool gas tank because nothing aftermarket really fits the BMW frame and of course I didn't even think of using the original BMW tank - way too huge!

"I found an old KTM gas tank at a swap meet. Of course, it didn't fit but I only used it as a shell and totally reformed the underside. The cool thing about the KTM tank is it has a small compartment to put little things in like your phone or keys.

"Like on all my bikes, less is more. Everything not needed was taken off or minimalised. The entire electrical system is hidden under the gas tank and the cover of the motor.

"The battery is hidden under the transmission. The battery case and exhaust mufflers were prototypes from my buddy Markus Walz of Walzwerk Racing.

"The most annoying thing was that, during the process of the build, I always found something else broken which had to be replaced. What I like best is that it has a very clean, racy look. It also feels like riding a very fast bicycle because of its lack of weight."

SPECS MBMW

Builder: Martin Becker, MB Cycles
Year/model: 1987 BMW R60 Monolever
Engine: stock R60GS
Carb: Stock but overhauled
Exhaust: Headers shortened with Walzwerk mufflers
Coils: stock, relocated
Mods: Air cleaner cover contains electrics, switchgear
Transmission: Stock
Frame: MB Cycles sub-frame with integrated indicators and PU mini LED tail light
Front forks: Shortened by 8cm
Front wheel/tyre: Stock wheel with Firestone 4.00-18 tyre
Rear wheel/tyre: Stock wheel with Firestone 4.50-18 tyre
Front brake: stock
Rear brake: stock
Headlight: PU 4.5in
Fuel tank: KTM moped with integrated trunk and tunnelled base
Handlebars: ABM Clubman
Controls: Grimeca and Kustom Tech
Seat: MB Cycles solo
Footpegs: stock
Speedo: Motogadget mini
Battery: Lithium with Walzwerk carrier under the transmission
Paint: Chikos Pinstriping
Colour: Black & silver

