

Cycle World Bike Show In Chicago

By John Skala

I used to look forward to seeing all of the new motorcycles in one place at the bike show in the St Louis convention center each year. In addition to the factory displays, it was also a chance to visit with a number of the local dealers and see accessories from the major national companies. However, it has been a few years since the Cycle World International Bike Show stopped in St Louis. Therefore, when I noticed a sale on flights on Southwest, I booked a trip to Chicago. I figured it was almost as cheap as the gas to drive up there and a heck of a lot quicker. Merle and I flew up in the morning and were picked up by a friend who lives in the windy city. It was straight to the convention center in Rosemont, almost six hours at the bike show then back to the airport for the return flight. We didn't even have time for a stop in my old neighborhood for a pizza at Home Run Inn.

The 27th Annual Cycle World International Motorcycle Show presented by Toyota, (official name) in Chicago occupied 347,000 sq ft, a lot larger than it ever was in St Louis. The show had something for everyone. Nineteen vehicle manufacturers displayed their 2008 model-year motorcycles, ATV's and scooters at the 13 cities on the show tour. Along with the manufacturers, there were tour-wide and local exhibitors and dealers for a total of 250 exhibitors.

The entrance to the convention center put us at the corner of the main hall for the bike show. The map showed the event spilled over into the adjacent halls so we had to figure out where to go from there and plan our attack on the exhibits. We decided that the exhibits with a live show or activity would be our first stops to find out what their time schedules were. The first stop was across to the other room for the Gina Woods' XX Chromes – all women bike build. During the three day show, four talented ladies built a bike from the ground up. They installed the motor and transmission on Saturday morning while we were watching them work. You can see the finished bike at www.xxchromes.com.



On our way over to the check out the time schedule for the BOSS stunt show, we stopped by the custom v-twin display. There were many local entries in this category. They included nice classic bobbers, some cool choppers, a bagger covered in skulls and a custom with a swingarm so long I thought they were going for the hill climber look.



The next stunt show wasn't for another hour and a half so we backed up and spent a little more time looking over the bikes in the Matt Hotch display. Most notable was the bike Matt built for his biker build-off competition with Roger Goldammer. As part of the competition, the bikes were run on the Bonneville Slat flats. The v-twin engine was a from a 1950's era Vincent and the front wheel had a 26 inch diameter with a perimeter disk brake.



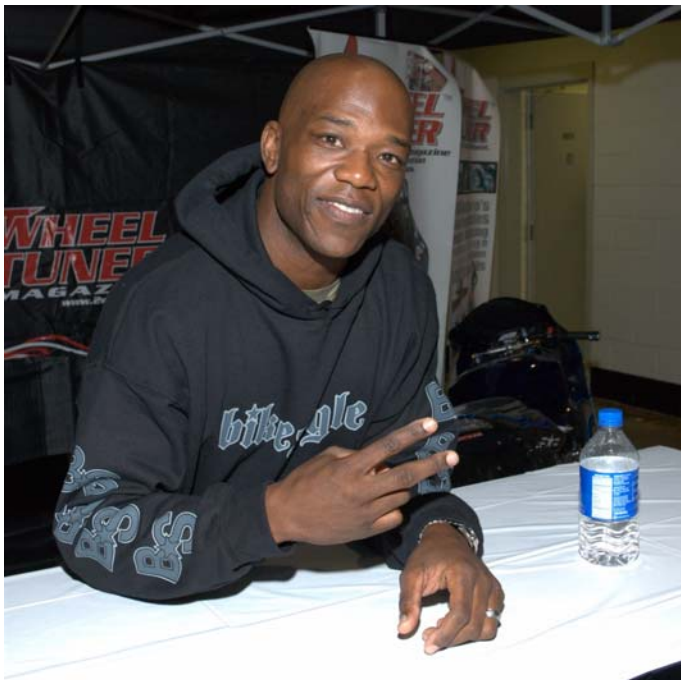
No bike show would be complete without some biker babes. This show had plenty of babes at the various exhibitors throughout the hall.



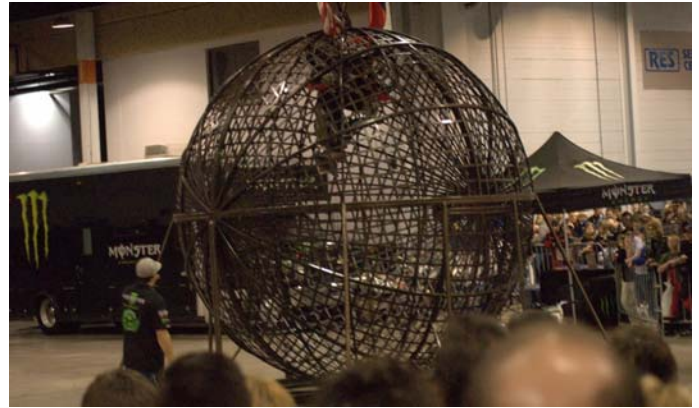
Since we had some time before the stunt show, we wandered back to the main hall where the food vendors were. There were several spots with a decent selection of food choices and the prices were a bit lower than the convention center in St Louis or the St Charles Family Arena. We passed by the ATV outdoor showcase and the custom sport bike area. There were a lot of tricked out bikes with some amazing paint jobs.



Speaking of sport bikes, Jason Britton of the Speed channel show "Superbikes" was on hand signing autographs and talking with the fans. If you haven't seen his show yet, you should check it out. Jason and his guests do some crazy stunts and make it look easy. However, Jason has been doing this for over 11 years and has put in a lot of time practicing to become one of the preeminent stunt riders.



Back over at the BOSS stunt show it was time for their demonstration. I underestimated how early I needed to get there to be anywhere near the rail holding back the crowd. They started the show with the Ball of Steel Stunt (BOSS) where they rode a small pit size bike inside a steel ball that was approximately 13 feet in diameter. After getting the crowd warmed up, they went to doing some jumps from ramp to ramp on the same small bikes.



Next to the stunt area was the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum display that traced the evolution of motocross in the US. They were also selling raffle tickets to support the museum. The winning prize was a 1953 Vincent Black Shadow touring model. The bike was on display in their booth. The engine looked familiar but the rest of the bike was totally different from Matt Hotch's version.



There were plenty of motorcycle related vendors there selling anything you might need for you or your ride. Alongside the typical clothing and accessory displays were all of the major motorcycle insurance companies, a few customizing shops, sidecars, and trike conversions. I spent a few minutes talking to Dean at the DFT booth where I learned how their independent suspension trike rear end worked. I also found out why they don't have as large a range of bikes as some of the others. He showed

me where the components are custom made for each model. They do not use a universal model with all kinds of brackets to make it fit anything. For the new Harley touring bikes for example, they use the factory Brembo brakes with ABS and the cushion drive Harley calls the isolated drive system. They make trike kits for both Honda Goldwings and Harleys. I thought the Goldwing would be the biggest seller and was totally blown away when Dean said the Harley kits outsell the Goldwings by more than 6 to 1.



Keeping with the something for everyone theme, I visited the Women's Studio that had a lounge where women could learn more about motorcycling in a relaxed atmosphere talking with other women. The studio featured moto makeovers, entry level bikes, riding gear for women along with a traffic simulator/trainer they could try out.



From there, it was on to the "History of Speed" display. This was a collection of historical record holding machines. The display included the BUB streamliner that recently raised the bar to 350.884 mph on the Bonneville Salt Flats. That is quite a bit faster than the Harley-Davidson that set the speed record in 1937 that was on display. Joe Petrali set the record at 136.183 mph on that bike. I'll bet Leo Payne got more respect than most Sportster riders. His 1957 Sportster powered streamliner was the first bike to break the 200 mph barrier in 1969.



There were two theme bikes built by Orange County Choppers on display at the show. The Army National Guard Patriot bike was there with a few Guardsmen allowing people to go up to it and get their picture taken. This bike was recently featured on the American Chopper TV show. In the adjacent hall was the new DieHard chopper. This bike has not been on TV as of the time this was written. As a matter of fact, the bike's unveiling took place the night before at the bike show. I don't know if Paul Sr. or Jr. were there for the unveil, but they were nowhere to be found on Saturday. The bike was painted with a silver metallic paint but the display was setup with lights all around it that changed colors giving the bike a cool look.



A couple of aisles over was the Ride for Kids display. This ride raises money for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation. The Chicago ride is now the largest in the country raising over \$400,000.00 last year. (The St Louis ride will be on September 21 this year.) They were selling raffle tickets for a custom Roland Sands customized Honda CBR1000RR. Roland was on hand signing posters at the booth. Roland also had another custom on display in the nearby Toyota display.



All of the bikes and other exhibitors we had seen up to this point would have made a great show in itself. But from there, it was on to the bike manufacturers displays. These displays were huge with most of the companies showing their full line. Honda, which has over 50 models in their powersports lineup, brought a large representation of their line. Kawasaki was showing off their updated Ninja ZX-14, which they claim is the most powerful production motorcycle ever. We will have to see the response from Suzuki with their Hayabusa. Ducati had the 1098 R & S models on display along with the rest of their line. However, I didn't see the exclusive 1098 RR, which is the \$72,000 model Tom Cruise recently bought. Victory had their new Vision model on display. My pal Killer Miller may like this new bike, but the rear end of it was a little too radical for me. The Buell display had cutaway bikes from both their air cooled and liquid cooled models. It was different to see a fuel pump installed in the frame because that is where the gas and oil is stored. BMW featured the new F800GS model with the rest of their line. Harley-Davidson had all of their bikes on display. The bikes that drew the most interest were their newest models, the Softail Rocker and the Cross Bones.



Korean manufacturer Hoyosung has been making motorcycles, scooters and ATV's since 1978. They had some nice looking bikes on display. This may be a company to watch along with Taiwan's KYMCO as they both further develop their dealer networks.



The 3 wheel Piaggio scooter with its two wheels up front and one in the rear was not the most unusual bike there. In the 1970's, several manufacturers designed rotary engine motorcycles. The few models that made it into production did not last long. It was interesting to see someone try this again. In this case, it was a custom bike that had a Mazda twin rotor engine from an RX7. I couldn't imagine what an engine like that with straight pipes would sound like.



There were way too many other bikes and exhibitors to mention. If you are at all interested in motorcycles and not stuck on a single brand, then this is the show to see. I don't expect them back in St Louis anytime soon, so I'd recommend a trip to Chicago to see the show there. Just make sure you plan some time to stop by Home Run Inn for some of my favorite pizzas.

