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## FORWARD INTO THE PAST

By Harry Mergard

Take a look at any new Harley-Davidson model and except for the V-Rod\* you are looking at a motorcycle design first produced in 1936. It is almost unbelievable that any powered vehicle design could remain in production for nearly 70 years. As the old saying goes, "The more things change the more they remain the same". The Harley-Davidson Motor Company is without question the planet Earth's leader in selling nostalgia. Nostalgia, that wonderful place lodged in the memories from our youth. Just think about it. When you were a little kid and saw a Harley for the first time. You probably said to yourself, "Wow! That's so cool. Some day I'm goanna have one of those."

I grew up in the fifties when Hot Rods were king. By the way Hot Rods are king again, just check out any classic car auction or magazine. I watched the Scottsdale Classic Car auction a little while back and saw Rods bringing in as high as \$400,000. Maybe these high prices reflect my generation of guys around 60 with a lot of money and believe that it is possible to go home again. More than likely, though, it is guys with bucks buying cars as an investment to resell at even ridiculously higher prices.

Well, whatever the reason, the fact remains that high horsepower cars and bikes are here to stay, at least for now. Now; however, does not exist, since it is impossible. Now, constantly changes and will not stand still. There is no such thing as the present; we can only live in the past or the future. Hence, we have the popular rebirth of Chopper motorcycle's. Why? Who knows for sure but my theory is that "cool" lives eternally. Chopper's are defiantly "cool" because they look great and great style is timeless.

Chopper's reflect superb looking original motorcycle designs that were carried a few steps further by visionaries who were born to think outside the box. These visionary guys could not leave well enough alone. They were required by some uncontrollable force to improve on the original design. I'll just call this uncontrollable force the customizing gene.

Who, why, or what knows the reason for taking a design and trying to improve on it. Maybe for those of us that have that have the customizing gene it is a gift or a curse. We can't leave well enough alone. We are guided by some invisible power to fiddle with this and that until we make it better, stronger, or faster.

I also notice that the Harley-Davidson motor company is aware of today's market





and is making their motorcycle's better, stronger, and faster. Though H-D does extract some of their styling ideas from avant-garde custom designers and builders; it is careful not to change too much for the sake of change alone. The company continually reinvents itself by linking new motorcycle design to the styling of the 30's and 40's. The Springer forked bike's are a great example of connecting modern mechanics with retro-styling and not screwing the whole thing up. The new Harley accessories catalog is full of items that draw their look from an earlier period. Are we moving forward into the past?

I realize that not everyone likes the same thing. Some people like chocolate and some folks like pineapple-raspberry. So, I have composed the following short list of what I consider to be forever cool: Chopper's, convertible's, Corvette's, Hot Rod's, manual transmission, friendly biker bar's, and beautiful women with one name.

\*V-Rod sales in the U.S. have been moderate. However, the bike sells well in Europe where sport/touring motorcycle's are much more popular. You may notice that the V-Rod bears a striking resemblance to some of the old BMW bike's. Are the European's moving forward into the past?