

BIG BEAR D



BBC have a new dealer in Queensland – Also himself spills the beans ...

STORY DOC
 PICS DOC & GLENN PRIDDLE

Expatriate Aussie Kevin Alsop, the head honcho of Big Bear Choppers, produces what is undoubtedly the coolest range of production bikes on the planet, bar none. Situated on a mountain top at Big Bear Lake in California, Kevin's state-of-the-art factory rolls out a range of 15 models varying in style from the rigid Devil's Advocate to the bagger with a difference, the GTX.

Kevin recently visited Australia as part of a world tour to liaise with his dealers, inspect their facilities and share some marketing ideas that have helped make BBC the leader in its field. Wildcard Customs in Maroochydore, Queensland, is the latest dealership to be appointed by BBC, and proprietor Chris Hill has done a bang-up job setting up a stunning showroom, a modern and well-equipped workshop, and a comprehensive parts and accessories section.

With the slogan, "American Muscle, Aussie Brilliance", the boys at Wildcard are off to a flying start in terms of bikes sold since being appointed a BBC dealer a few short months ago. Staff and principals have spent time in the US training at the Big Bear facility and are well equipped to answer questions on the range, supply product and assemble knocked down models to factory standards.

I caught up with Chris, his National Sales Manager Kelvin Mulholland, and the rest of the Wildcard

BELOW (L TO R): Kelvin, Steve, Kevin Alsop, Chris, Mariska, Adam, Sean and Gordon. Kelvin is sales manager, Steve is a silent partner, Chris is head honcho, Mariska works there, Adam and Sean assemble the bikes.



DOWNUNDER

Customs team during Kevin's visit Downunder and had a ball riding a number of these stunning choppers. I spent the most time on the Venom and Miss Behavin' Pro Street models, and came away impressed with the power, smoothness and handling of these no-compromise, fat-tyred, yet completely rideable choppers.

Puttering through the downtown traffic of Mooloolaba on the last Saturday of the school holidays on either bike was like being up on stage under a bright spotlight. Young boys hooted and hollered, giving the thumbs up, schoolgirls giggled and waved, soccer mums smiled and briefly forgot about the kids while old men wished they were young again and able to re-live a misspent youth on one of these coolest of cool machines.

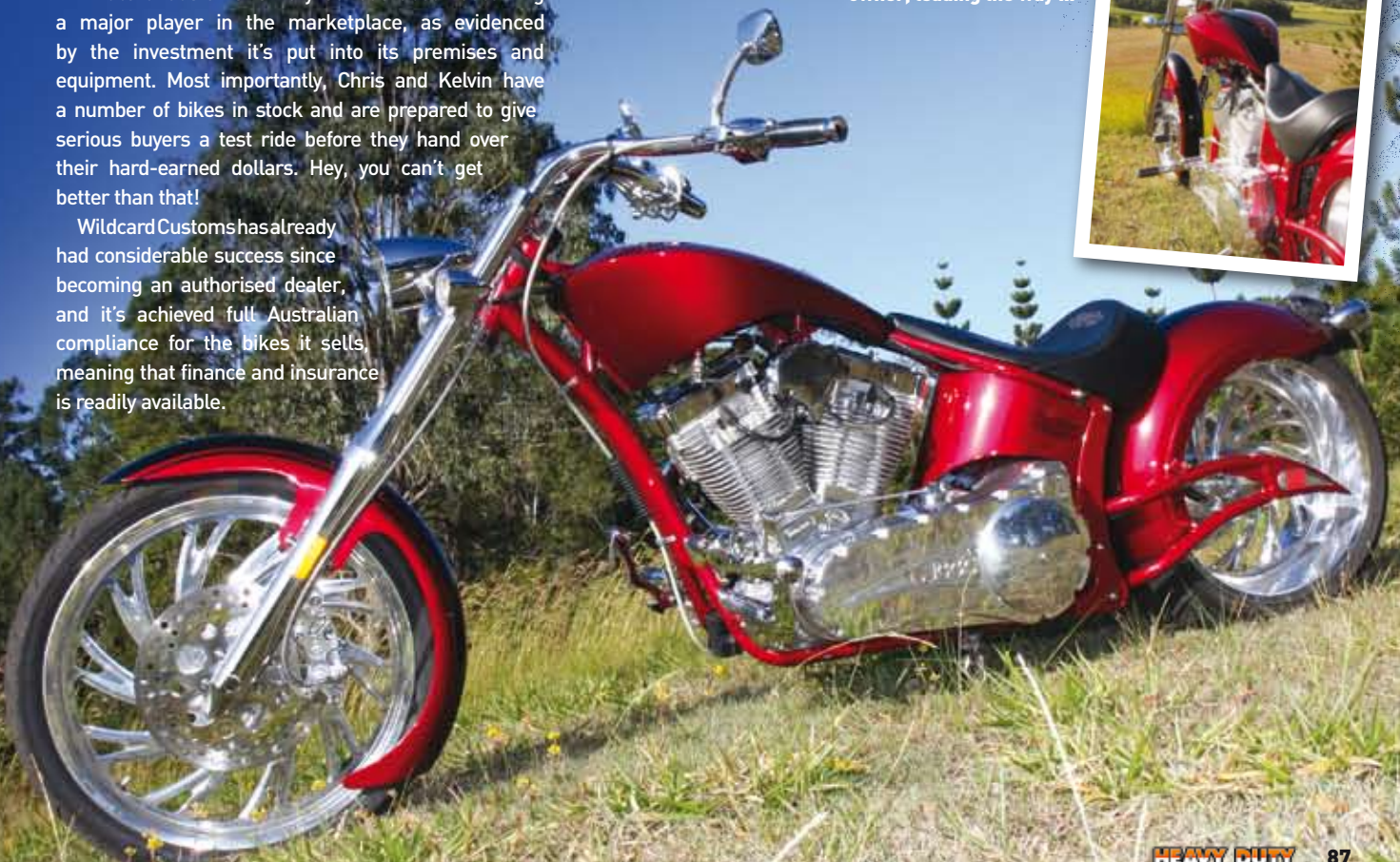
And whether I was carving corners in the lush Queensland hinterland or blasting down the highway at speed, the BBC bikes were predictable and did everything they should, and did it well. In fact, these bikes ride a good deal better than one might expect – especially if one has ridden some of the other choppers out there.

Wildcard Customs is very serious about becoming a major player in the marketplace, as evidenced by the investment it's put into its premises and equipment. Most importantly, Chris and Kelvin have a number of bikes in stock and are prepared to give serious buyers a test ride before they hand over their hard-earned dollars. Hey, you can't get better than that!

WildcardCustomshasalready had considerable success since becoming an authorised dealer, and it's achieved full Australian compliance for the bikes it sells, meaning that finance and insurance is readily available.



ABOVE: Doc samples BBC's wares – with Kevin Alsop, BBC's owner, leading the way ...





“... SEXY LINES AND COOL DESIGNS, ALONG WITH THE CORRECT GEOMETRY FOR GOOD HANDLING”



Wildcard Customs has a great website at www.wildcardcustoms.com.au, where you can view heaps of information on Big Bear Choppers, including quite a number of informative videos. You can also contact Wildcard for a free DVD, which contains all the videos on the site. Pictures of all available models, cool paint job options and complete pricing is all there. To speak with Kelvin, just give him a buzz on 07 5443 5548. He's a friendly guy and keen to do deals on these great bikes.

Big Bear Choppers has an international reputation for being a cut above the rest, and while I agree with that sentiment fully, I thought I'd leave it to Kevin Alsop to tell our readers why this is the case. So sit back, pop open a can and read why BBC stands tall.

What makes Big Bear Choppers so special?

What makes Big Bear special is that we manufacture the frame, the tanks and the fenders to an in-house standard of quality that is difficult to achieve when you outsource. And our bikes have sexy lines and cool designs, along with the correct geometry for good

handling. Style plus quality sells motorcycles, and I believe we have the most aggressive designs on the market.

Tell us about the motors you use. I understand that while they are made by S&S, they are proprietary to you.

Yes, our 100 Smooth Evolution motor has the rpm balance factor shifted for more streetable use; the cam is proprietary and the compression ratio is to our specs at around 8.5:1.

That seems low – most blokes think that higher is better. Can you please explain your approach?

Well you can run a high compression ratio but then you can't build any cylinder pressure. But by using a lower compression ratio and then building cylinder pressure you're going to have something that's going to build torque, and you're going to have more of a consistent load on the motor. The valves close early as the piston is coming up and it starts building pressure in the cylinder and creates a more gradual and longer load on the piston, and this develops a smoother

LEFT: Big Bear supremo Kev Alsop (l) with HD's own, Glenn Priddle



Kevin and Doc discuss beards and tats ...

torque, and do it in a smooth manner. Twist the wick down low and they pull like a train.

You've gone to a lot of trouble and expense to develop your own primary inner and outer cover. Was this mainly a styling thing? They sure look good!

Styling comes into it, but the primary is something that is part of the vibration issue, and we wanted one that performed better. We didn't want a cast primary because of the inherent brittleness and its ability to transmit vibration, and we wanted a tough enough primary that could withstand even 200 to 300hp. The only way to do that is through a forged primary, where we take billet aluminium and heat it to 900 degrees and then smash it in a die, making the structure extremely strong and dense. It has another advantage too, as it comes out very close to tolerance and requires significantly less machining to end up with a fantastic looking product.

I was very impressed with the Baker 6-speed tranny you use and the way it shifts so smoothly, and I was particularly taken with how easy it was to select neutral while stationary at the lights – effortless every time.

Yeah, well everybody knows Baker builds a great tranny; they're just the best in the industry.

Tell us a bit more about your other components ...

Our wheels are our own designs but they're manufactured by Performance Machine, who as you know are also industry leaders. The triple trees and fork tubes are manufactured by us in-house, as are the swingarms and the fenders, and we use Progressive Suspension shocks, which are the best. We manufacture our own kickstand, which is all stainless steel and has been designed for both easy and safe operation. If you forget and leave it down it will fold up on contact, but it also

situation on the piston to a sudden tremendous load, which creates power, certainly, but along with a great vibration frequency – which turns the engine into something of a boneshaker.

Interesting, that's sort of opposite to what people think when they're considering modifying their engines.

Well think about it Doc – just about every big bike marque who builds a street V-twin motor, including Harley-Davidson, Ducati, Honda, and Suzuki, builds it with a compression ratio of around 8-8.5:1 for that very reason.

What sort of figures does your 100 Smooth put out? They certainly go like stink when you twist the wick ...

(Laughs) They're designed to be ridden hard, Doc, but yes, they develop about 80hp and around 100ftlb of



ABOVE: Wildcard assemble BBC bikes with meticulous care. BELOW: A showroom with plenty to show!



has the kickstand safety switch so you can't start it with the stand down, and there's a neutral safety switch too. Of course we make the gas tanks, the fuel filler caps and the top motor mounts, and with our wiring harnesses we use nothing but Deutsch connectors, which are the best and the absolute industry standard for quality.

I'm quite taken with the lighting, especially the unobtrusiveness of the indicators.

Our lighting is all LED, which means no globe problems ever, and our seats are made by High End, who also manufactures all of the Screamin' Eagle seats for Harley-Davidson. We also do the oil tanks and all the associated engineering on oil flow, as well, of course, as frame geometry and many other things. Essentially, that's what makes us different; we're pretty well doing the lot.

I guess there are still some other items you outsource, though not many, by the sound of it.

Yeah, well, there's the petcocks for one, and here we only ever use Golan, because they're the best. But we do pretty much everything else except the engine and transmission, but even there we specify the bill of materials for the product.

Who does your speedos?

Wire Plus make them for us, but we have proprietary faces on them with the neutral, high beam and turn signal indicators, as well as the kickstand light and a low fuel light, which brings up a symbol of a gas pump.

Well it sure sounds like you've got every base covered. Good luck with all your international operations, Kevin, including Europe, which all sounds pretty exciting.

Thanks Doc, and thanks to HEAVY DUTY for your interest in our motorcycles. **HD**



ABOVE: Miss Behavin' on a stunner of a day. Put yourself in the frame?

