

KEANU REEVES TAKES HIS PASSION PUBLIC

QUICK! NAME A CELEBRITY WHO RIDES A motorcycle. The usual suspects probably come to mind: Jay Leno, Lorenzo Lamas, Peter Fonda. These famous riders and others like them are known in motorcycling mostly by their appearances at charity rides, like Love Ride, the big one-day

The actor prepares for one of his biggest rolls

fundraising event in California. But there's an actor who's quietly been enjoying motorcycling for the last 25 years and probably has more miles on his tires than all other celebrities combined. And if it wasn't for the occasional tabloid photograph of him buzzing around the streets





of Los Angeles on one of the many Nortons he owns, the general public might not even know that he's a rider. "It's my day-to-day means of getting around, rain or shine," Keanu Reeves shares matter-of-factly. "There have been stretches ... where I didn't have a car, so it was my only mode of transportation."

And up until now, the 47-year-old actor, best known for his roles in the movies *Speed* and *The Matrix*, has been pretty low key about the fact that he rides motorcycles (and has had a stable of about a dozen or so over the years). And that's not by any grand design. Keanu's just a low-key kind of guy, straightforward, easygoing, and has never bought into the whole Hollywood thing. He has been content to be a working actor for the last 25 years with more than 50 movie and TV projects to his name. He has become famous along the way, but has been enjoying his personal passions privately, motorcycling being one of them.

"I love the physicality of riding," Keanu explains. "You go through something when you ride, you know. When you start and when you come back, you go on a little journey that sometimes you don't get when you're sitting in a car — the sensory experience of riding, the attention you pay and the times it becomes contemplative. Even just going on a two-hour scoot, you go through something, and you get something. And there's something about the satisfaction of coming home from a journey. You just kind of got out into the world, and you've come back, and it's like, okay, this is good."

It's so good that Keanu is positioning himself to share with the general public his love affair with motorcycling. He's collaborating with well-known custom bike builder Gard Hollinger of Choprods to bring a production motorcycle to the masses, one that was born out of a custom bike Gard has been building for Keanu over the last five years. The final masterpiece had them both dumbfounded. "We just kind of got carried away by what the bike did to us, in a way," Keanu remembers. "We both were looking at the bike, and to me, well, I just loved looking at it. All the different lines and angles on it, and the materials and the surfaces — it's just aesthetically beautiful."

Hoping the bike's beauty was more than skin deep, Keanu put the custom through its paces. "Once I rode it ... the way she sounds and the way she rides..." Keanu trails off as his mind wanders back to the day he christened the bike in the canyons around Los Angeles. "It holds the lines, whether straight or in the corners, really well. And it's pretty nimble. The weight of it is so centralized that it comes up and down, and goes side to side pretty well."

The incredible ride, the jaw-dropping good looks — this two-wheeler left Keanu and Gard with one conclusion. "It seemed like it was asking us to go out into the world," the actor says with a grin, seriously. And so it will. Keanu and Gard are forming a motorcycle company that will make this as-yet-unnamed model available to the public in the near future. While details are still being worked out on all of the

business stuff, we can ponder just what style of bike this is. Part cruiser? Yes, with its pullback handlebars, raked front end, forward controls, and 210mm rear rubber. Part sport-bike? Sure, with its racy aesthetics and upswept performance exhaust. Part Brit bike? Definitely, with its café-racer fuel tank. In today's terms, you might call it a sport cruiser or performance cruiser. Gard comments, "I think it is kind of unique. I guess the quickest way I could describe it is a lightweight, custom V-Rod or [Ducati] Diavel or something in that vein."

Considering that Keanu had heavy creative input, it's no surprise the motorcycle is part this and part that. Keanu has owned nearly every style of bike over the years, but those familiar with the dark-haired, 6'1" actor might associate him only with Nortons because he's usually photographed riding one of several that he owns. But the first bike he ever owned was a Kawasaki 600 enduro, purchased after he took his first ride ever while filming in Munich, Germany, in 1986. "This girl had an enduro on the film lot, and I asked her if I could ride it, and she said sure," Keanu recalls. "And I said, 'I don't know how to ride a motorcycle,' and she went, 'That's okay.' Then she showed me where everything was, and I started riding around the film lot." When the young actor returned home to Los Angeles, he visited a motorcycle shop called Super Twins, and so began his relationship with Norton Commandos, his first being a 1972 Norton Commando that he purchased in 1989.

But being away from home and his motorcycles for months at a time while filming posed a problem for Keanu and this budding love affair. His solution? "I would go to the city, buy a used bike, ride it, and then at the end of the film, I'd sell it back." Over the years, the actor has owned a Suzuki GS1100E, a Suzuki GSX-R750, a Kawasaki 900, and a 1984 Harley-Davidson Shovelhead that he purchased in Pennsylvania one winter. "I rode it with like 18 layers on.

Went on my first toy ride at a shop out there. That was fun." He's even owned a Moto Guzzi, and a West Coast Chopper built by Jesse James. But it was his 2005 Wide Glide and his desire for a custom sissybar that brought him to Gard's Los Angeles shop. "I had a Thunderheader [exhaust] on it. It was a lovely motorcycle, and I just wanted to customize it a bit, and Gard was like, I don't do that," Keanu says laughing. That's right. Gard doesn't do custom bolt-ons, but the two got to talking, and, well, Gard remembers, "It was very casual, and he looked at some of the bikes I do, and we talked about the bikes he had and what he wanted to do. And that's where it started. The plan wasn't to have a five-year project, but it just grew from there." And grow it did. The only noticeable holdover from the Wide Glide on Keanu's custom is the motor. "The engine's a combination of the best stuff we could find to build up the stock engine and have performance built in. It's a 106," Gard says.

KEANU ADDS, "One of the things I want with this motorcycle is that I don't want it to be a hassle for people, wherever they live, to deal with it. So I want to homologate it as much as we can and still make it the bike that it is."

That means everything from getting it registered easily to getting it serviced easily, because many riders — like him, Keanu admits — have limited technical know-how. "I'm the side-of-the-road wrencher, where you're like, okay, I'll take this hanger, I'll splice this wire, I'll take the seat off," Keanu says chuckling. "I'm not really getting into the guts of the bike, but I'll do what I have to do to get home."

So what began as a custom bike for Keanu is now a prototype the actor is excited to share with his fellow riders. "You know, in a way, I was the first customer," Keanu smiles. "And from that I can really represent my passion for the motorcycle. This is an investment, sure, but I'm also making a personal investment." **AIM**

