

### H-D Museum Features "Regular" Bikes, Too

By "Gunner"

The Harley-Davidson Museum is a "big deal" type of place. It sits on a 20-acre parcel at Sixth and Canal Streets, a bit south of downtown Milwaukee. The company spent billions to construct the 130,000-sq.-ft. museum, which is first-class all the way. The company expected 350,000 visitors annually.

The museum is said to showcase the people, products, culture and history of Harley-Davidson. It certainly displays the rich history of the company with hundreds of bikes arranged three abreast throughout the industrial-looking building. However, it is nice to see the passion of everyday Harley riders honored, too.

In addition to exhibits about the company's employees, dealers and suppliers—and corporate leaders and community members who contributed to Harley history—visitors will find an interesting wall of backlit photos of Harley enthusiasts. They range in age from the earliest days of the 20th century up to modern times and they show Harleys at races, wedding, Pikes Peak, Mount Rushmore and the local grocery store. The people who rode the bikes ranged from tux-wearing grooms to hippies to businessmen in gray flannel suits.

The design of the museum was first unveiled four years ago and became a reality last summer. Ground for the facility was broken on June 1, 2006, with legendary Harley-Davidson dirt track racer Scott Parker doing a hot burnout on a XL 883R Sportster. Parker broke the ground with his spinning rear tire and sent dirt flying.

The H-D Museum development created 70 jobs for Milwaukee residents, including a man we spoke to who was photographing visitors on the Indiana Jones movie bike. He said he worked part time and loved the job, because he was learning about the company's history. The photos he takes are posted to a Website where the visitor can download them.

The museum features exhibit space, a restaurant, a café, a gift shop, meeting space and special-events facilities. It will also house the motorcycle company's massive historical archives. In addition to employee jobs, the development of the museum supported an estimated 500 construction jobs.

Many bikes in the collection are completely restored vehicles that would be out of reach for many enthusiasts. Others are original, unrestored units that were saved directly from the assembly line, which makes them even more valuable to collectors. However, it was also nice to see a number of exhibits of customized motorcycles that were cherished by their everyday owners for many years or many miles.

One very personalized bike was "King Kong," created by Felix Predko of Windber, Pa., between 1949 and 1953. It mated two factory frames together and used two 1200-cc V-Twins for power. It featured such accessories as 1959 Cadillac taillights and scuba diving tanks that supplied compressed air to a freight train horn. Another example is the




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The "Rhinestone Harley" was built by Russ and Peg Townsend from a full-dress Electro-Glide model.



Jim Kobe improved the same bike for 50 years! In 1998, after 100,000 miles of riding, he donated it back to Harley-Davidson.

"Rhinestone Harley" that Russ and Peg Townsend built from a full-dress Electro-Glide model. It is decorated with countless red, white and blue rhinestones.

One devoted Harley owner was Jim Kobe, who rode his 1948 FL OHV V-Twin wearing a Viking helmet with two large horns jutting out from the sides. Jim bought the bike new for \$965. Like most of us, he made constant modifications and performance enhancements, but Kobe improved the same bike for 50 years! In 1998, after 100,000 miles of use, he donated it back to Harley-Davidson.

Albert Ver Cruysse was another man who had a passion for Harley products. However, he did not even start to ride until he was 62. In 1988, he purchased a new FLHTC with sidecar and proceeded to make 33 cross-country trips with it, racking up 775,775 miles on charity rides. Albert was the tender age of 87, when he turned in his gauntlets and donated the bike to Harley, along with a super-detailed maintenance log he had kept.

Other cool features of the museum include a wall display of brightly-painted tanks, an engine room tracing the various types of Harley power plants used from Day One, a mock up of a 1951 Harley-Davidson dealership and a room devoted to vintage board track racing and hillclimbing.



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