

The devil in the details

By Colleen Swartz and Cass Kuzba

In January of 2007 I was part of the Milwaukee World of Wheels show. Although many fine bikes competed in the bike show, there was a vendor set up on the peripheral of the motorcycle show area that had more than one bike that really caught my eye. Here is a feature on just one of the beautifully restored bikes by Wisconsin Harley Davidson, located in Oconomowoc Wisconsin. Each of the bikes were masterfully restored by long-time employee, Cass Kuzba.

I found the bike to be very interesting, but more so, the fact that it had been restored by a Harley Davidson dealership caught my attention. We all know from experience that it is hard to find a H-D dealership that will deal with anything older than 10-15 years, and here was a dealership that not only worked on the older models, but sought them out for complete and authentic restorations. I was impressed.

Cass told me that he felt that his penance for chopping all of those beautiful pans and knuckles in the 70's was now he would devote his time and talent to restoring those beautiful old bikes to original. I have to say, he is doing a noble job.

Now, in Cass' own words, the story of this 1940 EL:

I have always been a fan of old Harleys. There was a time in my life, back in the 70's and early 80's when I bought Knuckleheads and Panheads, fixed them and resold them. The prices I paid were quite a bit different. I can remember buying complete bikes for anywhere from \$300.00 to \$1500.00. I know some of those bikes ended up as choppers. Heck that was all the rage back then. Everyone I knew wanted a chopper. The lens of history however, can be very clarifying. When I look at those bikes today, the ones that really draw me in are stock restored, or stock original paint un-restored.



Back in the thirties and forties, the men that worked at Harley-Davidson were bikers in every sense of the word. Many never owned a car, but almost all rode Harleys. That's where the story begins on this 1940 EL. At that time, Juneau Avenue was the factory. Everything came in as raw material, and left as complete bikes. Joe Campbell, a welder at the factory had decided it was time to get a new bike. His 1936 EL had served him well, and it was time to move on. Sometime in 1939 he bought this 1940 EL. List price was a staggering \$430.00!

Joe lived in West Allis and one can only imagine what it was like riding to the factory. When winter came, he bolted on a sidecar, and also pulled the Knuckle motor out of the frame and installed a 74ci Flathead motor. The lower compression made it easier to start, and also helped preserve the appearance of the Knuckle motor. This would be the bike he would own until he died. After some time passed, Joe's wife sold the bike to a friend of mine, and I bought it from him.

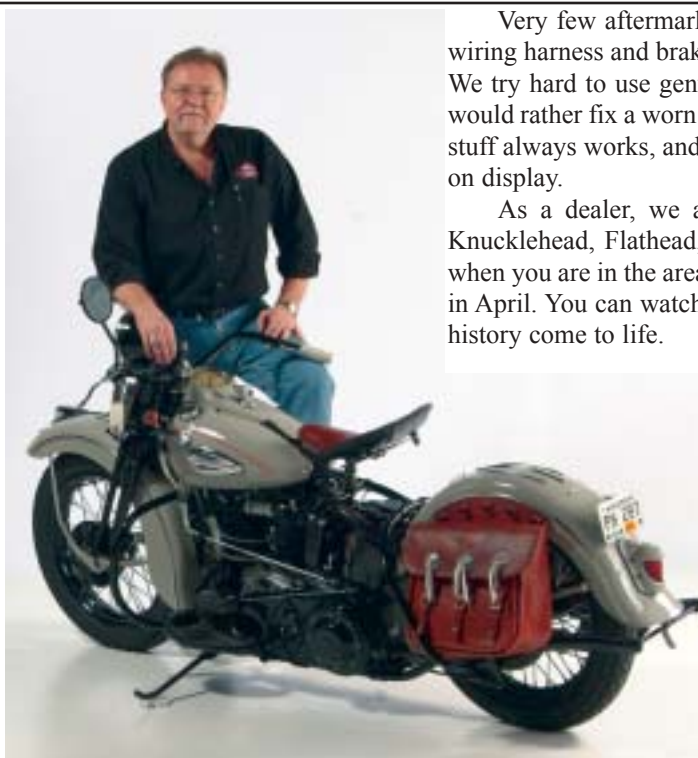
The hardest bike to do an accurate restoration on is the Knucklehead, and the pre-war can be a real challenge. At Wisconsin Harley-Davidson, there is only one way to restore a bike. We make them like they were when they left the showroom. Everything has to be as it was. Every wire, clip, screw and plating finish has to be correct. The devil is in the details and I wanted to do this bike the way it deserved to be done.

We begin each restoration with a complete tear down. Every part is examined. Good parts are set aside for painting or plating, bad ones for repair. On the 40 we found a bent frame and old crash damage on the left side but all repairable. I was on my way except for one thing, time. Some other project always seemed to get done first and there was never time to get back on the Knuckle. That's when a good friend of mine jumped in to help put things in perspective.

The Antique bike scene is full of great people, and when you talk about Knucklehead restorations, the name you are most likely to hear as the best in the country, is Mark Jonas. He is in and out of the store all the time and was always asking when I would get the 40 done. Now if you know Mark, you know he can be a very persuasive guy. His offer was to help me finish the bike, but we had get back on it now. Offer accepted!

With his help it started coming together. He put lots of work into the sheet metal it all had to be straight and true. No bondo on this one. The final mock-up showed the quality of Marks work as everything fit perfect. Fred Borchardt our restoration tech, did his magic on the transmission, and it looked and would work like new. Ken Presson did an excellent job on the motor, Paul at Hill Top Auto in Waukesha did The Squadron Gray paint and Oconomowoc Signs did the Bitter Sweet Stripe. This was the original color of the bike and is listed as 1940 only, so that's the color it had to be.

When all the parts were ready to go, Mark, Fred, Ken and I got down to business. It took about 40 hours to finish. Mark is a fiend for the details like we are, and it shows. It would not be this correct without his help and guidance. On September 26th 2006 we fired it up and I took it for a short ride. All the effort pays off when you take a fresh restoration for its maiden voyage. The quality is evident in a tight but easy to start motor and a transmission that easily changes gears up or down with no grind. This bike is a joy to ride!



Very few aftermarket parts were used in this or any of our restorations. The wiring harness and brake shoes come to mind, and maybe some nuts and washers. We try hard to use genuine parts wherever we can, because they always work. I would rather fix a worn out genuine part, than buy a new aftermarket part. The real stuff always works, and we expect our customers to ride these bikes, not put them on display.

As a dealer, we are proud to offer repair and restoration service to our Knucklehead, Flathead, Panhead and Shovelhead customers. Stop in and see us when you are in the area, we are in the middle of a 1948 Panhead that will be done in April. You can watch Fred assemble this bike in the Restoration Shop, and see history come to life.

Motor

- 61ci
- Stock cam
- Stock Cylinders
- Stock Heads and Rocker Assemblies
- Transmission
- Stock Primary chain
- 23T Motor Sprocket
- Stock 1936-1940 Clutch
- 23T Transmission Sprocket
- Stock Gearing
- Frame
- Stock HD Early 1940 Sheet Metal
- All Genuine Harley Wheels
- 18" Genuine Rims
- 18" Dunlop Tires
- Correct Original Hubs
- Electrical
- Stock 6V
- Points Ignition
- Original Coil
- Original Ignition Switch & Key
- Replacement Harness W/ correct flag terminals added
- Original Head and Tail lamps

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