

[Login](#) | [Manage Account](#) | [About](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Classifieds](#)

Search

Web Search powered by YAHOO! SEARCH

User Name:

LOGIN

Register or log in using your account on these websites.

Password: [Forgotten your password?](#) | [Create an account](#)

Calendar

Stories & Blogs

Speed Freak

By [Phil Fuson](#)

Posted March 12, 2009 at 4:16 p.m.

[0 Comments](#)

PHOTO BY PHIL FUSON, PHIL FUSON

American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association champion Jack Parker in his shop.

My first impression of Jack Parker came one day after mowing the lawn. As a reward, I'd given myself permission to ride to Deals Gap before the sun went down. About halfway to the store past the overlook, I checked my mirrors and noticed a group of sportbikes gaining on me quickly. I slowed and motioned for them to come around me. As the big liter machines began to spin up and power away, this tiny, angry bee of a bike blew past every one of us with shocking speed and precision. When I arrived at the store I was greeted by a familiar grin perched on an RD 60 Yamaha.

Parker is the reigning two-time American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association (AHRMA) road-race champion in the 200 GP class. Unlike most racers, who acquire a production-based bike and modify it for the track, Jack campaigns a machine he designed, built, and developed



PHOTO BY PHIL FUSON

American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association champion Jack Parker in his shop.



PHOTO BY PHIL FUSON

Lean and mean: Jack Parker's race bike began its life as a Yamaha CT1 175 dirtbike.

Latest Blog Entries

THE DAILY PULSE

The Key to Unlocking the Lox Salon 'Soul to Sole'

12/13/12 at 9:19 a.m.

THE DAILY PULSE

The Daily Plan-It: Holiday Craft Happy Hours...

12/13/12 at 8:37 a.m.

THE DAILY PULSE

The Daily Plan-It: Whitey Hitchcock, A...

12/12/12 at 8:17 a.m.

THE DAILY PULSE

New Website Provides Info on Coal Ash Ponds...

12/11/12 at 12:44 p.m.

CLASSICAL CAFE

KSO Holiday Concerts This Weekend

12/11/12 at 10:57 a.m.

Featured Events



DEC 13

Circle Modern Dance: 'Modern Dance Primitive Light'

Laurel Theater

DEC 14

Daryl Hall and John Oates

Tennessee Theatre

himself.

The Laverne, Tenn. native began riding at the age of eight. His first bike was a Tecumseh “Thunderbird” acquired from the Western Auto Store. He still has it. Then, in a seemingly traditional fashion, came a string of dirt bikes and dual sports: the Suzuki TC 100 with the dual-ratio transmission, a YZ 125 “...that never ran,” and Honda’s Triumph knockoff, the 305 Scrambler. These machines provided not only a means of self-inflicted education from the school of hard knocks but also the hard-earned wisdom that gravity can be a harsh mistress.



PHOTO BY PHIL FUSON

Lean and mean: Jack Parker's race bike began its life as a Yamaha CT1 175 dirtbike.

“I started in the dirt, didn’t ride much on the street—uh, that my mother knew of,” Parker recalls of being a 13-year-old unlicensed rider learning how to wheelie while testing his mettle (and physics). “But we had county roads and the Scrambler would do ‘almost’ a hundred. Hence the crooked nose. There were no full-faced helmets back then. My nose bled for three days. I think my folks knew but they never said anything.”

At an early age, Parker began acquiring the skills that would ultimately allow him to build his own bike. His first teacher was a live-in instructor: “My Dad taught me to weld when I was a kid. It’s still the most important skill you can know for assembling machinery.”

When he arrived in high school his shop chops had the opportunity to go into overdrive. “Our shop teacher, Mr. Racht, used to run me and my brother out at the end of the day. We’d come back after school while he was doing his paperwork. He’d say ‘Ya’ll can work till I get done but, I gotta leave at four o’clock!’ We were trying to make stuff as fast we could before he threw us out. He was a real machinist turned teacher. He really knew his stuff!”

After high school, Parker enrolled in the fine arts curriculum at the University of Tennessee. “In college I was an art major. I figured out that I could substitute ‘shop tech and industrial education’ for ‘life drawing’ by saying, since I was a sculpture major, I needed to learn how to work with metal. So, I took ‘shop tech’ in the facility beneath Neyland Stadium.”

After graduating from UT unemployed, he began to build bikes. Some of his early work consisted of building choppers and cafe racers. “Started with RD 400s, Triumphs, and Nortons. Didn’t much like the Nortons, still have some Triumphs,” he says.

Eventually, this led him to the underground railroad of vintage bikes known as “swap meets,” the biggest of which is held every summer at the Mid-Ohio road race course. “This was the first AHRMA event I’d ever been to. I was interested in the swap meet, that’s why I went,” he says. But the kid with the crooked nose noticed they were racing there: “I thought, ‘Wow, that’s cool!’”

The race bug had bitten. This led him to WERA Motorcycle Roadracing where he found they had a mini class. Arriving at his first race, Jack was under the assumption the mini class would be contested by folks around his age riding vintage small bikes. “I get there and it’s a bunch of eight-year-olds on 20 horsepower metra-kit 72 cc bikes that go over a hundred miles an hour and they all want to be the next Nicky Hayden.” Turned out, one of the kids who beat Parker that day was Hayden’s young cousin Hayden Gillem.



DEC 19
Reverend Horton Heat
The Square Room

Featured Restaurants



AMERICAN
Tupelo Honey Café
Downtown



ASIAN
Bida Saigon
West Knoxville



MEXICAN
Taco Loco
Maryville

“...But he was on a 20 horsepower machine to my eight and weighed 46 pounds so, I'll give him that one.”

At Mid Ohio, Jack met Carl Anderson of Decatur, Ala. He'd taken a shine to Jack's home-brewed RD 60 racer. Anderson told him, “If you can build that, you can build a race bike.” This got Parker thinking about starting such a project.

Parker's donor bike was a gift from Buzz Kelly—a Yamaha CT1 175. “He was at the swap meet and was tired of being low-balled for it. He said, ‘Y'know Jack, I'll give you that bike because I know you'll make something cool out of it.’” The CT1 had begun life as a dirt bike. In its stock form it probably weighed around 250 pounds. According to Parker, “I just started cutting it down. Pretty much all that's left is the swingarm and rear wheel. I used a CB350 front wheel and Bultaco forks. I just wanted it to be like my RD 60.” Most of the frame was discarded. The only parts left were the steering tube and down tube for the engine cradle. But all of this had to be shortened.

After Parker's frame fabrication and “transformation,” the completed bike weighs 180 pounds. Considering that carbon fiber parts costing hundreds of dollars to save ounces are so popular, erasing 60 pounds is quite a feat. “I think the trick with that bike is it's really low and really skinny. It doesn't make a big hole in the air. When you only have 27 horsepower, wind drag is huge!”

The Parker prime directive is to keep the bike small and tight. That way, it doesn't have to lean that far over. It has a lower center of gravity. “An advantage I have is being small. I weigh 135 pounds and I'm short and skinny. So, I don't make a big hole in the wind either.” At high-speed tracks like Daytona this makes a huge difference.

The bike's debut was pretty impressive. “I had six hundred bucks total in the bike, including the Bridgestone tires, and I went out and got third in my first race,” he recalls. “Carl was like, ‘Wow, that's crazy!’” By the end of the first year Parker campaigned the CT1-based racer, he had finished third in the championship, even after missing a number of important rounds such as Daytona.

After the “development” season of 2006, Jack was doing well nearing the end of 2007. He and Tim Kinsey of Michigan were both contenders for the title. “It came down to Barber. I'd beat him at Mid-Ohio on the first day and was so psyched on the second day that I was going to do so well and I ran out of gas,” Parker says. The fuel issue seemed as if it had killed his chances for the championship. There were two meetings left of the 21-race season. “I had to win both races at Kershaw and both races at Barber. The chances of that happening were nil because Tim had been smearing me!” He pulled it off. “If I had finished second in any of those races, I wouldn't have won the championship. It's not often it comes down to the last race. Usually it's decided with a couple rounds left.”

The 2008 season didn't hold the drama of the previous year. Kinsey and Scott Clough, of Yucca Flats, Calif., two of Parker's toughest competitors, didn't show up to as many rounds as the previous year. But, when Kinsey did show up, he'd copped a tip from Parker. “He built a new bike based on a CT1 just like mine because he was tired of getting beat on his Honda.” The sporadic attendance of Kinsey and Clough allowed Jack to lock up the '08 season with three rounds to go.

Parker is hoping to have a new bike finished for the '09 season based on an RD125 to run in the 250GP class. “It'll be shorter, more compact and lighter but I'm not sure if it

will be any better.” With two championships in three seasons, it may not be better. But odds are it will be if the kid with the crooked nose shows up.

© 2009 MetroPulse. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.



Also in Profiles in Motorcycling

[Sixty Years and Six Cylinders](#)

[Cindy Lou's Epic Adventure](#)

[Off the Beaten Path](#)

Comments » 0

[Submit a comment](#)

Be the first to post a comment!

Share your thoughts

Comments are the sole responsibility of the person posting them. You agree not to post comments that are off topic, defamatory, obscene, abusive, threatening or an invasion of privacy. Violators may be banned.

[Click here for our full user agreement.](#)

Username * Don't have an account? [Sign up for a new account](#)

Password * Can't remember? [Reset your password](#)

Comment

[Preview comment](#)

Comments can be shared on Facebook and Yahoo!. Add both options by [connecting your profiles](#).



Scripps Interactive Newspapers Group
2012 The E.W. Scripps Co.
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [About our ads](#)