

Free Wheeling stories, photos and ideas from around the traps.

## Kulture vultures

Never before has motorcycling had so many subcultures.

**Sure, we've always** had distinctly different branches of the motorcycle tree – off-road riders, on-road riders and riders who only race. But right now within those segments are dozens of obsessive little groups.

One subculture has burst through from the grassroots. The “neo retro kustom kulture” scene has grown from the backstreets of the world’s major cities to the drawing boards of factory designers. The ideals are the same as the original kustom kulture crowd, 1950s hot-rodders. Rather than a flat-head Ford coupe, the modern kulture vulture’s blank canvas is an old Yamaha Virago that gets transformed into a low-rider. Or a busted Honda NX650 Dominator turned into a flat-tracker replica. Perhaps a BMW R80 reborn as a café racer. The builds become internet hits through blogs and Pinterest postings. The best examples inspire others and the scene has exploded.

Late last year Melbourne hosted the aptly-named Oil Stained Brain. Held in a “communal Collingwood workshop”, it displayed 30 retros, along with movies and a photographic exhibition.

It really was a “no brainer” for any observer of the scene. The One Motorcycle Show, in Portland, Oregon, is four years old and has inspired similar events in Europe and the UK (*Ed: Russell Burns will be there for FW this year, so stay tuned*).

Even Hog Mecca Sturgis last year hosted Ton Up!, a celebration of retro café racers.

Of course, it never takes long for the mainstream to realise backstreet heroes are on to something. Especially if their products star in a movie, such as the Honda CL350 custom ridden by actress Rooney Mara in 2011’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

But there are pitfalls. In 1971 the FX Super Glide was Harley’s first factory-custom bike and Norton came out with the Hi-Rider “chopper”. Both failed to sell well because they looked like caricatures of the standard bike. That’s the risk both the back-alley kulture-vulture purists and the factory style-interpreters take. Probably only about 30 per cent of retro customs look “right”. There’s a real skill and artistry involved to reinterpret an original design.

However, there is hope. Harley-Davidson’s new generation of Sportsters and the latest crop of factory retros from the other major manufacturers are honest attempts. Ride on.



Hamish Cooper



## THAT KODAK MOMENT

**The first time I rode** through the clouds on a motorcycle seems like yesterday. It was in the early summer of 1982.

I was living just outside Beechworth in Victoria and had arranged to join the annual local bikers’ ride over the mountains to the coast at Marlo. This was a long weekend ride so failure to meet them on the main road outside their campsite just outside Omeo was not an option.

There was a slight complication. Because I finished work as a sub-editor on Albury’s *Border Morning Mail* at 1:00am, I had to ride home 50km away, sleep for a few hours then sneak out of the house, leaving my wife and baby son asleep.

Ninety minutes later I was riding up the road from Harrierville in mist and damp. The road quickly turned from tarmac to dirt and the higher I rode the colder I got.

Suddenly, I burst through the clouds into a clear, blue sky.

My mood change was instantaneous. Dazzling light changes anyone’s perspective.

Ferris Wheels use this photo to promote their ride across Khardung Pass in India; at 5602m it’s the world’s highest drivable road. It’s an old caravan route but has only been drivable since 1988.

Ferris Wheels were the first Aussie company to “take people to the top”. This year they celebrate their 20th anniversary. So, happy birthday to Ferris Wheels and, to all riders, let’s commit to ride to the top. It’s an unrivalled feeling when you burst through the clouds.