

HIGHWAY

Hauler

**BBC BINS THE BAGGER
RULEBOOK...**

WORDS & PICS DOC

In the me-too world we inhabit, which is filled with too many 'same old, same old' bikes and where everybody seems to copy everybody else, the result is that many bikes are virtual look-alikes. Fortunately, Big Bear Choppers' Kevin Alsop has always taken the road less travelled, building slick, innovative bikes with many a proprietary component. Of his new GTX Kevin says, "Cool is cool. And cool will never die." Now who can argue with that?

When thinking about Kevin's approach to designing and manufacturing bikes I reckon the Eagles' song about James Dean sums it up:

*Well talk about a low-down bad refrigerator,
You were just too cool for school,
Sock hop, soda pop, basketball and auto shop,
The only thing that got you off was breakin' all
the rules ...*





The panniers swallow enough gear for a weekend escape for two.



"Now you'd have to agree that in putting this 'too cool for school' bagger together, Kevin has absolutely broken all the rules."



Now you'd have to agree that in putting this "too cool for school" bagger together, Kevin has absolutely broken all the rules.

Baggers are supposed to be big, chunky things – tall, fat and heavy, with skinny wheels and doo-dads clustered all over them like piercings and costume jewellery on an east LA crack whore. They're not supposed to be long and low, with a chopper-like fat back wheel and a raked out front end.

They usually don't have a stretched frame, either – yet Kevin's put a full 12in of mid-section stretch into this radical machine. And there are good reasons for this, for both form and function.

Form contributes to the looks, while the functional aspect allows the rider to sit centrally on the bike with the pillion passenger seated directly over the frame, rather than over the back wheel. This provides two benefits: a lower centre of gravity (much lower than on a standard bagger), and it transfers more weight toward the front, which assists high-speed stability.

Now at first glance armchair critics may sniff at what looks like a tiny fuel tank, which, at three US gallons (11.4lt) it would be. But what they don't realise is that there's a further two gallon (7.6lt) fuel tank under the seat, boosting the total capacity to five gallons (18.9lt), long the standard for tourers.

Now I'm not going to name names as such, but because baggers make up a large section of the market, a lot of manufacturers in what might be described as the Harley-Davidson aftermarket are rolling out bikes they claim to be baggers. However, most of them are garden variety bikes simply with a couple of panniers thrown on the rear.

The difference here is that Kevin started with a clean slate, with no preconceived ideas of what a bagger should be. This bike has virtually no styling cues or boring functional approaches borrowed from any bagger ever seen before.

Of course while this all sounds good, shows creativity, and demonstrates thinking outside of the



box, it all turns to doggy-doo if the bike doesn't function as it should. It must do the job it's designed to do – ie carry two passengers in comfort for reasonably long distances, while still being fun to ride. So, you ask, does it? Yessir – though with some limitations, of course.

Sure, the luggage capacity isn't huge, but it's adequate for you and your significant other to pack all you need for a weekend away.

But don't get one if you're crowd-shy or otherwise anti-social, because this jigger draws a heap of onlookers everywhere you stop, be it for petrol or for a beer. In three days of riding it around Victoria's Gippsland Lakes area and the Mornington Peninsula, I only received positive comments. One young lady on the back of a Road King exclaimed: "Hey look, a chopper with bags – how cool!". Which sums it up pretty well.

Confession time. I fully expected this bike to be somewhat compromised in its handling, what with its length and its massive back tyre. In fact it handles way, way better than I expected. It's not a Ducati 1098 or a Yamaha R1 in the twisties, but it goes around corners a lot better than its dimensions would suggest, thanks to the fine engineering that has gone into its overall design.

The right-side-drive Baker 6-speed 'box keeps the engine and tranny centrally balanced, and taking both hands off the 'bars doesn't bring on a tendency to veer to one side as you'll find on some bikes – instead it tracks straight and true.

Stopping is excellent and there is plenty of power available from the '100 Smooth' S&S engine, which is built to BBC's specifications and provides gobs of torque for overtaking. The riding position is a tad more feet forward than I prefer in a bagger, but I soon found myself getting used to it as the kilometres rolled by.

Several times while scouting a location for a static shoot of the GTX I found myself doing U-turns on fairly narrow country roads, and here again the bike surprised me. I was able to perform this manoeuvre easily – with both feet up – and given that ability, roundabouts are a piece of cake.

Okay, enough about concepts, purpose and innovation; let's walk through this bike front to back. Up front we find a BBC 2in-over fork mounted with a rake of 36 degrees and a triple tree rake of six degrees, which results in a trail of 3.75in. Nice. Also nice is the BBC "smooth mount" design hiding the top of the tubes,



which are set into the triple trees, while at the other end the forks end in a beautiful smooth finish with a hidden axle mount. The forged aluminium wheel carries twin rotors with Performance Machine 4-spot calipers, ever ready to wash off speed when required.

There are eight styles of wheel to choose from, the ones on the test bike being the BBC Engage models, with the front being a 21 x 3.5in unit shod with Avon Venom rubber, the rear being an 18 x 10.5in job, shod with a 300mm Avon hoop. A PM 4-spot caliper does duty down the back.

BBC has gone to great lengths to have engines built for its bikes and it's rightfully proud of them. I'll quote BBC's words here to describe the closed-loop EFI power-



ABOVE: The controls are set a little forward, but you adapt quickly enough.

LEFT: This test bike came with chain drive (with a tensioner), but from now on the GTX will utilise a belt.

ABOVE: Despite its length, it handles bends well.



GUTS & BOLTS

ENGINE

Type: BBC/S&S 100
 SMOOTH™ EFI Evolution
 Finish: Polished/chrome covers
 Displacement: 100ci
 Bore: 4"
 Stroke: 4"
 Compression: 8.5:1
 Horsepower: 95hp
 Torque: 110ftlb
 Induction: S&S closed-loop
 electronic fuel injection
 Air cleaner: S&S Tear Drop
 Oil pump: S&S High Volume

TRANSMISSION

Type: Baker, right side drive
 Gears: 6-speed overdrive
 Primary drive: BBC enclosed,
 wet chain
 Final drive: BBC chain on test
 model – now belt driven

WHEELS & TYRES

Wheels: Big Bear Choppers
 Type: Forged aluminium
 Front rim: 21 x 3.5"
 Rear rim: 18 x 10.5"
 Front tyre: Avon Venom 120mm
 Rear tyre: Avon Venom 300mm
 Front brake: Twin disc
 PM 4-piston calipers
 Rear brake: PM 4-piston caliper

FRAME & SUSPENSION

Make: Softail BBC GTX
 Material: 0.25" steel wall
 Mid-section: 12" Stretch
 Rake: 36°
 Forks: 2"-over, BBC Hidden Axle
 Triple tree: 6"
 Trail: 3.75"
 Rear shocks: Softail-style
 Progressive Suspension
 Seat: GTX 2-up
 Seat height: 25.5" from ground

ELECTRICAL

Wiring harness: BBC/WirePlus
 Charging system: BBC 40-amp
 Ignition: S&S

GUARDS & TINWORK

Fuel tank: GTX plus underseat
 tank, 5.1 gallons total
 Guards: GTX 12-gauge steel

plant that drives this GTX. "Branded as '100 SMOOTH™,' this internally-reformed 100ci engine boasts a healthy 110ftlb of torque. With a square configuration of a 4in bore and a 4in stroke, proprietary compression ratios, redesigned cam timing and reciprocating weights all result in an incredibly smooth-running engine, while meeting all the strict legal requirements. While looking like any other S&S Super Sidewinder engine from the outside, the essence of this new engine is the low vibration. High engine vibration is an enemy to both the rider and the motorcycle. The effects of high engine vibration may cause premature rider fatigue. Eliminate engine vibration and you will eliminate potential problems."

The Baker Drivetrain 6-speed tranny is renowned for its smooth shifting and durability and is nicely paired with the torquey engine. Between them sits the BBC proprietary primary and once again I'll let BBC describe it. "This newly designed proprietary primary is built tough and reliable along with very sleek, new generation aesthetics, with a cool BBC-branded inspection cover. This primary drive is approximately 200 per cent stronger than most other manufacturers' primaries, with its machined forged aluminium inner and outer cases. The dense aluminium material makes for a unit that doesn't flex under heavy torque, and absorbs most engine vibration. Another great attribute that sets this primary drive ahead of the curve is the triple seal design on the main shaft, as opposed to an industry standard single seal, ensuring virtually no leaks. The starter motor shaft accessory plate is removable for an easy starter change-out. The internals utilise an easy-to-replace standard clutch basket and a compensating sprocket for smooth power transfer."

With such a futuristic design and considerable technical innovation, it may come as a surprise to find a chain final drive. This is because when BBC was building the first 10 production bikes, belts long enough weren't available. Now they are, but I found this chain-

driven model to be as smooth as silk through the entire drive, aided no doubt by the final drive chain tensioner.

On most pannier-equipped touring bikes the bags hide the shocks, but not so on the GTX. This bike uses Softail-style rear suspension, with two underslung shocks from Progressive Suspension doing the ride-softening duty – a role they perform well. Also innovative is the rear guard that moves with the swingarm. Sound familiar? Well it's my understanding that Kevin came out with this concept some time before you-know-who released the Rocker ...

There's a lot more detail in this bike than we have space for, but by now you should have a good overview of this ground-breaking new entry to the touring scene. I know I enjoyed my three days on it zooming around the highways and byways of rural Victoria, being continually amazed at just how easily this behemoth can be slung around. It's impressive how well it holds the road in big, sweeping corners in need of attention from road crews, and how stable it is in a straight line at speeds that would cause Mr Plod to quickly relieve me of my licence should I happen to be caught.

Now Big Bear Choppers offers two models of GTX; the Standard, which is the one you see on these pages, and the GTX Fairing, which as the name suggests comes with a fairing and screen. An in-between option of course could be to fit a Standard GTX with one of the many quickly detachable screens available from the aftermarket, should that be your wish.

For more details on this bagger with a difference, check out BBC's Aussie distributor, Wildcard Customs – visit www.wildcardcustoms.com.au or call 07 5443 5548 and ask for Kelvin or any of the friendly guys at its Maroochydore (Qld) facility. The website is comprehensive and easily navigated, with great photos and a wealth of information on BBC's top products. **HD**