



THE APPRENTICE

T's Sporty: A Final Exam

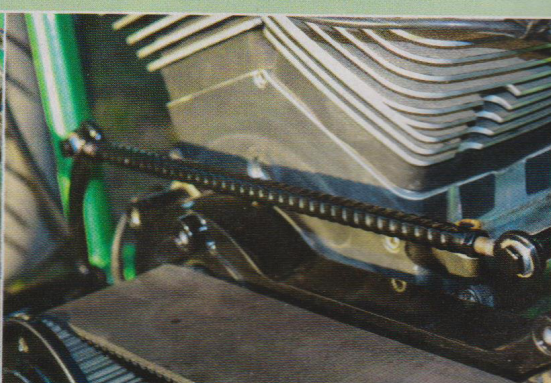
Story by Copper Mike • Photos by Marilyn Stemp

Being a bike builder, you come across many people with the same passion as you. At shows it's common to meet people who say they are or want to be "bike builders." It's rare though to meet people who actually have the passion, the talent, and the commitment to do it. But about a year and a half ago, I got an email from someone wanting to apprentice for me.

ap-pren-tice [uh-pren-tis] noun

1. A person who works for another in order to learn a trade.
2. A person legally bound through indenture to a master craftsman in order to learn a trade.

Apprentice is a word that has fallen out of use in this country. It was once used when people wanted to learn a true craft. A term like "internship" doesn't capture the soul-craft that is motorcycle



building: creating parts in your mind and bringing them to reality with your own two hands.

I had been working solo for over a year (except for my girlfriend Deborah who was a huge help.) I was fabricating, welding, building, loading bikes on the trailer, driving to shows, setting up and breaking down, on my own. So when I received this letter it got my attention:

Hello,

My name is Terence Musto and I was wondering if you are hiring anyone at your shop, either as an apprentice or as a full time employee. I am a recent graduate from Babson College, but my passion is fabricating and working on bikes. I have built a custom chopper for myself and also had the privilege of completing a workshop with Steve Stone, a custom builder in Massachusetts. Although my experience in the motorcycle industry is limited thus far, I am interested in furthering my knowledge and skills and truly breaking into the industry full time. Everything that I have learned so far has been mostly self-taught. I am a quick learner, a hard worker, and extremely passionate about these bikes.

I also have a portfolio of work that I have completed that I would be more than happy to either send to you or bring by the shop if you are interested. I truly appreciate your time and consideration.

Terence Musto

I said to Deb, "Maybe we should have this kid come in and talk." She thought I was crazy, as she knows how hard it is to find someone committed to this craft. But I said, "He lives in Albany, three and a half hours away. I'll make it an early meeting and if he's willing to drive that far for an 8 AM meeting he might have the dedication that I could use."

Well, he arrived on time and said, "Hi, I'm Terence but everyone calls me T." He brought a book of photos of the chopper he'd built in his parents' garage in New York while going to college in Boston. As I found out, he's beyond well educated, well spoken and polite, and has the same passion for motorcycles that I do. He had tools, abili-



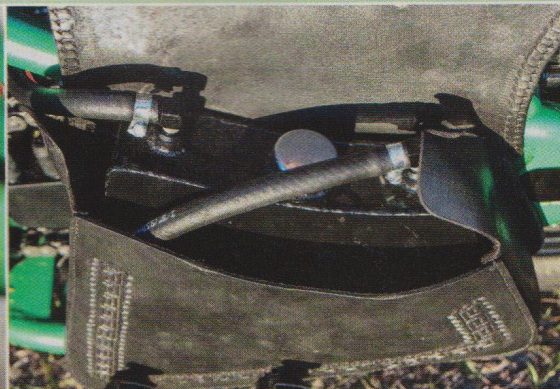
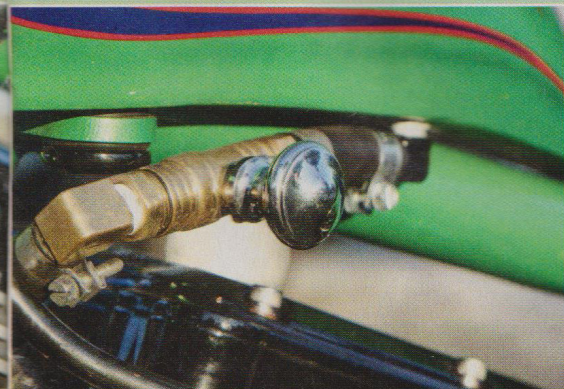
ty, the desire and the smarts to learn anything. (And the nice new TIG welder he brought with him didn't hurt, either!)

After only several weeks, it was time to take the show on the road and T got thrown head first into the industry: Timonium, Daytona, Vegas Bike Week, even Art Basel! We probably did 20 or 25 shows together.

But it didn't take long for me to see what a valuable asset T was and I decided I couldn't have him working for free, commuting to and from Brooklyn to my shop on Long Island. So I gave him a meager wage and set him up with a place to stay, and we kept the ride going. Loading bikes into art galleries in NYC, going to the Hamptons, setting up at James Hetfield's Orion Music + More Festival; the action was never ending.

For a young man, T has an old soul. He digs antiquing, going to flea markets and taking the time to learn the right way to make things. He told me he hated doing wiring, so what did I do? What any good teacher would! I had him wire every bike that came through the shop. It worked out nicely, because I'm not a big fan of wiring myself, and now, T is a pro at it.

During countless hours in the shop and on the road, we'd pass



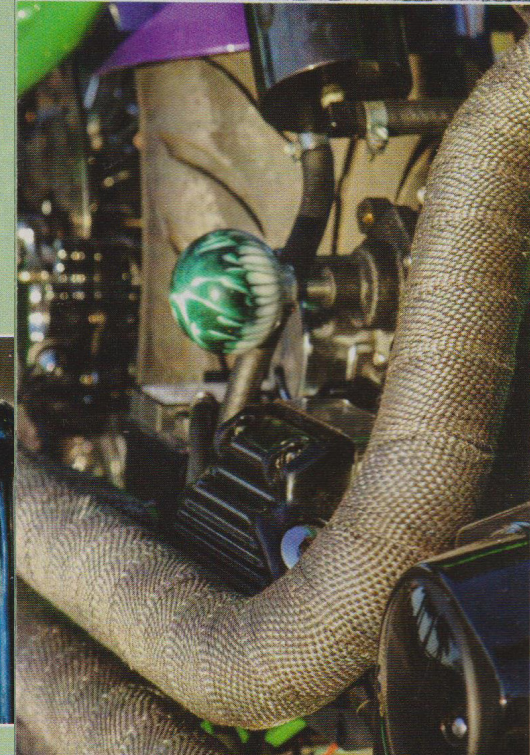


the time by building bikes together in our minds, and T decided he wanted to redo his bike with a Gravesend frame. To me it sounded like the beginning of his "final exam!" I told him I'd help him and we would bounce ideas off of each other, but he'd have to make everything himself for his bike.

His work ethic and ability continued to impress me as he built this bike. Working a full day at the shop then building until the early hours, he slept at the shop many nights. I think the results speak for themselves.

I'm proud to see he has developed his own style: a mix between a chopper and a bobber, creating innovative parts while maintaining classic lines. His bike is a mix of parts that were hand-formed from sheet metal (like the gas tank, rear fender, and oil bag) and quality machined components. He found creative ways to make the bike his own. Check out his revolver cylinder style machined oil bags: they are part oil bag/part Chopper Shox mount. That's right, inside the top portion of the cylinder is a Chopper Shox for the seat, and the bottom acts as an oil reservoir. The main oil bag is actually inside of the Vulista leather saddlebag. An innovative and clean system!

It's nice to see him rocking a clean set of Copper Mike Signature 10" Mini Apes. And his forward controls? They're made from antique stove handles that we picked





up while passing through the Rocky Mountains. That's not the only antique on this bike: the tail light is a World War Two microphone that he repurposed and wired to function as a running light/stop lamp. The springer front end is a DNA unit with a front piece that was a collaboration between T, Ryan Boyd, and myself. T took my frontend design and made it his own by incorporating 1/4" round bar accents into it. T also worked the round bar concept into the top motor mount, fender struts, shift linkage, and rear master cylinder mount, as well as the front brake caliper mount. Don't forget the machined and ball milled switch box—and we don't use a CNC mill around Gravesend. All our millwork is done by hand on a 40's-era Bridgeport Knee Mill.

T's original bike was green, considered by many to be a bad luck color. However, T's a firm believer that you make your own luck in life, and he decided to name his new bike Cheatin' Death—so it's green, of course!

You can decide for yourself as you check out the bike but as far as I'm concerned, T has passed the test of being an apprentice and can now proudly call himself a bike builder. As his teacher, I couldn't be prouder. **IV**



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