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TAXTABASH

“I only came in for a swingarm, but ended up with a full build...” In his own words, that’s how Steve Seddon’s Shovelhead, ‘Taxtabash’, came into being

 **WORDS & PHOTOS: STU GARLAND**




The place that he’d visited in search of said component was Rocket Bobs Cycle Works of Swindon, and that such a relatively simple request morphed into an entire project says a lot about how impressed Steve was with the workshop. Steve was happy to hand the mission over to Pete Pearson of Rocket Bobs, confident in the knowledge that his vision of a retro-flavoured Harley chop would be fulfilled.

Amongst the main elements of the bike that Steve already had but needed tying together was a fully rebuilt V-twin lump, put together by highly regarded spannerman, Dave Francis. Based in Southport—not too far from

Steve’s home in Lancashire—Dave has long been the ‘go-to’ man in the North-West (and indeed, beyond the region’s confines) for anything and everything to do with Harley-Davidson engines. Dave assembled the engine, with characteristic meticulous care, to original 1979 1200cc (74 cubic-inch) Shovelhead specifications, the only notable internal modification coming in the shape of a more efficient S&S oil pump.

Rocket Bobs is an established official dealer for a number of aftermarket parts manufacturers, one of which is Morris, the top-of-the-range magneto ignition systems much favoured by race teams around the world. So it wasn’t particularly surprising

when, in due course, the Shovelhead engine sprouted a Morris M5 mag unit that includes the all-new drive assembly housed within a complete replacement for the standard timing cover. The M5 is described by the company as the ‘soft kick’ option, though I think Pete would have something to say about such a liberal interpretation of that phrase...

The handling of fuel delivery duties was assigned to a dual throat S&S carb with mesh-fitted bellmouths, while spent gases depart via a one-off 2-into-2 straight-through shorty exhaust system fabricated in the Rocket Bobs workshop. It’s a tricky combo for anyone to set up properly, hence Pete’s joy at firing 





the bike up for the first time, as documented in footage available to view on Youtube.

But before that triumphant moment there was plenty of other work to be done. From the outset, Steve had wanted to incorporate as many original '79 factory Shovelhead features as possible wherever and whenever practical. For instance, instead of sticking the lower fork sliders on a lathe and smoothing everything out by removing the reflector blocks, as had been common practice during the historical era of custom building that *Taxtabash* reflects, they remained unshaved, while he also declined the option of uprating the front brakes to 21st century standards by choosing to

fit a pair of stock 2-piston Harley calipers.

In the same spirit, the numerous frame castings were left as the Motor Company intended, though that presented other problems; for example, the foot controls simply wouldn't fit the standard attachment points, so Pete fabricated a set of one-off mounting brackets anchored behind the rear cylinder. The retention of these castings has left future options open for Steve, should he ever consider re-vamping the bike in a more original fashion, but he also figured that it would represent an authentic period approach to building this kind of chop. And besides, the priority was to get the

thing back on the road as quickly as possible rather than spending Lord knows how long polishing out every single imperfection or grinding/hacksawing off all redundant lugs and brackets.

Where the suspension was concerned, Steve decided on an upgraded set-up comprising a pair of short Hagon shocks and an Arrowhead swinging arm conversion that replicates the typical 4-speed configuration whereby the wheel spindle slot is sited above the axis of the tubular member. A Springer Softail twin-pot caliper is anchored firmly to a one-off torque arm—machined in-house at Rocket Bobs—which is mounted at its lower end to the bottom shock mount. Still at the

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'79 FACTORY SHOVELHEAD FEATURES AS POSSIBLE
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PETE INCORPORATED INTO THE TANK A NEAT BRASS WINDOW FUEL LEVEL GAUGE, A USEFUL LITTLE ADDITION THAT HE REPEATED WITH THE OIL TANK

back end, Pete came up with the idea of mounting the Lowbrow oil filter onto the swinging arm axle plate, and ensured that the oil lines would clear the tyre safely by securing them with some ingenious invisibly-mounted clips.

The list of Rocket Bob's one-offs on *Taxtabash* also includes the concise single-strut rear mudguard, a minimal solo seat and the rabbit-ear/Z-bar hybrid handlebars. The composite open belt primary assembly, too,

was down to Pete's efforts in matching and mating parts from a BDL kit to others from Cycle Jammer, while the accompanying outrigger was another product machined from scratch. Then, of course, there's the radically modified Sportster tank, which was de-tunnelled to sit high on the frame's top tube, and fitted with an extended filler neck with a one-off cap. Pete also incorporated into the tank a neat brass window fuel level gauge, a useful little addition

that he repeated with the modified 1979 H-D Low Rider oil tank. In fact, the more you look, the more you see of the machined brass detailing throughout the bike, all of which came from the lathe and milling machine at Rocket Bobs.

Now, Steve works 'in the oil business', and as such, he's obliged to spend much of his time abroad. Thus, synchronising diaries between he and Pete proved to be somewhat less than straightforward, meaning that the overall build time stretched ◻



SPECIFICATION SHEET

ENGINE:

1979 1200cc (74 cu in) Harley-Davidson Shovelhead V-twin rebuilt by Dave Francis, S&S Cycles oil pump, dual throat S&S carburettor, open mesh brass bellmouth intakes, Morris M5 magneto ignition, one-off 2-into-2 shorty exhaust system with brass tips by Rocket Bobs, remote Lowbrow oil filter, composite BDL/Cycle Jammer belt primary drive assembly, one-off Rocket Bobs outrigger, 4-speed kickstart H-D gearbox, hand gearshift with one-off knob.

FRAME:

Twin downtube 1979 H-D 4-speed Shovelhead front loop, Arrowhead swinging arm conversion.

FRONT END:

Stock length 35mm H-D FXER forks, 21" rim laced to twin-disc H-D star hub, 3.00 x 21" Avon Speedmaster MkII tyre, dual H-D single-pot calipers, braided stainless brake line, one-off Rocket Bobs handlebars, K-Tech master cylinder/lever, K-Tech throttle unit, Lowbrow customs 'Coke bottle' handgrips, Chinese headlight.

REAR END:

16" H-D wheel, 5.00 x 16" Avon Safety Mileage Mk II tyre, one-off stainless Rocket Bobs axle, spacers, etc, Custom Chrome mini-disc, twin-pot H-D Springer caliper, one-off torque arm, braided stainless brake line, modified single-strut Custom Chrome mudguard, nitrous Hagon shocks, 530 DID O-ring chain, Crime Scene Choppers taillight.

MISCELLANEOUS:

De-tunnelled H-D Sportster petrol tank, brass window fuel level gauge, extended filler neck with one-off cap, one-off Rocket Bobs solo seat, modified 1979 H-D Low Rider oil tank with one-off brass window oil level gauge, one-off foot control mounts, one-off Rocket Bobs gear lever and linkage.

PAINT & FINISH:

Candy apple over metalflake paintwork to owner's design by Art Slade. Powder coating by Rocket Bobs.



OH YES, THE BIKE'S NAME, 'TAXTABASH'...

out rather longer than either of them would have liked. On top of that, Pete says that the project "...put up a bit of a battle", but clearly experience ultimately prevailed, and though it might have been a long time coming, Steve is happy to concede that it was well worth the wait.

Oh yes, the bike's name, 'Taxtabash'. I'm sure that you would be interested to know its derivation, and here's me, almost forgetting entirely to explain it. As I said, Steve's job takes him wherever there's oil

to be extracted from the ground, and he's currently undertaking lengthy stints on the shores of the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan. He assured me that the colloquial translation of Taxtabash from the Azeri language is 'Shithead', something that needs no further explanation given that Steve earnestly requested a grateful mention in print for the staff at the Fountain bar in the main square of the capital, Baku, for "...putting up with all my shite." 'Nuff said, I do believe. ☒