

# Custom Motorcycles: What's Out There For Me?

THIS MAGAZINE'S PAGES ARE FILLED WITH photos of beautiful custom motorcycles that talented designers have fabricated, welded, and painted to create rolling masterpieces. They're visually stunning. Who

wouldn't want to call one of those two-wheeled head-turners his own?

Lately, I've been wondering if I, the consumer, have a place in this custom world. I like cool motorcycles just as much as the next guy or gal, and I subscribe to the lifestyle as much as I can. With all the rallies, trade shows, and magazines playing host to the baddest bike builders, I'm wondering if it's time to ante up and start playing.

The first thing I examine before making a purchase is practicality. If I put a pretty penny down on an item, it better serve a good purpose — or an emotional one. Here's an example of an emotional purpose. "I need a cool custom motorcycle so I can be the envy of other bikers." Ahh ... don't think so. I don't need a bike to stroke my ego. Don't get me wrong, I definitely wouldn't mind having the coolest, hottest bike to show off to others, but there is pressure attached to owning a high-dollar toy, in my opinion. Do I want the kind of attention that comes from riding a bike that's out of the ordinary? I'm a rider who is a woman. That alone attracts unwanted attention sometimes. Now, put me astride a wildly painted, low and long-necked beast, and I'm sure to be the target of straying eyes. I'm not always comfortable with that.

Next, there's pressure to protect this pricey piece. Will someone steal it? How can I ensure that strangers don't sit on it or touch it? It's too pretty. I don't want to get it dirty. It's like a piece of art. It invites attention, sometimes the wrong kind of attention. Do I feel like dealing with this?

The next thing I examine when considering my place at the custom motorcycle table is, does this kind of machine serve a function? I ride mostly long distances. No more boulevard cruising for this chick. Don't feel the need to profile anymore. Just need a reliable steed to lead me down some of America's great roads, carrying me safely as I gawk at the scenery and take it all in. Can a custom-built show-stopper do this? I suppose it can if I outfit it with the accessories I desire when embarking on a long trip. But then that defeats the whole purpose of a motorcycle being a custom. Or does it?

Most custom-built motorcycles these days are minimalist. Just look at some of the eye-popping metal in the pages of *American Iron*. Builders seem to be going for the leanest and meanest motorcycle



possible. That doesn't leave any room for my saddlebags, a windshield, a comfy seat, or a backrest for my rear bag. Some bikes barely make room for a rear shock. So, I'm not so sure the custom bikes of today can get me where I want to go in the style I'm used to. Even if I wanted to bolt on these touring luxuries just some of the time, a lot of these custom jobs just can't accommodate them. So, I'm out of luck.

Now, wait a minute. They're called customs, for crying out loud! Why can't I go in and have a bike customized to my specifications? That's what everybody is doing, isn't it? So what if my specs are different than everyone else's. Can't I get a full-fairing, windshielded, saddlebag-hanging, cushy-seated custom with a decent set of shock absorbers?

I've interviewed Arlen Ness several times; one time, he walked me through the gigantic garage of his showroom in Dublin, California. Out of all the flashy bananas lined up, the one he told me he likes the most is what he calls the Eagle. It's very custom. Looks like it started out as an FLHT Electra Glide Standard, complete with hard bags, full fairing, and a windshield. Of course the Arlen Ness version has been slammed and stretched, with a low-profile windshield and hard bags. The bike is black, and a large eagle perches on the tank with wings spread out down the sides. There's a big, wide, cushy saddle for him and his wife, Bev. I bet there are some decent shocks underneath, too. That's a custom motorcycle, all right. In fact, Arlen told me that when he contemplates which of his masterpieces will take him to Sturgis each year, more often than not, he chooses the Eagle.

So, that's it. I can have a custom the way I want it. I don't have to succumb to the minimalist trend. Those bikes just don't serve a purpose for me. I do want a unique motorcycle, one that has my stamp on it. So what if that stamp is in the form of comfort. At least I have a comfy rear seat and a backrest that I can offer to Joe Cool Custom who's standing in a bar wiping bugs off his face while waiting for his sore butt and smashed tailbone to quit aching so he can complete his last 500 miles to Sturgis. Hop on, buddy! **AIM**

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