

Just a small part of the custom show.



WORDS: BLUE PHOTOS: BLUE AND HORST ROSLER

MOTOR BIKE EXPO

VERONA FIERA, VERONA, NORTHERN ITALY

There is only one thing that puzzles me about the magnificent Motor Bike Expo in Verona, and that is – where were you all?!

It's January, it's invariably cold and wet, there are these amazing inventions that they call aeroplanes and they fly to the tiny and very nice airport of Villafranca just outside Verona. Even better, both Easyjet and British Airways will fly you direct to Verona from London Gatwick (and back again) and, for this miracle of modern aviation, they will ask less than the price of a single peak time train journey from London to Manchester.

Once in Verona there are countless hotels and bed and breakfasts that you can find on internet booking sites. One of our party found an excellent B&B for 135 euros for three nights where the landlady wanted to adopt him. And where, in January—or any other time of the year, for that matter—are you going to find a show in the United Kingdom that has hundreds of top class custom bikes, hundreds of trade stalls and exhibitors, sunshine, good food, beer and wine?

Right, that's the sales pitch over, although I genuinely don't understand why more Brits don't visit what is now the best custom show in Europe. So you don't speak Italian? Nor do I, but I manage

for a weekend without starving, sleeping on the streets or going without a glass of wine for more than an hour.

After a pleasant Easyjet flight (I know the words 'pleasant' and 'budget airline' don't always go together, but give the company its due, everything was quick and efficient, from check in to bags arriving before us on the reclaim carousel), I met up with Mark and Linda Wilsmore of the Ace Café and Neil Blaber of the AMD World Championship and we paused first for refreshments. Before we had even left the airport I had thrown coffee everywhere and Fulvio Battistini had been appointed as my responsible adult. Fulvio is a legend, the patriarch of the company which bears his family name, a real gentleman and it seems there's no-one in Italy who he doesn't know. He is also 81 years old, which shows you just how irresponsible I am.

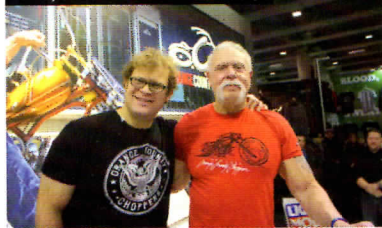
Friday is normally the quietest day of any show and, while the Motor Bike Expo probably welcomed fewer people on Friday than on the following two days, 'quiet' is a relative term. In short, it was ◊



Hair coordinated with paintwork. Always a nice touch.



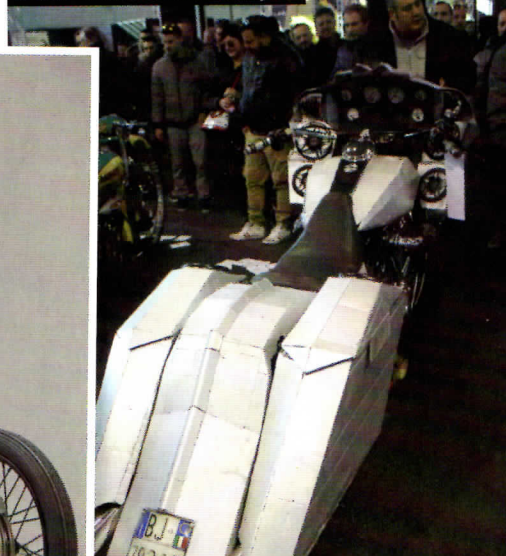
Mikey and Paul Teutul Sr on duty.



Fred Kodlin (centre) looking cheerful as he unveils the Harley Sportster he has built for Custom Chrome Europe's Bolt On And Ride programme. That is Fred looking cheerful...



A bagger made of cardboard? Well, at least it would burn more easily...



There was bicycle and moped racing although, with the commentary in Italian, I never understood quite what was going on.



Blech & Drüber and Karpatenhund, second placed in the Championship class of the Custom Chrome International Bike Show.

I GENUINELY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY MORE BRITS DON'T VISIT WHAT IS NOW THE BEST CUSTOM SHOW IN EUROPE

The Blech & Drüber guys winning the Harley-Davidson styling trophy, presented by Karen Davidson (left), Ray Drea (third left) and Tony Pink (far right).



Pete Pearson (right) of Rocket Bobs Cycles explains Speed Weevil to the world's top custom motorcycle photographer, Michael Lichter.

The united forces of Rocket Bobs, Hardnine Choppers, Custom Design Studios and AMD celebrating the end of a great show.



Steve Hopkins (right) and Boccin of Boccin Custom Cycles. Despite being from Bristol, Steve speaks fluent Italian which made our lives much easier!



Royal Enfield and a host of tricked out Bullets.



packed. 'Packed' is also relative. Because the show and the site is so huge, there were few points at which it seemed uncomfortably busy. Spread out over seven massive halls that make the NEC look like a village hall, the space was more than enough to accommodate the crowds. Just as well, as 160,000 visitors came to the show over the course of three days. That's 50,000 more people than go to the NEC bike show during nine days and, unlike that show, Motor Bike Expo is all about custom bikes.

Much of the custom show dominated hall one, interspersed with stands from builders, including the Ness family, Cory and Zach being regulars at the show. This year they had also brought along the youngest member of what could be seen as custom motorcycling's royal family. Max Ness is only 23, but he bought his first Victory Vision when he was 17 and set about customising it. Mind you, he has also just graduated from university with a degree in Retail and Consumer Sciences, so the lad has something to fall back on should the family business not work out!

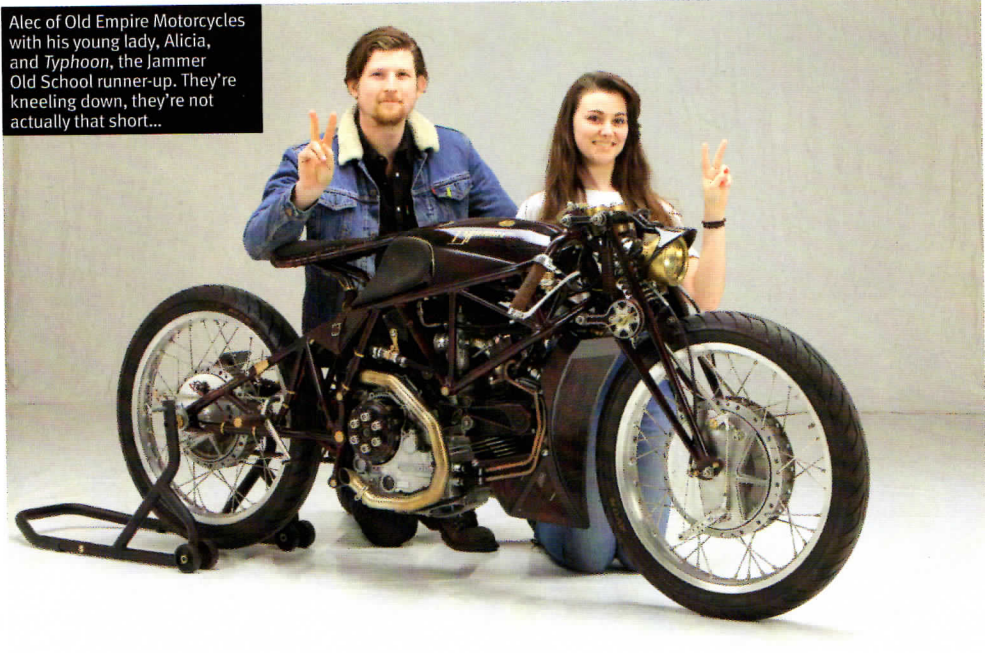
The custom show always produces a huge variety

of builds and this year was no different. It housed everything from a bagger fully kitted out with cardboard bodywork—I'm not sure what was going on there but at least it would make it more combustible, which is no bad thing in my book—to the tiny *Ciuf-Ciuf*. Now, I admit when I initially saw photos of this bike, I had reservations. Fitting a Harley engine into what resembles a bicycle frame with forks seemingly no chunkier than matchsticks struck me as an exercise in futility while I was perplexed by the headlight with its long cowl. The clue to the inspiration was in the final drive which had dispensed with anything to do with modern technology and was based on a locomotive drive. Then it all started to make sense, the headlight, and even the name which, as the owner from Apuania Choppers explained, translates as 'Chuff Chuff'. I'm not sure just how far you would want to ride *Ciuf-Ciuf*, but it was a stylish and clever piece of work and I took rather a shine to it.

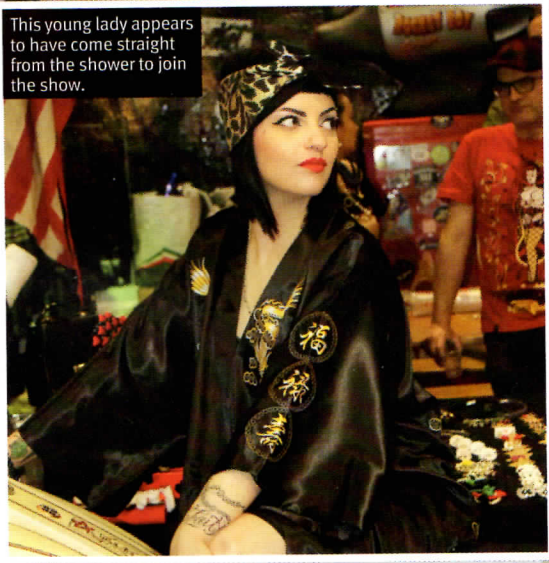
I'm not sure if I can remember British bikes taking part in the show at Verona before (and if so, they've certainly never reached double figures in the event's history), but this year saw entries from Rocket Bobs Cycles, Warr's Harley-Davidson and Shaw Harley-Davidson (both exhibiting on MAG Europe's stand) and, from Old Empire Motorcycles, the *Typhoon* Ducati, as seen way back in 100% Biker #192. Not a massive showing, perhaps, among the hundreds of show bikes, but it's a start. Pete and Lisa Pearson of Rocket Bobs had brought along *Speed Weevil* and the *Gas'd Rat* Shovelhead. Pete hadn't been convinced about showing *Gas'd Rat* as he built it some four years ago. However, he was persuaded by others, although he did then strip the whole bike to bits in the run up to the show and made it even shinier and prettier.



Alec of Old Empire Motorcycles with his young lady, Alicia, and Typhoon, the Jammer Old School runner-up. They're kneeling down, they're not actually that short...



This won the Lowride custom show. We were as surprised as you. It's called the Special Bike. I don't think any further comment is needed.

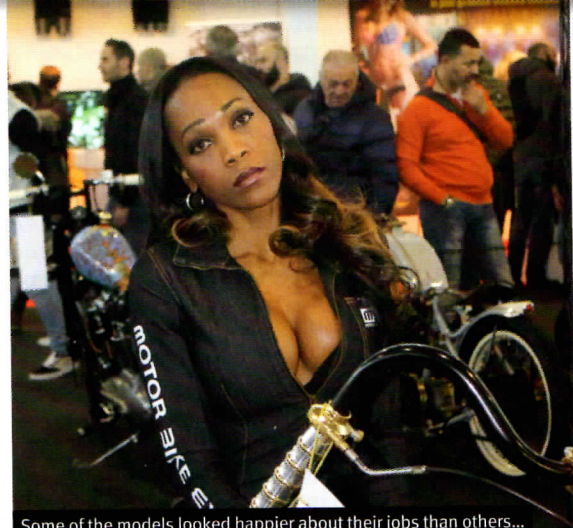


This young lady appears to have come straight from the shower to join the show.

THIS YEAR'S SAW ENTRIES FROM ROCKET BOBS CYCLES, WARR'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON, SHAW HARLEY-DAVIDSON AND OLD EMPIRE MOTORCYCLES

Rocket Bobs shared a stand with Hardnine Choppers of Switzerland and Custom Design Studios of California, an arrangement that worked well in a raucous sort of way, with both the shiny Shovel and the tiny Bonneville-bound Triumph constantly under scrutiny for the whole three days. We found that, probably because it's so little, people couldn't resist touching *Weevil*, even after a polite 'Non Toccare' notice (Google Translate is a wonderful invention) had been made. Another plus in Motor Bike Expo's favour is that it's not a static show. There was something going on in one of the halls or outside

throughout the weekend. Outside, in cold but bright sunshine, crowds flocked to the stunt and drift shows as well as the moped racing, while inside there were timed events like the unveiling of Custom Chrome Europe's latest Bolt On And Ride motorcycle. I went along to this out of curiosity and because I knew there would be free fizzy alcohol. Fred Kodlin is a fine builder but his taste and mine don't often coincide these days, especially when it comes to his apparent quest to fit the biggest wheel possible to a motorcycle. So, when the covers came off the bike, I was all ready to adopt a suitably neutral expression. That wasn't



Some of the models looked happier about their jobs than others...

HD Pavia's Boardtrack Racer which took top honours in the RevTech Performance class.



PART OF MY WORK WAS PICKING A BIKE FOR THE 100% BIKER MAGAZINE AWARD, WHICH THE MBE KINDLY INVITED US TO PRESENT ONCE AGAIN

needed; Herr Kodlin had unexpectedly built a very neat and compact Sportster for which the term 'street racer' might have been coined.

One of the main draws of the show—for the paying public, at least—was the appearance of Paul Teutul Senior and his son Mikey of *American Chopper* who were holding regular photo and autograph signing sessions on the stand of Burning Rubber which distributes, among others, Orange County Choppers' merchandise. I've always taken a bit of 'on the fence' attitude when it comes to OCC. They may never have actually built a bike I liked, but they did open up custom motorcycling to a huge audience and particularly to youngsters. I wasn't sure quite what I expected of father and son, but I have to say, they were both charming. Mikey may come across as an annoying brat on television, but in person he never stopped smiling and was clearly thoroughly enjoying the show. *American Chopper* was obviously an even bigger hit in Italy than in the UK to judge by the crowds of people who wanted to meet them, and each session went on far longer than advertised. Paul Teutul Sr is also a sucker for collecting rescue animals and that puts him up quite a number of Brownie points in my book.

I did come across one or two Brits on my travels—not enough though!—including the Sinroja brothers from their eponymously named company who were blown away by the event. Next year, boys? Hall 4 has, over the last couple of years, become the province of café racers, as popular in Italy as elsewhere in the world. Two of the regular and always busy stands were our own Ace Café and that of Mr Martini. Mr Martini is a builder and also runs a bar and restaurant in Verona, while the company's stands are always among the most innovative and striking of the show. Previous stands have included a circus theme, a London Routemaster and last year, Alice in Wonderland with



A rejuvenated Gas'd Rat came back better than ever.

a snail 'train ride'. I've always loved the ideas, but this year not so much. For 2017, Mr Martini had pursued a boxing theme with a full-size boxing ring in which bikes were displayed and pretty girls paraded. It was a great idea but, because the ring was so high off the ground, didn't work well in practice. It was impossible to see the bikes in the ring properly or, with thick ropes in the way, even photograph them.

From hall 5 onwards, the more mainstream came into play, with many of the major manufacturers showing their latest models (including, yes, FB Mondial's Hipster), while the final two halls are given over to a certain amount of oddments—catering, somewhere where people could sell their bikes and various trade stands. To backtrack a little, despite the number of visitors, there were many catering establishments both inside and out so queues were relatively short. What a pleasure to go to a show

Little Speed Weevil, surrounded by its winnings.



Charlie Stockwell of Warrs Harley-Davidson, delicious with joy at finishing in the top three of the Modified Harley class with the JT Rascal Racer.



Ciuf-Ciuf (pronounced 'Chuff-Chuff'), part bicycle, part steam train.



The crew of Cycledelic Garage making their own entertainment.



REMEMBER I SAID THERE WERE JUST A HANDFUL OF BRITISH BIKES IN THE SHOW? WELL, BOY, DID THEY PUNCH ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT!

where there's more on offer than burgers and hot dogs (although those were available) and a huge baguette stuffed with salami and salad was only a few euros.

Part of my work at the show was not only being a judge for the Custom Chrome International Custom Show, but also picking a bike for the 100% Biker Magazine Award, which the MBE kindly invited us to present once more. It would be too easy to just pick a bike I liked, I wanted something that I felt would appeal to many of you and that would also reflect the ethos of the magazine. I made a shortlisted of, oh, around 20 bikes, but, in the end, I kept coming back to one in particular. You will be seeing *Sacred*, a Pan/Shovel by Boccin Custom Cycles, in a future issue and I hope you think I didn't pick too badly.

Finally it was time for the prizegiving. Remember how I said there were just a handful of British bikes in the show? Well, boy, did they punch above their weight! Charlie Stockwell picked up 3rd place in the Modified Harley-Davidson class for Warr's Harley-

Davidson. A somewhat shellshocked Alec Sharpe was called to the stage to collect the runner-up trophy in the Jammer Old School class and then Rocket Bobs went and won the Modified Harley-Davidson class with *Gas'd Rat*. Incidentally, this was the very first time that the jury of ten judges had all put the same bike in first place. And then, if that wasn't enough, *Speed Weevil* took top honours in the Championship Class (again, an almost unanimous decision with only one judge not placing it first). To see three British builders take four of the fifteen trophies was pretty damn good. And that really sums Verona up—pretty damn good. Get yourself there next year. ☘

Thank you in particular to Harley Staniforth who was in his first year handling Foreign Relations for the MBE and who went beyond the call of duty to make sure everyone was happy before and over the weekend.