

SUMMA CAFÉ LOUDLY

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Why can't Milwaukee do this?

Harley-Davidson has had 55 years to build a bike like the Storz SP1200RR and never has. (We'll set aside the XR1200R for now.) In fact, it took former factory dirt-track tuner Steve Storz to conjure the superbly designed and impressively built conversion parts to create a bike

like this—a potent mix of flat track and café racer style and performance.

Impossible you say? Yeah, maybe on the track where top riders in AMA Pro Racing's XR1200 class lap about six seconds slower than the entry-level Supersport 600s. But the street isn't the track, Scooter, and every little knife-edged advantage that's essential at Rattlesnake Raceway isn't actually necessary to dispatch vermin at Deals Gap. Besides, on the street, looks, vibe, and cool are, well, cool.

If you don't believe it, check out the hipsters on their primer-black \$1500 café specials and see what kind of action they get. OK, maybe you don't want to know about that. But the point is, presentation does count. And the

SP1200RR has it—big time.

The SP1200RR is the latest in a long line (since 1990) of Sportster-based specials that Storz has patterned after the iconic Harley-Davidson XR750 dirt trackers and road racers. To build one of the most inviting Sportsters ever, Storz starts with a Sportster 883 or 1200 from any Evo generation (including 2003 and earlier solid-mount engines, 2004 and later rubber-mount engines, and 2007 and later fuel-injected and rubber-mounted engines). He keeps the core engine, chassis and electrical essentials and then upgrades the rest using premium components. Every bike is built to order starting with your donor bike, so you can pick and choose your level of play.

If the donor is a Sportster 1200, the powertrain remains stock. If it's an 883 model, like the 2007 XL883 Standard-based bike shown here, it gets a 1200cc upgrade using Wiseco 9.5:1 compression-ratio pistons and a re-flashed ECU. A minimalist Performance Machine air cleaner rides just above





A correct café racer is all about the stance, and Storz' SP1200RR has stance in spades. Cool, upswept exhaust pipes are designed by Storz and built by BUB.



big, satin-black, XR750-style Storz by BUB up-pipes with 2.25-inch ceramic-coated tubing, while the belt gives way to a #520 chain-drive conversion with modified PBI and Talon sprockets.

Gone is the stock Sporty fork, replaced by a proprietary Storz/Ceriani inverted piece. Out back are premium Öhlins HD144 14.25-in. piggyback shocks. Eighteen-in. black Excel rims, married to H-D hubs and stainless Buchanan's spokes, carry Metzeler Marathon tires, 130/70 front and 180/55 rear. Brake upgrades consist of triple Galfer DF680FLW petal-discs and beefy Performance Machine four-piston calipers.

Controls include Driven clip-ons, modified to Harley-Davidson's 1-in. standard, Performance Machine switchgear and grips, Storz rearset controls and a Storz hydraulic steering damper. The *pièce de résistance* is the unique bodywork, starting with a handmade aluminum Storz gas tank with SP1200RR emblems and then adding a twin-pad Harley-Davidson roadrace-style solo seat and a minimalist Buell front fender, in this case all painted by Bill Kee of Vintage Restoration in nearby Oxnard, Ca. The stock hooded headlight and speedometer remain, keeping the Sportster heritage alive.

Motorcyclist intercepted the SP1200RR as it was arriving for exhibit at The Quail



Instrumentation is as minimal as you would expect on such a stripped-down sportbike. That's a stock Sportster gauge cluster, framed by Driven clip-ons.

Motorcycle Gathering in Carmel, Ca, last May. And with photographer Jeff Bushnell's orienteering, we quickly headed into the local mountains for a good, long get-acquainted session. With its twin up-pipes, spare lines and orange, white and black paint with silver stripes, the bike definitely has a persuasive profile. But it doesn't take long to get exposure to a dose of Sportster quirkiness after stepping aboard. For starters, the air cleaner fouls the right leg slightly. Then there is the unmarked switchgear, which takes some memorization to recall which button is for the starter and which two are for the turn signals. *[Although you could always label them.—Ed.]* But as they say, love overcomes all (except for



No forward controls for this sporty Sporty! Custom rearset footrests are manufactured by Storz, and mated to Performance Machine braking components.

infidelities with the nanny). In the big picture, these are minor issues.

Fortunately the Sportster's electronic fuel injection makes starting easy, and the enlarged mill fires up quickly and rumbles menacingly through those big pipes. However, you have to recalibrate what the lumpy guttural exhaust note means in this case. It's not heralding some annoying bagger or chopper—but, rather, a machine with significant sporting intentions. Pulling away there's a great wave of midrange torque and tons of flywheel effect, thanks to the displacement and all those big steel parts swinging around inside the cases. The bike positively leaps forward when the clutch takes a bite. And better still,



This 883-based special has been uprated with a Wiseco big-bore 1200cc cylinder kit, filled with 9.5:1 pistons. The air filter assembly is by Performance Machine.

the EFI calibration is good—not too sensitive on partial throttle, and the metering picks up smoothly when you're doing fine control work midcorner when it matters most.

The riding position is sporty but not cruel, and it took just a few miles to get comfortable on the bike. The SP1200RR has neutral handling—more like a big naked bike than a knife-edged sportbike. That brings predictability and confidence. The excellence of the Storz/Ceriani fork and Öhlins shocks is a great asset, and so are the Galfer/Performance Machine triple disc brakes, which feature a firm lever effort, linear response and good feel. The worst element of the SP1200RR's dynamics is the shifting. Heavy



Remote-reservoir coil-over shocks from Öhlins dominate the rear view. The tasty tail section is designed to resemble an original Harley-Davidson XRTT roadracer.

and slow, it's unlike any other sportbike extant and vastly behind the times—but there's not much you can do with the industrial-grade stock Sportster transmission.

The SP1200RR as shown weighs in at a claimed 519 pounds wet, meaning that Storz took a useful 64 lbs. off the stock XL883 during the conversion. Although this leaves it roughly 30-40 lbs. heavier than the Kawasaki Z1000 and Yamaha FZ1, along a wonderful section of twisties that Bushnell led us to, it was still tons of fun. Of course, it's fair to point out that while the SP1200RR is a bit heavier than a typical liter-class naked bike, it also possesses 15 to 20 percent more displacement—and the street cred this brings.

The SP1200RR pretty much dazzles—perhaps not so much in outright capability as in gains that are evident over a stock Sportster. The new suspension, premium tires and brakes add a lot of confidence and capability when hustling the SP1200RR through the corners or shedding speed before turning in. That, plus the attack-mode seating position and added cornering clearance all combine to make this just about the sportiest Sportster ever. And the ergonomics are humane enough for longer rides.

The SP1200RR as shown comprises \$15,853 in parts, \$3600 worth of labor, \$1600 for paintwork, and a donor Sportster 883 or 1200 (Storz got his at a good deal for \$3500). The bottom line is \$24,553 plus or minus a bit, depending on the cost of your donor bike and whether or not you choose to go all-in on the components. Not cheap, but few unique customs ever are, and few work this well on Racer Road.

It's a shame, really, that Harley-Davidson has never properly harnessed its hard-won racing heritage. From the early board-track racers to battling in Formula 750, Superbike and drag racing, there's a rich heritage—and almost all of it with V-twin engines. Imagine, then, that the Storz SP1200RR is an outsourced embodiment of that racing heritage. **MC**