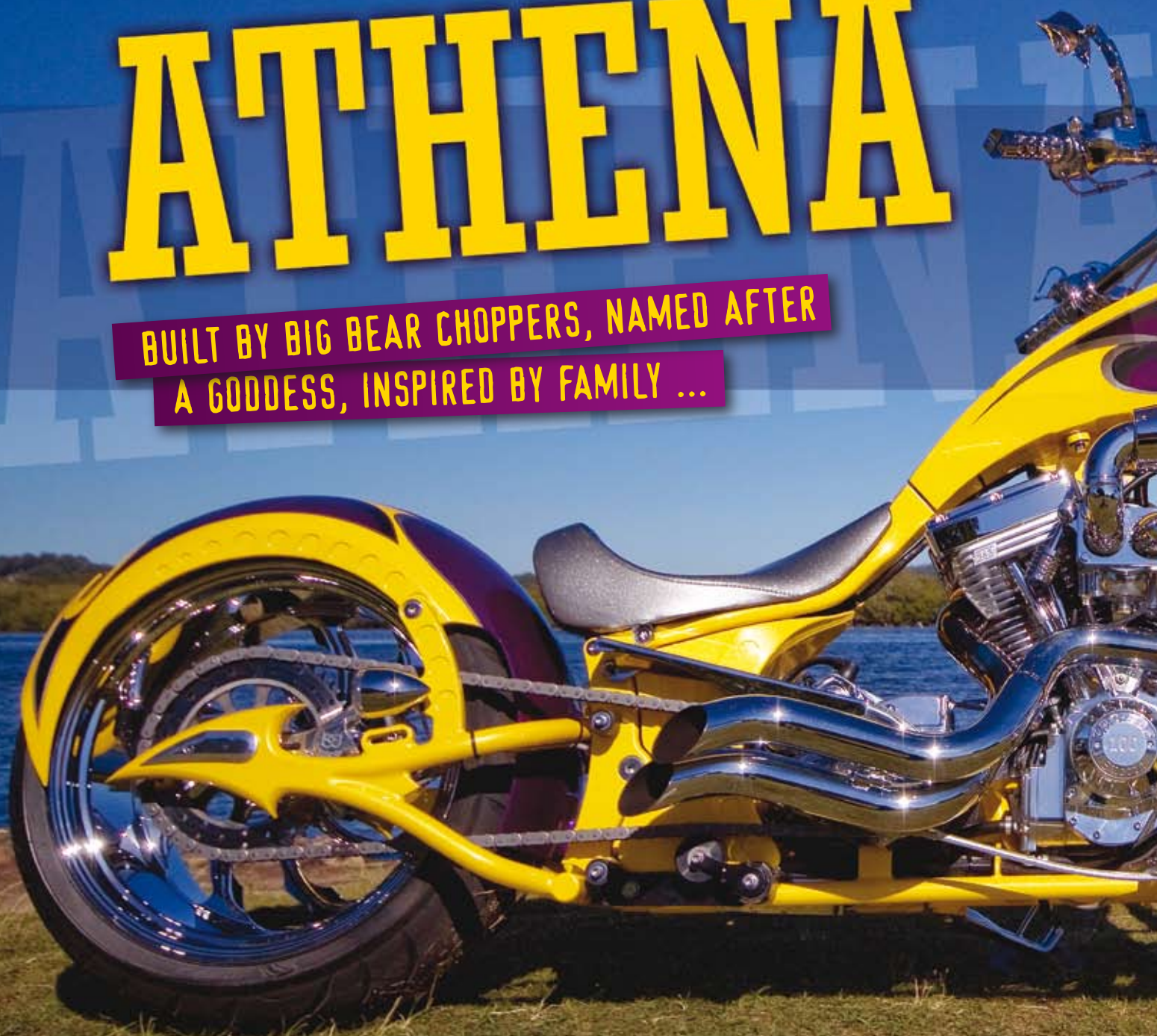


ATHENA

BUILT BY BIG BEAR CHOPPERS, NAMED AFTER
A GODDESS, INSPIRED BY FAMILY ...



WORDS DOC PICS GLENN PRIDDLE

Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, war, the arts, industry, justice and skill, was also the favourite child of Zeus, the king of the gods. Athena is also the latest model line in Kevin Alsop's US-based operation, Big Bear Choppers, but it wasn't named due to some mystical tie-in with the aforementioned goddess. Rather, there's a very human story behind the naming, and one that in

terms of a Greek tragedy is indeed apt, but we'll get to that later on.

Now it so happens that I've long been a fan of Kevin Alsop, the expatriate Aussie bike builder who took on one of the toughest challenges in the manufacturing world: building V-twin motorcycles in the Harley-Davidson aftermarket. Many have tried but few have succeeded in this hard-as-nails business. And lots of companies that didn't make it started out with rich backers and not an inconsiderable amount of talent,



yet fell by the wayside for a variety of reasons.

But Kevin's Big Bear Choppers is still out there and still producing cutting-edge motorcycles, while much of the competition has long since crashed and burned. There are some very good reasons for this, including the fact that Big Bear Choppers has never stopped refining, improving and re-inventing its models, as well as coming out with new ones.

Not only is Kevin's eye for design pretty bloody good but he continually pushes the envelope in

the manufacturing sphere, too. I've toured the BBC factory several times now, including one visit with the entire HEAVY DUTY Sturgis tour group, and both the manufacturing machinery and the manufacturing process is impressive.

In Kevin's own words, "We design and manufacture every bit of the frame, tanks, fenders, 'bars and front ends, along with foot controls and other proprietary components – all for the purpose of an absolute motorcycle."





Pegasus rides again, this time on the fuel tank of a modern goddess...

Recently representatives from the Australian Government flew to America to inspect the BBC manufacturing process and wholeheartedly endorsed it from go to whoa. As far as I am aware, no one else in the Harley-Davidson aftermarket can say that about their plant.

So, with BBC we have great bikes, bikes with an Aussie flavour and bikes that are cutting-edge cool and ultra reliable. What more could one want? A BBC chopper of one's own, naturally. And that is exactly what owner Cam has achieved. But as the Demtel man spruiks on telly, "Wait – there's more!"

You see this isn't the first Athena Cameron has owned. And no, he didn't throw the other one down the road, he sold it to a good mate, because Cam came to fancy the look and riding position of the chopper version.

You see, most of Big Bear's model range has not

just one, but two or three varieties – a Chopper version, a ProStreet version and a 2-up version. Cam previously owned the ProStreet version of the Athena, but decided he liked the style of the Athena range so much that rather than choosing another of BBC's swish designs – such as the Paradox, the Sled, the Venom, a Reaper, Devil's Advocate, Merc, Screamin' Demon or Miss Behavin' – he again chose an Athena, this time the Chopper model.

Together with Wildcard Custom's Chris Hill, Cam chose a range of components to make his bike a personal statement. Naturally an S&S BBC proprietary Smooth motor is the beast's powerplant, a motor built to Kevin's carefully considered specifications.

A motor has gotta breathe to perform and in this instance the breathing is taken care of by a Wimmer Machine Dual Super Sucker air cleaner. It filters out the airborne crap, while a BBC Fastback exhaust





spits the spent gases back into the atmosphere. This is a cool exhaust system and the diameter of the Fastbacks starts at 1.75in and ends up at 2.25in. They are premium chrome plated on the outside with ceramic coating on the inside, the latter to keep the unavoidable discolouration of the chrome plating to a minimum. Before leaving the powerplant I should mention that while an S&S carby is found in its usual spot, in this instance it's been jetted up to add a little extra 'throttle response' to an already powerful engine.

The Rolls-Royce of transmissions, a Baker Drivetrain unit, provides a well-spaced range of six gears to maximise the S&S engine's horsepower and torque, while with a 3in BDL open primary offers cool looks and bullet-proof function.

Speaking of cool looks, the industrial hot rod drilled holes on the frame downtube and rear guard struts add a further dimension of style while the patented Devil's Tail swingarm is a work of art in its own right, with 12

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individual compound bends that dovetail seamlessly into the two axle brackets.

And how about the lines of that fuel tank; sharp, aggressive, hard-edged and somewhat futuristic, they flow down seamlessly to the comfortable solo seat. Said seat, I should add, has since been changed to a purple one that unfortunately wasn't ready in time for this photoshoot. Additional hard-edged aggression – as if it was needed – is well supplied by the dagger-like rear section of the rear guard that, like the Devil's Tail swingarm, drips with understated menace.

I have a mate, a long term biker, who has begrudgingly accepted the electric leg, electronic ignition and even (almost) EFI, but there's one rule he reckons should never be broken – all choppers, bobbers and pro-street bikes should be black. It doesn't matter what colour black, or whether it's gloss or matt, but they must be black.

I've long disagreed with him on this, and obviously Cam does too. He chose the colour combination because he wanted the bike to be noticed. Well, he sure got that right. Cam informs me the idea for the purple was inspired by the song Start Wearing Purple, by the multi-ethnic gypsy punk band Gogol Bordello. Oops, there I go again – inventing reasons just because I thought they sounded better than the Violet Crumble wrapper that actually was the inspiration ...

But who am I to question Cam? As a humble motorcycle journalist I must defer to a man who makes his living with paint at Total Fleet Imaging, a company specialising in truck and trailer curtain painting and signage (www.totalfleetimagine.net.au). And before painting, the welds on the frame were smoothed and moulded to create a really nice finishing touch.

Cam tells me that the yellow “was just one we made up” and I think you'll agree that the yellow complements the purple, and vice-versa. A nice touch is a mural of the mythical horse Pegasus, also from the Greek pantheon.

In one Biker Build-Off episode, which pitted Kevin Alsop against builder Ivy Trosclair of Metry Customs (and was won by Kevin), it was revealed that the bike he built for the show was named Athena in honour of the daughter of his long-time friend and work mate, 'Mike the Greek'. Mike's beautiful daughter had passed away in a car accident, and in a touching gesture Kevin had her portrait painted on the tank of his championship-winning bike. The video concludes with Kevin informing Mike that his winning bike will go into production, named after his daughter Athena. He then presented the bike to Mike as a gift.

Now Cam's pretty happy with his new ride, but he does have one complaint: his old bike – the one he sold to his mate – beat out his new one at a recent bike show. Well, as bikers we well know that sh*t happens but they reckon you can't keep the smile off Cam's face once he throws a leg over this spectacular chopper. Kids smile and wave, soccer mums wink and heaps of people hang their camera phone out the window to snap a pic as he rides past. A mega-cool, attention-getting ride is what he wanted. It's also what he got. Onya Cam. **HD**

GUTS & BOLTS

ENGINE

Type:BBC/S&S 100 SMOOTH
 Finish: ..Polished/chrome covers
 Displacement:100ci
 Bore/stroke:4”
 Compression:8.5:1
 Induction:S&S Super E
 Air cleaner: ...Wimmer Machine
Dual Super Sucker
 Exhaust: BBC Fastbacks
 Ignition: S&S
 Oil pump: S&S high volume
 Horsepower: 110hp (est.)
 Torque: 110ftlb-plus (est.)

TRANSMISSION

Type: Baker RSD
 Finish:.....Polished/chrome covers
 Gears:6-speed overdrive
 Primary drive: BDL open primary
 Final drive: BBC chain
 BrakeDrive system

FRAME & SUSPENSION

Make:BBC Athena Chopper
 Type:Softail
 Neck rake:40°
 Fork: BBC smooth mount
 hidden axle
 Triple tree rake:6°
 Tube length:Plus 10”
 Rear: Progressive Suspension
 Swingarm: BBC Athena
 Seat height: ... 20” from ground

WHEELS & TYRES

Wheels:PM Torque
 Type:Forged aluminium
 Finish:Chrome plated
 F rim: 21”
 R rim: 18”
 F tyre:Avon Venom 21”
 R tyre:Avon Venom 300mm
 F brake: ..PM four-piston caliper
 R brake:BBC/PM four-piston
 BrakeDrive system
 Wiring harness:BBC/WirePlus
 Charging system:BBC 40a
 Coil: 80,000v Mini
 Starter: .Polished/chrome covers

DIMENSIONS

Handlebars: Burleigh Bars
 Grips: Excel Performance
 Mirrors: ... Wicked Image Gothic
 Headlight:BBC
 Forward controls:BBC
 Footpegs: Ness Tech

GUARDS & TINWORK

Tanks: BBC Athena
 R guard:BBC Pointed
12-gauge steel
 F guard: BBC Athena
12-gauge steel
 Paint:Wilky's Pro Paint
 Pery Mallett