

Replica of Tramp Unveiled at S & S Cycle Event By John Gunnell



On Friday, June 27, 2008 a replica of a famous 1939 Harley-Davidson Knucklehead racing motorcycle known as "Tramp" was unveiled during the 50th anniversary of S & S Cycle in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The original Tramp was constructed after the end of World War II and is now viewed as an important historical milestone in the company's history.

Company founder George J. Smith was passionate about Harley-Davidsons and was devoted to making them go faster. Riding Tramp, Smith raced on dirt tracks outside of Chicago in the early postwar years.

A 1997 article in Performance Times said that Smith, in the very early '50s punched his 61-inch Knucklehead up to 74 inches using FL cylinders and flywheels. He then employed a set of ULH flywheels to push the engine all the way up to 80 inches.

According to family members at the unveiling, Smith originally built Tramp as a drag racing bike. They say he intended to win a \$2,000 prize at a Chicago drag strip. The powerful bike won the race, but the promoter didn't pay out the prize money. Smith got only the glory of winning. Of course, in the long run, his victory counted a lot. Through its racing achievements, his S & S Cycle Equipment company became known as a winner.

Smith used the original Tramp to develop homemade pistons, special cylinders and "Knuckle" heads that he modified to take two Riley carburetors. He also developed lightweight push rods that were considered innovative.

Smith took an updated version of Tramp to the Bonneville Salt Flats in 1953 and eventually set records there. The engine in this version of Smith's bike displaced 92 inches and he used the added power to establish a new World Land Speed Record of 152 mph at Bonneville in 1954.

In 1958, Smith and a friend, George Stankos, started S&S Cycle in Blue Island, Illinois, south of Chicago. The S&S stood for the first letters in their last names. A year later, Smith bought out Stankos. His wife, Marge, whose maiden name was also Smith, became the second S in S&S and played a big role in the development of the company. The couple first ran the business out of their basement and used racing to improve their products.

S & S stroker engines made Leo Payne a drag racing legend. Still later, collaboration between the Harley-Davidson factory and S & S helped produce Cal Rayborn's 265-mph Salt Flats bike. It was also S & S development work that helped Harley introduce the 4.25-stroke EVO engine in the late '70s.

The Smiths moved to Viola, Wisconsin, in 1968. George J. Smith died of a heart attack in 1980. Marge passed away in 1992. In 2004, the company opened a distribution center in La Crosse. It has about 300 employees, 65 of whom work at the La Crosse facility. The rest are in Viola.

Charlie Hadayia, Senior Manager Racing & Customer Service, for S & S Cycle, rode the replica of Tramp during its unveiling in La Crosse. George B. Smith, the founder's son, was also in attendance. A former company President, he is now Chairman of the Board. Company CEO Brett Smith stood next to him. They said that the replica was as close to the original bike as it could possibly be.



This historic photo shows company founder George J. Smith on the original Tramp.



George B. Smith tried to duplicate his father's pose of years ago on the Tramp replica unveiled last June at S & S Cycle's 50th Anniversary event in La Crosse, Wis (John Gunnell photo)

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