

## Chopper Class with Mr. Baas

### The Beginning

Think back to your high school days. How many of you have fond memories of cool classes, bad ass teachers, and projects you could never forget.

Being one of them wild child kids who always seemed to find trouble I was in need of some teachers who understood the type of kid I was and would help push me with cool stuff to do to focus my energy into learning and not screwing around. Unfortunately that didn't really happen and I even had a counselor tell me I wasn't "college material". That started a fire inside of me that made me swear that I would become the teacher I wish I would have had and be one of them teachers that would be remembered as the coolest teach ever leaving a definite mark behind when I someday retire.

After graduation from college in 1996 I was fortunate to get a job right away at Bloomington Kennedy High School as a Technology Education teacher. My first few years were spent learning the ropes of the courses I had to teach and due to the fact that I floated around between many different classes it was hard to find time to get something really cool going in my classes. One of the courses I taught "welding hot metals" was one the road to being dropped when I started but I new deep inside that this was the area I wanted to focus on and try to build into a program I could call my own. About four years into my teaching at Kennedy, I was finally able to get my old ironhead up to Minnesota by me from storage back in Milwaukee at my dad's. I started riding the old bike back and forth to school every day it wasn't snowing or raining and I started noticing many kids I didn't have in class coming up to see the bike and ask me to do burn outs or rap the drag pipes. This immediately turned on the light bulb. I asked the kids if they would take my classes if we worked on bikes and after they all said yes I decided to recruit them all for an after school motorcycle chopper club and the first ever high school chopper class was born.

That first year we tore down my ironhead and rebuilt the old girl and by the time we were done I had more kids around wanting to help than I knew what to do with. I promised them that the next year there would be yet another project and sure enough when the enrollment numbers came out for the following year my classes in the metals area doubled.

When the next year started, I was in hot pursuit of an old pan-head I had heard about stashed in a farmers barn down south of me. After much wheeling and dealing I finally picked up the basket case and the chopper project was again in full swing. At this time I started contacting builders and companies to spread the word of what I was doing and to see what kind of response I would get. We were extremely fortunate to have Paul Cox reply and he was willing to tool the seat that we were going to put on the bike. This started to get more and more people to listen to my story and finally when the pan-head was completed we started to earn some respect and credibility with all who we showed the pictures to.

The pan-head project created a lot of talk through the school again about the chopper project and the following year I again saw an increase in my enrollment. The next year brought some interesting times, with budget cuts coming hard from the upper levels I was at risk of losing the program I was working so hard to rebuild. Because of the high cost of consumables, materials and equipment up keep, I needed to find a way to raise some money fast or lose the program forever. This and with the kids hounding me to build another bike I decided to see about doing a fund raiser build which would be built from donated parts and then sell the bike with the proceeds going into my metal shop class account to only be used to better the classes. I got on some on-line forums to post the project and look for sponsors and started e-mailing everyone I could. Things took off quick with George Counes of Spartan frameworks stepping up and offering one of his frames and a springer front end.

Then armed with this foundation we held an open house at the school to show the community what we were doing.

Donnie Smith made an appearance and after being blown away by the kids drive and enthusiasm on the project he offered to help as much as he could. After talking with Donnie and letting him know of our needs for the most expensive and crucial parts , Donnie made some calls and sure enough secured us a sponsorship with S&S cycle and a motor for our project and a primary from BDL. Everything else came pretty quick as we had only 2 months to build the entire bike and have it ready for the Donnie Smith Invitational in March.

After the kids made there own gas tank from scratch and modified a boat trailer fender, we were fortunate to get Hering Kustoms of Northfield Minnesota to donate all the paint work, the bike was really taking shape. We received a transmission from custom bike shop and SPS dealer "The Shop" in Minneapolis, and DumbassBiker helped us in getting many parts as well.

It was awesome how many others helped out with the smaller items needed to get the bike completed. I also was able to incorporate many of my own custom bike parts from my business Baas Metal Craft [www.baasmetalcraft.com](http://www.baasmetalcraft.com) which taught the kids how to make and fabricate as much as possible. When the show date arrived, the kids were incredibly proud to display their bike and they were on hand to answer all and any questions on the bike build.

Thanks to Neil Ryan and American Thunder Promotions for the spot at the Donnie smith Bike show! We ended up taking home four awards at the show and amazing the crowd and all who saw what we accomplished. It was exciting being the first ever high school chopper class and the kids proved how important a project like this is to the future of the industry. That summer I took the bike to the smoke out thanks to a spot supplied by Edge, and many new people offered their support for the next years build.

You can see a video of this build on the S&S web site at this link <http://www.sscycle.com/iframes/video.php> just click on the Kennedy High School video link once there to see the class in action.

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