

A MOTORCYCLIST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

Building Our Kind Of Community

a tank on the bike that was an evolution of the earlier 750, but not like Louie and Willie would have liked it. So we re-did the tank, and that got us thinking. If we evolve the Sportster XL—it was a bike that was trying to be a sporty bike—what if we took it to the next level, and took some design cues from the XR and transfer those to the XL chassis? How do you maintain the look and work with the marketing requirements to get a gas tank that has enough fuel, and a seat that looks good, but still allows for two-up seating? We knew we wanted to use the imagery of that, but getting the proportions from pure race to street was the challenge.

Daniels: The XR750 is such a huge motorcycle to the company from a historical standpoint, a crowning achievement, if you will. But it's so minimalistic. Its proportions are so much different. You just can't put lights on it and call it a streetbike. The challenge is not doing a straight copy of what's sitting in the race trailer. That muscular stance really boils down to proportion, and that's why we worked so much in 3-D, in clay, to make sure that the motor, the gas tank and tail section worked well together. As with most Harleys, the engine is the centerpiece, and you try to work in balance with that.

Savage: We did a lot of work with the tank, placing it low on the bike and challenging the engineering department, because they typically want a lot of space for components. We actually wanted the tank low enough to bisect the rocker box.

Daniels: Toward the end, I think we were arguing over, like one-eighth of an inch. It's a fine process.

AM: This has been a three- to four-year project. How do you keep the focus for such a long period of time?

Savage: It's interesting. We'll finish our work, the styling, in the first year. Its done up in clay, and we'll critique it and have Willie bless it. And then we kind of sit and look at the bike for a couple years as engineering and manufacturing work with it. They're a big part of it. It goes through a development process with engineering to surprise people with its handling, and also with manufacturing to build it well. Styling is a part of it, but it's the whole package. Without everyone's input, it wouldn't work so well. Then when it hits the street, we kind of have to look back because we've moved on to other projects.

Daniels: Its great. It's kind of a different segment that we're stepping into. To bring a Harley to the racetrack for the press introduction, to a lot of people, that's a foreign concept. To deliver a bike that is a little different than what a lot of people in general think of Harley-Davidson is gratifying.

These days, plenty of neighborhood zoning boards and city councils are cracking down on motorcycles, trying to ban them from their streets, or restrict riders' rights within the limits of their cities or housing developments.

Then there's Neil Shuster.

Instead of looking for ways to rid his 2,500-home development in central Florida of motorcyclists, Shuster is actively courting them—catering directly to them while urging them to “live where they ride.”

It's a move that only makes sense, Shuster says. And it started with a simple realization.

“The area around here is incredibly popular with riders, and it's a big draw for riders from throughout the state for its great roads,” he says. “We have curvy backroads and beautiful farm country with Spanish moss that drapes down from the trees and forms canopies over the road.”

With plenty of housing developments in and around the Lake Weir area, Shuster figured it made sound business sense to appeal to those riders, some of whom may be looking for retirement homes or

second homes.

“It's been a successful approach on many levels,” he says. “The response has been unbelievable. It shows that riders themselves want to be in a community where they are respected, where they can enjoy their passion, and where they can do something as simple as have their bikes with them, which some communities don't allow.”

Shuster also notes that he will build homes specifically for motorcyclists. “There are differences between houses for motorcyclists and houses for non-motorcyclists, and one of them is in the garage. We're seeing people who want bigger space to store all their toys.”

As a bonus, Shuster notes, his latest endeavor has allowed him to tap into something he didn't realize he had: a passion for riding motorcycles.

“I started riding recently myself,” he says. “I am the consummate workaholic, and riding is a great stress-reliever; it allows me to turn off my brain from work and focus on the ride. From the first moment I get on a bike, everything goes away and I get into the moment.”



Neil Shuster (right) with Joe Thompson, builder and owner of Sterjo Construction.