

Saxon Chopper

LET'S GET ONE thing clear at the outset: No one has ever selected one chopper over another because of how it scores in MCN-style objective performance categories.

Our readers, for the most part, judge motorcycles in the context of the best bike match for their particular riding style. This is not true about choppers or their owners. While choppers are somewhat fun to ride... for limited distances, for most chopper owners, it's really not about the riding.

My experience suggests that you are better off viewing choppers as works of art. Unlike traditional art objects that hang on the wall or rest on the coffee table of your home for guests to admire, chopper art is typically displayed in front of a bar. Coincidentally, you can also mount your work of art and ride it to a new exhibition location where those who appreciate this style of art can admire, compliment and discuss your acquisition with you or amongst themselves.

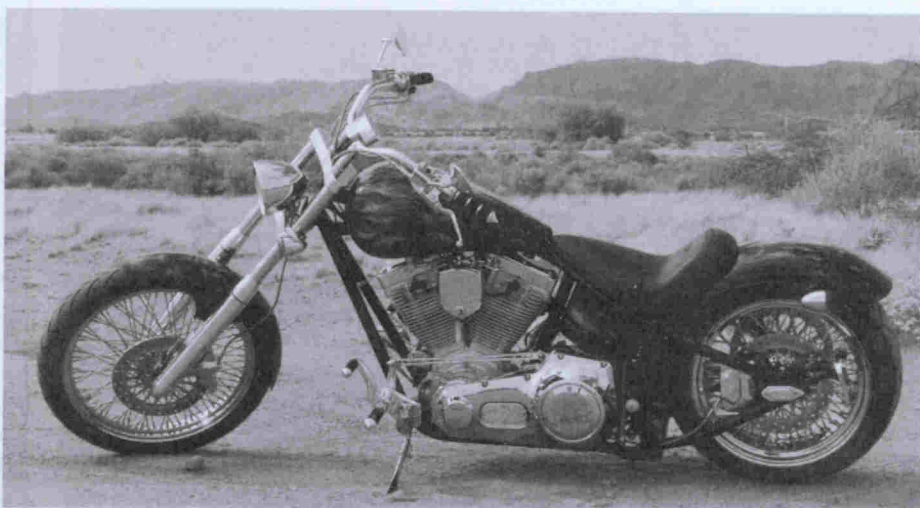
Picasso or Van Gogh

As in the art world, the price of a one-of-a-kind work from an acknowledged master such as Arlen Ness can be astronomical. Alternately, choices of reproduction models from lesser known builders or "semi-customized" models of more mainstream bikes dramatically affect the asking price. Once a purchase is made, the "picture frame" for the work of art is the owner/rider. After one picks the right chopper, a multitude of personal wardrobe choices; belts, boots, jeans, bike accessories, facial hair and even full-coverage tattoos are chosen to enhance the newly acquired art object.

Saxon Motorcycles is in business to give its customers a bike with a unique look at an affordable price. Ranging in price from \$22,595 to \$26,995 and with fewer than 200 of each model available worldwide in 2006, you'll see one Saxon motorcycle for every several hundred Harley-Davidsons you pass. Each year, Saxon plans to come out with at least one model that will be made only that year, moving you further up the exclusivity trail. For 2006, that model is a retro-modern Black Crown, a Gard Hollinger (of LA County Choprods)—designed bike that appears totally like a one-of-a-kind bike. During the dealer meeting I attended, the company emphasized its focus on building high-quality bikes that are reliable and that contain more proprietary components, including unique Saxon pegs, grips, coil covers, shift linkages and keys.

Performance Testing

Using the term "performance" in the same sentence with choppers is problematic, as I mentioned above. What performance these bikes have is limited to straight line acceleration and then, I suspect, is based largely on the noise they make in the process. Staying true to the work-of-art theme, I contacted the factory a few weeks after the launch and suggested a very non-MCN type test, but one that would address my artwork point of view. As a result, one Saturday afternoon I borrowed a new 2006 Saxon Fire Storm motorcycle and headed out with the goal of hitting some local watering holes frequented by those most likely to appreciate this sort of ride. Desiring to look the part, I discarded my normal riding attire of padded leather pants, padded mesh jacket and European-style riding boots, full face Arai helmet and carbon-fiber reinforced gloves. Always a believer in dressing for the accident, I had padded underwear under my blue jeans, a fully-padded leather jacket, and I found a flat-black



full-face helmet and rubber-soled cowboy boots. I sort of fit in.

Heading from Phoenix out to Cave Creek, I found the bike was not very comfortable to ride. Being somewhat inseam-challenged, I had a long reach to the bars and found the front controls were a good stretch for my legs. With more time and some adjustment, some of these complaints could have been overcome, but not all. Navigating through Saturday afternoon traffic at Cave Creek, however, I could feel the glances and occasional outright stares. When I parked the bike at Harold's Cave Creek Corral, an old west saloon and restaurant and favorite haunt of many a Harley rider, I took a spot in the front row. Inside, I got a table where I could observe the bike through the window. Sure enough, all through my hamburger and diet Coke lunch, the bike was ogled. Other bikers seem unable to pass it without slowing down, at the very least. Most stopped, stared, walked around it, and talked about it. Hey, it gave me a nice feeling and it wasn't even my bike.

Like nearly all chopper owners, Saxon customers tend to be dual-income, 40-ish and own at least one other bike. Most come from the Harley camp and are looking for an "affordable custom," a "real chopper" but not a one-off that won't run or a poorly designed assemblage of off-the-shelf parts. It was interesting to learn that the average chopper enthusiast spends approximately \$8K per year on the hobby, including accessories, trips and apparel.

Customers ordering a bike have a wide variety of paint schemes to choose from and the bikes can be further customized with special chrome and billet wheels, sissy bars, two-up seats, several handlebar options and black-out packages. All models feature the S&S 96 or 111-cubic-inch engine, are EPA and CARB certified, and carry a two-year warranty.

There are currently 30 Saxon dealers around the country. Go to www.saxonmotorcycles.com for more information.

I enjoyed meeting the Saxon team and had fun riding the bike. However, besides the general disregard for protective gear, two aspects of the chopper culture totally infuriate me. The first is the blatant disregard for others as it relates to loud pipes. Loud pipes are largely responsible, I believe, for turning general public attitudes against all motorcyclists. The second is the practice of riding to a bar, having a drink or two, and then getting on the bike and heading to another bar. Some rides are even organized to encourage this. Manufacturers play to this image by building bikes with drinking themes or styling touches (oil reservoirs shaped like mini-kegs.) Even Saxon names a part on one of its bikes the 390 which is the police code call for drunk and disorderly conduct.

—Steve Larsen

Saxon Motorcycle Co.—555 W. Main Avenue, Casa Grande, AZ 85222; (520) 426-3000; E-mail: info@saxonmotorcycles.com