

Bad Boy BLACKBIRD



A custom black and yellow Rocket Bobs motorcycle is parked on a sandy beach. The bike features a black frame, a black fuel tank with yellow pinstriping and the word "BLACK" in yellow script, and a black seat with yellow stitching. The engine is black with a red air filter. The exhaust system is made of polished metal. The front wheel is black with a yellow rim. The background shows a beach with some water and a cloudy sky.

BRITISH BUILDER ROCKET BOBS REFUTES THE ROCKER'S UGLY DUCKLING TAG...

WORDS DOC PICS ROCKET BOBS

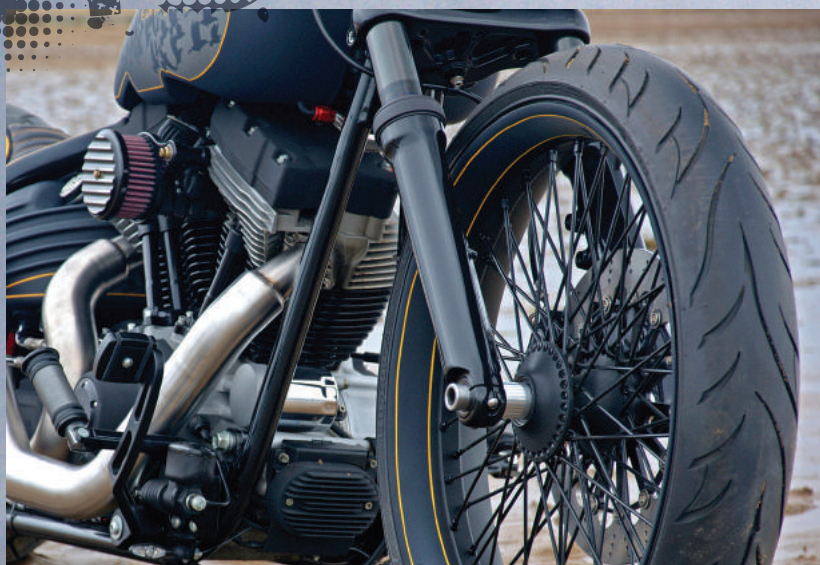
Rocket Bobs, eh? When I first heard the name I imagined a run-down bar way out in the Nevada desert near Area 51, with vultures circling overhead and the darkness inside sheltering a mix of tired humanity. Burnt out prospectors in sweat-stained baseball caps, semi-retired hookers and grizzled war vets, along with a handful of fugitives on the FBI's 'wanted' list ...

As it turns out, I couldn't have been further from the truth. Rocket Bobs (www.rocketbobs.biz) is a cool custom bike shop near Oxford in the

very heart of ol' Blighty, and one that's turning out some first-class rides, at that.

Pete Pearson is the guiding light behind Rocket Bobs and he brings with him a lifelong love affair with Harleys, plus some 30 years of experience in the design and engineering of race bikes. Let's hand it over to Pete for the lowdown on the fine machine before us ...

"My obsession is with design, but not just any aspect of design – I'm into flawed, iconic design. It's not necessarily the obvious, mainstream stuff, but usually mechanical and mostly from the US of A.



ABOVE: **Supercool Apollo SL** rims set off to perfection by **Art Slade Graphics**.
TOP: The 103in kit provides plenty of punch.

"To me, a finished piece of work is one you can spin through a full 360 degrees, with it morphing as you do so, but with every change as adrenalin-charged as the last. We're not talking amorphous Euro blobs like those red penis rockets from Italy, we're talking sculpted curves, Coke bottles, Zippo lighters and '60s muscle cars.

"The 1969 Charger is a good example – it looks impossibly svelte from a dead profile, and yet changes to a squat, badass mutha from a front or rear three-quarter view, and the looks keep changing as you walk around it.

"But not everything is as 'finished', like Harley's Rocker. From the rear three-quarter view the Rocker is at its worst, in my opinion. The tank becomes so thin and out of place it utterly destroys the whole bike.

"The skinny 19in front wheel,

however, is probably the biggest 'WTF' moment, and in flat profile so much of the scoot jars with your mind that the very first time I saw one I immediately left the showroom, muttering incoherently under my breath.

"However, there are minor details, such as the headlight mount or the full-on 'Coke bottle' moment offered by the oil bag, that are often passed over when viewing this polarising model. And while the debate will continue, in the meantime there are plenty around to snap up and re-build into something more ripped.

"I wanted someone to give me free reign over a Rocker build, and Jim gave me that opportunity. Together we put together a plan that allowed me to create a Rocker to my vision, with no compromises and no area left untouched.

"Several aspects to the Rocker's design grabbed my attention. The seat height is governed by a poor rear frame design and a huge battery, while the Deuce-like fuel tank is just badly mounted. Then there's that idiotic speedo/console thing, only surpassed in 'fugly' by the front wheel and the handlebars. Then there are other touches like the clutch cable bracket on the downtube – one of the most idiotic pieces of flawed engineering I've seen – and what about the coil on the side of the motor?

"Given that the Rocker's main focus is the design of its oil bag, and that my aim was to keep this build firmly grounded in Rockerdom, I opted to leave that aspect alone, instead building the scoot around it.

"The obvious contender for a tank was a Street Bob item, as its main radius would flow right into the rear frame, especially if it was slammed tight to the engine – creating a long, low and even lean look. And from the rear the fatter tank would give the bike more of a muscular stance.



"The first thing we did with our FXDB tank was to cut out the tunnel. This was a pain because of the fuel pump mounts and so on but with the new tunnel fabricated and purge-welded in place we had the perfect line – almost. We also decided to notch the right-hand side to clear the pots – something I now dig so much I want to hit every tank I see these days with the same treatment!

"I wanted the profile to be as clean as possible, so the flush console and Motogadget mini gauge we'd developed for Dynas was a no-brainer, and with Harley's flush-fit filler cap and gauge the overall impact of the tank is exactly what I was looking for.

"It was easier to remedy the battery situation – we dropped a Speedcell lithium battery into the well at the centre of the oil bag, which was joined by all those difficult-to-place electronics that eat into the space beneath the seat – still leaving room for a gel-over-neoprene seat pad.

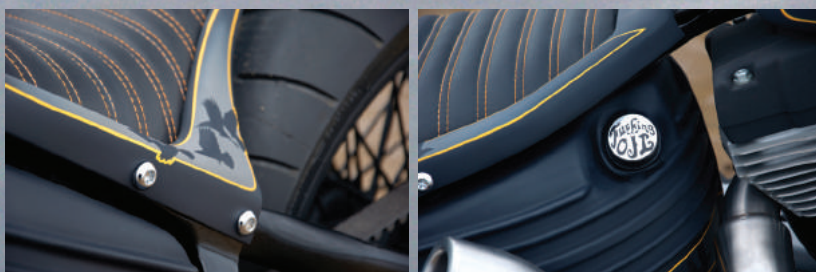
"I wanted to fabricate our signature Pintail for this Rocker – one that looks, from the front, as though it is moulded to the tyre, but from the side stretches out and follows the radius of the rear frame. To achieve that meant cutting away most of the rear frame to get the line I needed, and replacing everything from the spine back with a new crossmember and mounts. Having built a jig around the bike and chopped out the parts that were in the way, we replaced them with our own kit, beefing up the spine while we were at it, and settling for an inch of usable suspension at the swingarm to allow for a lower ride height without making it unrideable.

"With the swingarm we had to follow the same route to lose some 10mm off the top of the arm and change the throw slightly so we could hook it up to our uprated shocks, with LA Choppers springs and a mechanical ride-height adjuster.

"The Pintail itself we set up and welded with the



The Street Bob tank, slammed hard over the engine, is a visual key in this Rocker rebirth.



GUTS & BOLTS

ENGINE

Model: 2009 103ci Twin Cam B
 Pushrods/rockers/etc: Stock
 Pistons: CP
 Compression: 10:1
 Air cleaner: Joker Machine
 Pipes: Rocket Bobs
 316 Stainless Zombi Killers
 Power: 85-90hp
 Torque: 85-90ft.lb
 Transmission: Stock 6-speed

FRAME & SUSPENSION

Type: 2009 Harley-Davidson Rocker
 Rake: 1° under stock
 Swingarm: Rocket Bobs
 Heavy Slammed Arm
 Seat: Rocket Bobs Pintail
 Forks: Rocket Bobs fully re-worked
 OEM fork w/ internal dampers, etc
 Triple trees: 2010 Dyna Custom
 Rear shocks: Rocket Bobs
 race tuned w/ LA Choppers Springs

WHEELS & TYRES

Front wheel: Apollo SL 23x4"
 Tyre: Avon Cobra 130/70
 Caliper: Rocket Bobs Billet slim 6
 Rotor: Rocket Bobs full floating 13"
 Rear wheel: Apollo SL 18x8.5"
 Tyre: Metzeler 880, 260/40
 Caliper: Rocket Bobs mini race
 Rotor: Rocket Bobs 190x8mm
 thick stainless rotor
 Brakelines: Rocket Bobs braided

CONTROLS

Bars: Rocket Bobs 4" Zombi
 Grips: H-D Diamond Black series
 Front mc: Joker Machine JX series
 Switchgear: Joker Machine JX series
 Headlight: Rocket Bobs LED blazer
 Taillight: Kellerman micro
 stop/tail/turn all in one units
 Speedo: Motogadget mini
 Forward controls: Stock

GUARDS & FINISH

Tank: Modified Street Bob
 Oil tank: Stock
 Painter: Art Slade



"... WE'RE TALKING SCULPTED CURVES, COKE BOTTLES, ZIPPO LIGHTERS AND '60s MUSCLE CARS."

tyre in place and the arm mimicking maximum compression. In this way we know that the bump-stop – effectively the edge of the seat – is 8mm from the 260 Metzeler rear tyre. The kick tail of the seat is fabbed from two 10mm steel plate struts stolen from one of our regular Rocker kits – it's been heated up to cherry red and gently bent and then twisted through a third plane to create the shape you see. It might look delicate, but it is in fact extremely tough.

"The laced Apollo SL wheels were an obvious choice for us, with an 18 x 8.5in rear and 23 x 4in front from HD Wheels in California – they're probably the sickest wheels I've even seen. The 23in front wheel just had to happen, but its size presented some issues, which were then rectified with a set of mid-glide trees from a Dyna Custom, and – once we'd DLC-coated the stanchions and blacked out the hardware – by lowering the fork by 3in. It's a solid ride but it performs well, and you just don't get a stance this tough without slamming it.

"For braking on went a mini rotor and racing caliper at the rear, complemented by a Rocket-Bob-branded Harrison Billet Mini-6 caliper and 13in floating rotor at the front.

"Our Zombi 'bars went into the mix, while the controls and switchgear are Joker Machine's JX series – ditto the risers and air cleaner – all milled from 6061 billet aluminium.

"The motor is largely stock but it needed to be stripped to be painted with a two-tone black and

grey powdercoat scheme, because I've got a thing for black jugs – it probably stems from my love of Shovelheads.

"There was no sense in refitting the 96in barrels so it got a 103 kit to capitalise on the free-breathing cleaner and we fabricated a one-off stainless exhaust that comes out close enough to the rider's ears to savour the sound, but not close enough to cook his butt cheek.

"Now if you've clocked the name – Blackbird – you'll realise why there isn't a lot of colour, which is a result of brainstorming in the barn with Art Slade, who painted it.

"It's a subtle celebration of asymmetry with little more than a beak-yellow flash of colour as an accent to draw the eye into the flat black and grey that matches the shading of the motor. It is as simple as it is understated, which made it all the more rewarding when it placed third in the Modified Harley-Davidson class at the California Dreamin' Expo in Bournemouth, against some very tough competition.

"There are many other mods that went into completing this Harley but I've covered the main ones. I'd like to thank Jim for giving me free reign over the project, as well as putting up with me taking eight months to complete it!"

Thanks Pete, I'm sure our readers will enjoy the insight into your design philosophy as well as eyeballing this unique build. **HD**

