



That's Some Restoration

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Studio photos by Josh Withers
Outdoor photos by Kevin T Vu



I WAS JUST COMING OFF THE HIGH OF my second frame off, down to the crank Airhead restoration when I got a random call from a guy in North Dakota. We got to chatting, and he quickly revealed his interest in having me make a custom motorcycle for him just like my latest build. Due to the internet and a few magazine articles, my bright blue 1973 R60/5 toaster café conversion was attracting attention from all over the world and now from this guy Shane in North Dakota. In this first conversation with Shane, I prefaced that I was not a professional mechanic, and I work out of the garage of my humble southern California townhome. I would need help rebuilding the engine, I'd have to send off items for paint, and so on. Also it would take about a year or two due to my day job, a teaching job, getting married, being a father and so forth. He understood that and put his faith

in me. Thus, our project – and friendship – began.

Within a month of starting, we found a carcass of a 1972 R75/5 for \$600. It was in really bad shape: Broken rod; wiring was a mess with extra lights and switches drilled into the headlight; and many other parts were missing, broken or downright bastardized. As I met the seller in the California desert and was beginning to take the bike apart to load it into my station wagon, another man walked up and asked if I would be interested in another R75/5. Considering I already had one halfway into my car, I laughed him off at first, but then we got to talking. I soon learned he lived nearby with a warehouse full of motorcycles. His R75/5 was a complete bike, except it hadn't run in 20 years and had no title, yet he was asking \$400. I had to check it out, and before I knew it, I had not one but two

1972 R75/5 motorcycles in my garage. Let the restoration begin.

Shane's one request was that the bike matched his recently restored silver 1965 Porsche, and since this bike was for somebody else, I couldn't cut the same corners I did for my own personal restoration. I decided to have everything rebuilt so the bike would run like new without any guessing or wondering when an old part would fail. This meant completely rebuilding the engine, rebuilding and upgrading to five-speed transmission, new drive shaft U-joints, rebuilt final drive, wheel bearings, front forks, steering bearings, speedometer – I think you get the idea.

The other opportunity was to improve whatever we could with the new upgrades and accessories available today. I am very happy to see the aftermarket part selection for old Airheads is always growing. We



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found a good selection of bodywork following my last restoration and settled with BoxerCafé, who even made a custom front fender with no ridges for us. I found a local powder coat shop that also uses liquid-based, baked-on enamel for a well known brake caliper company that matches the Porsche color. After hearing good reviews about the Siebenrock piston and cylinder upgrade kit, we decided to buy a set instead of spending extra money on a BMW set of R75 pistons. The Siebenrock kit bolts onto the same rods and uses the same heads as the stock R75. Supposedly it offers a 20 percent upgrade in power. A lightened flywheel was a must. Electronic ignition from Dyna was added. Rear shocks from YSS looked like the match for our Porsche-themed bike. What would be a classy café bike without some wide shoulder Akront rims laced on powder coated white hubs? Let's hope the hubs stay clean!

A Shorai battery has been tucked under the café seat. The tail light came from an old British retrofitted 6V turn signal. I found a set of drag bars that matched the same reach as my clubman handlebars on my blue café. Of course, I had to get some custom gray and silver throttle, brake and clutch cables made. I had custom swingarm caps made to match his Porsche, and the stripes on the toaster panels were painted white to match our

side covers. To customize the bike even further, we found a reproduction exhaust system from a 1937 BMW R12. It was Shane's idea to get the mufflers, and at first


stay silver. They sound beefy, too!

Two years and four months after that first phone call, I was happy to let Shane know that his bike was complete. I've enjoyed every minute of Zen in my garage designing another custom BMW. I had a lot of help along the way and continue to learn the nuances of these old bikes. Above all, through this process, Shane and I have shared numerous phone calls, e-mails and text messages and only about 25 percent of them related to his motorcycle. We have become good friends and have shared the joys and sorrows of two separate lives from completely different parts of the country. Shane and I will meet face to face for the first time in a few weeks. It will be a bittersweet encounter, for it also means that I will have to say goodbye to my two-year labor of love and send it to North Dakota. In order to heal from that anticipated wound, I've already started planning my next build!



I was hesitant, but now I have zero regrets. I had to customize them to fit the header pipes and then sent everything off to Jet Hot to be coated so the pipes would forever

Engine build gets credited to Dave Gardner at Recommended Service; transmission, final drive and local consultant goes to the illusive Matthias in Long Beach, Calif.; chrome by Polished Treasures; liquid/powder coat by Hy Tech Processing; upholstery by Autos International; body parts were purchased from www.BoxerCafe.com; odds and ends came from Boxermetal. ☺



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