

PAY AND DISPLAY

Like Roland Sands' BMW R NineT project? Well check out this brace of full-bore, money-no-object Roland Sands Design Harleys

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It's one of those great pub questions (indeed, for some of us, it's been grim reality...) What bike would you get if you were on 11 points? What can a self-respecting SuperBike man or woman ride about on and still have fun, yet not end up with a bus pass instead of a driving licence for six months? Small-bore sportsbike? You'll still be doing 90 in a 50, and you'll get the wheelies and stoppies sorted eventually. Supermoto? Worse than a big sportsbike, with twice the wheelie and stoppie rate. Big tourer? Too dull, apart from the music.

Fancy-ass custom? Hmmm. Virtually no stunting, sensible top-end potential – and a

riding style that favours cruising? The ideal antidote to going too fast?

Now normally, I'd say no to all that. But for the last six months, there's been a custom bike that's grabbed my attention at a few bike shows. Built for MAG Europe, the UK importer of Roland Sands Design parts, this Harley 1200 Sportster-based special tickled my fancy. Partly because Sands is the man of the moment, with his BMW R NineT project, but partly because this bike looked just the job for an exiled sportsbike rider. It had fancy suspension! Better brakes! Wheels and tyre upgrades! And a race pipe together with Power Commander fuelling mods. Plus, it looked pretty sweet, with the best use of brown paint seen since

the first Suzuki Hayabusa.

I had to ask for a spin. So the good folks at MAG sent me down to Shaw Speed and Custom – who built the Sands Sportster for MAG. And when we got there, they only went and offered us a ride on Shane 'Shakey' Byrne's custom Harley too! Pretty much the polar opposite of the lean Sportster, Shakey's bike is an all-out custom bobber, again laden with Roland Sands parts. It's based on a Harley Big Twin, this time a Softail Slim, but massively modified, with a paintscheme centred around his '67' race number.

So, a big day out to the seaside, on nearly £50k worth of sweet Sands specials. Has to beat the bus any day, right? **▣**



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Sporty Sands

I actually ended up spending a couple of weeks with the Sporty, thanks to some cunning planning. I picked her up at the London bike show, with instructions to deliver the bike down to Eastbourne when finished with it.

As the Sportster rolled out of the MAG Europe truck, I remembered why it had caught my eye. It's a handsome bike, no doubt, with clean lines, nicely-matched components, and a purposeful look that's lacking in some of the other chromed custom queans you see in the custom section of bike shows. Not too 'Shoreditch' – no knobby tyres or matt green paint – and with a few touches that suggest performance has been more than an afterthought here. A wider rear rim and tyre, upgraded front caliper, and a set of adjustable piggyback Progressive Suspension shocks, together with a neat titanium race pipe and the Power Commander hidden under the sidepanel. Sweet.

The very nice man from MAG starts it up, and a small storm of aural mayhem ensues. Like the proverbial Metallica concert in a dustbin, the Sporty is small, but very, very loud...

I've not ridden a proper custom in a long time, but the unique feel comes back

to me before I leave the Excel carpark. I always reckon riding a custom tells you a lot about basic bike chassis dynamics – because they're so extreme on a cruiser. You'll never notice the effect of, say, steering inertia on a sportsbike, because there's very little. Ditto the feeling of extreme rake and trail. So when you ride something like the Sporty, you appreciate what these things mean a bit more.

What I'm also appreciating is the grunt of the engine. It's partly down to the mega-loud pipe of course, but the combination of an enormous, yet lowly-tuned motor, and a very low rev limit means the 1200 twin has tremendous tug off the line. Like an empty Transit van though, it runs out of revs quickly, and once you get through the five gears, you're not too far over the ton. 110mph is easy enough to see on the



SECOND OPINION JOHN HOGAN: SPORTY SANDS

Ever wondered what a twenty grand naked SV650 feels like? I reckon this is about as close as you'd get. The riding position was one that I could happily live with if I was doing a rural ride, but the stupid peg position doesn't suit urban feet-up, feet-down riding. It was clear what kind of Harley AI was into as he always went for this over the other one. Watching him huss it across roundabouts and along Eastbourne seafront, it was clear AI was enjoying what this bike had to offer. For me, it was at odds with itself. Fast enough to get you into trouble eventually, agile enough for you to take the bait when a sports bike passes you by, but massively underbraked and quite quickly out of its depth mid-corner. I thought Harleys were about going slower and trying less. Sure has got a perdy mouth, though...



speedo, but the way the Sporty gets there is pleasing indeed.

Through town, another side to Sporty Sands quickly becomes clear. Folk properly, properly love it. The noise, the style, the mad paint, whatever it is, this bike gets massively more attention than any sportsbike. And when I get home, the kids, the wife, even the visiting in-laws all come out and crowd round the 1200 like paparazzi round a just-stabbed Justin Bieber. They're sitting on it, taking pics, melting their shoes on the white-hot pipe, but they absolutely love it! Ah well.

A few days later, I press Sporty into action for a more mundane errand.

I need to visit Big CC Racing to do some work on my project ZRX1100, so I set off. First problem is I need petrol: the teeny peanut tank holds about the same amount of fluid as one of those gigantic Monster Energy cans that Shaun the Pope lives on (okay, it holds about 12 litres, but still).

Next problem is the front mudguard. Because there isn't one. And like the huge steering inertia and the silly rake and trail, you don't notice a mudguard till you haven't got one. It's not raining, but the roads are damp from last night's downpour. So the front wheel picks up the water off the road, and sprays it at me, like a liquid circular

saw. It's a nice, sunny morning, but I can barely see from the muddy effluent spraying all over my visor, as I carry my own personal rainbow down the A3. Bah.

Things improve – I get some petrol, and once we get over about 50mph, the wind whips the road spray away before it can soak me. And I'm down at

Big CC in a reasonable trice. The Sporty is okay on the motorway, the riding position is near-enough to normal that it's no worse than most other naked bikes. I'm not going to be racing any BMW M3s today, but the top end of 110-120mph is fine for dicing on the (actual) M3...

"The noise, the style, the mad paint, whatever it is, this bike gets massively more attention than any sportsbike."

While down at Big CC, I popped the Sporty on Sean's dyno. Embarrassingly, I was massively off on the power output. I should, admittedly, have known better from the top end (you need about 35bhp to hit the ton on a sportsbike, 100bhp gets you up to around 150mph). But in my head the Sporty would have about 85bhp. In reality, it made about 62, at the tyre, and was running a bit lean... It was also smoking a bit – the MAG guys thought it might have been overheated on a trip to Rome last year, and it did seem like a valve oil seal might have gone.

Still, 62bhp at the wheel is about the same as a Suzuki Gladys (which is about 70kg lighter). Hmmm. A £17k bike that'll get handed its arse at the lights by a £5k commuter with a stupid name? Even in Shoreditch that doesn't sound so good.

And of course, if that's all we care about here, then the Sporty makes no sense. On the other hand, like my in-laws, kids, and that posh lady outside Liverpool Street Station all thought, there's definitely something about the Sporty that just works. We often talk about the garage door test – how do you feel when you lift the steel up-and-over door and see your bike within? I know a Gladius would make me pleased to have a bike certainly. But the Sporty would make me very happy all over, every time... ▣

SPORTY SANDS

The Sporty Sands had a very specific job to do, which was to show what can be done simply with bolt-on parts, rather than a load of custom one-off fabrication. So all the bits are out of the Roland Sands catalogue, or from Performance Machine (the firm started by Roland's dad, Perry).

The base bike is a 2011 Harley-Davidson XL1200N Nightster. Den Lane from MAG Europe picked the parts from the firm's Roland Sands Design catalogue, and Steve Willis at Shaw Speed and Custom managed the build. Roland Sands himself came up with the paint scheme, which was executed by Shaw's paint partner, Image Design Custom, and features real gold leaf.

► Wheels

RSD Slam Contrast Cut wheels

► Engine

Stock motor, RSD Velocity Stack air filter, RSD/Vance & Hines Slant works finish exhaust, Dynojet Power Commander fuelling module

► Stuff

Translogic Micro Display temp/tacho display
RSD contrast cut front master cylinder cap, cafe gas cap, RSD Tracker belt guard, RSD Avenger levers, Tracker grips, Moto pegs

► Suspension

Progressive Suspension
430 Contrast Cut shocks, RSD Tracker fork brace

► Brakes

PM Brake calipers front and rear,
RSD discs

What does it cost? The Sporty Sands would cost you about £17k to build, including paint and the base bike.

**PAY AND
DISPLAY**



Shakey Sands

Now this is more like it. This is the sort of crazy extreme custom engineering that you'd expect from someone like Shane 'Shakey' Byrne. The BSB legend is a man who knows what he likes, and he clearly gave the guys at Shaw plenty

of direction on this build. Unlike the 1200 Sportster, almost everything on this '67' bike is custom-made, with the original bike barely recognisable under the total teardown and rebuild.

That base bike is a Harley-Davidson FLS Softail Slim, one of Milwaukee's Big Twins. So you get an enormous 1,690cc twin, with a primary drive and

transmission that wouldn't look out of place inside a cutaway Chieftain tank. The rear suspension is designed to look like an old hardtail bike, and on the '67 bike, it's been modified with an enormous 240-section Performance Machine 'Phatail' rear wheel kit. Of course, there's another ear-bleeding exhaust setup and pancake air filter, and as Steve Willis from Shaw starts her up for us, I can't wait to get out on the road down to Eastbourne.

My first spin, though, is a bit of a 'mare. Unlike the comparatively normal Sportster, the riding position on Shakey's Project '67 is really extreme, with the forward-set footpegs barely within reach, and the flat bars stuck way out in the wind. My stumpy pins can just about reach the pegs, but it's a struggle to keep my feet on there, especially once the wind gets up. The bars are a long way off too, and I feel like I'm being gently crucified as we ride along. Even better, the sinuous Vance & Hines pipes are a bit short of heat shielding where my leg runs, and every now and then I singe my inner calf on the 800° titanium pipeage.

Riding position aside, the '67 bike is a bit of a handful through town too. Bumping around Eastbourne seafront, the huge rear tyre is a struggle to get up and over to steer through roundabouts, and the utterly minimal ground clearance means you're liable to be done up the inside by grannies in Micras on those same roundabouts... ▶

Engine

103 cubic inch (1,690cc) Twin Cam, Vance and Hines race pipe, Roland Sands Design air cleaner

Stuff

Performance Machine forward controls and switchgear, RSD engine and tranny covers, fuel tank, fuel cap, grips and seat. Bitwell bars.

Suspension

Performance Machine Phatail rear suspension, titanium carbide coated forks

SHAKEY SANDS

The guys at Shaw were keen to point out that while the Sands Sportster is a bolt-on exercise, showing how far you can go with just parts-swapping, the 67 bike is the real deal. Things like a hand-made extended oil tank don't sound like a big deal, but are responsible for changing the lines of the bike completely. The attention to detail is superb, with the flower motif continuing onto the frame and swingarm paint finish, and everywhere you look, you see another neat little touch. Things like the aircraft aluminium switchgear and the stealth LED dash mark Project 67 out as something beyond the norm.

Wheels

RSD contrast cut Boss rims, 21" front, 18" rear, Avon Cobra tyres, 240-section rear

Brakes

Performance Machine discs and calipers, PM master cylinders

What does it cost? Shaw wouldn't put a price on Shakey's bike, but to build one like it would cost "about £35-40k".

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SECOND OPINION

JOHN HOGAN: SHAKEY SANDS

If you're going to go slow, you might as well give the people something to look at. It's actually more useable than you think, I have no doubt that I could commute across central London on this bike everyday. I'd enjoy it as well. Using both brakes with the gearbox to slow pace is something that you get used to, as is pushing the bike over and holding it down in a corner to stop that massive 240 rear tyre from dictating your line. I loved it and could have quite happily ridden it all day. Comfortable, loud, and built with the kind of quality that makes me embarrassed to have ever picked up a spanner. When I grow up, I definitely want one of these in my lineup of dream garage bikes. Fast(ish) and loud, Shakey is a lucky man.

Of course, it's not about all that. Project 67 is very much a cruiser – a tool for trundling along very straight, very long boulevards, preferably in the sun, preferably with lots of hot girls checking you out...

Conclusion

The idea for this 'test' changed markedly over the duration. At first, I just wanted to ride the Sporty Sands because I thought it looked cool, and would be a laugh to ride. Then, when we dug into

the world of Shaw Speed, MAG Europe and Roland Sands, it became clear there was much more to see. Shaw itself is a real enigma. Here's a former industrial lawnmower dealer, in the garden of England, building award-winning, world-class Harley customs, and sending them out globally. Indeed, the firm regularly ships one-off specials back to the States. Like selling oil to the Arabs or coal to Newcastle, Shaw's bikes are so good, they're actually showing the natives how it's done.

I said 'test' there because this isn't really a comparative contest. These are two very different bikes, and they show the breadth of what's possible as much as anything. I loved the Sportster and pretty much hated the 67 bike – John Hogan was the exact reverse. You might be either. But to go back to the beginning for a moment: if you're a proper sportsbike nutter, and are thinking of something less frantic for a change, there's definitely something in a custom cruiser. The Sporty Sands shows you can still get acceptable, 'normal' street bike performance, in a package that will turn heads, and give you a proper thrill every time you open the garage. How yours looks will very much depend on what you like of course. But with your imagination, and some help from guys like Roland Sands and the Shaw Speed and Custom folks, it could be a real corking bike. **BT**