

MAN
IN MOTION
ISSUE 12
DESIGN
SPECIAL

\$5.99 US \$5.99 CAN

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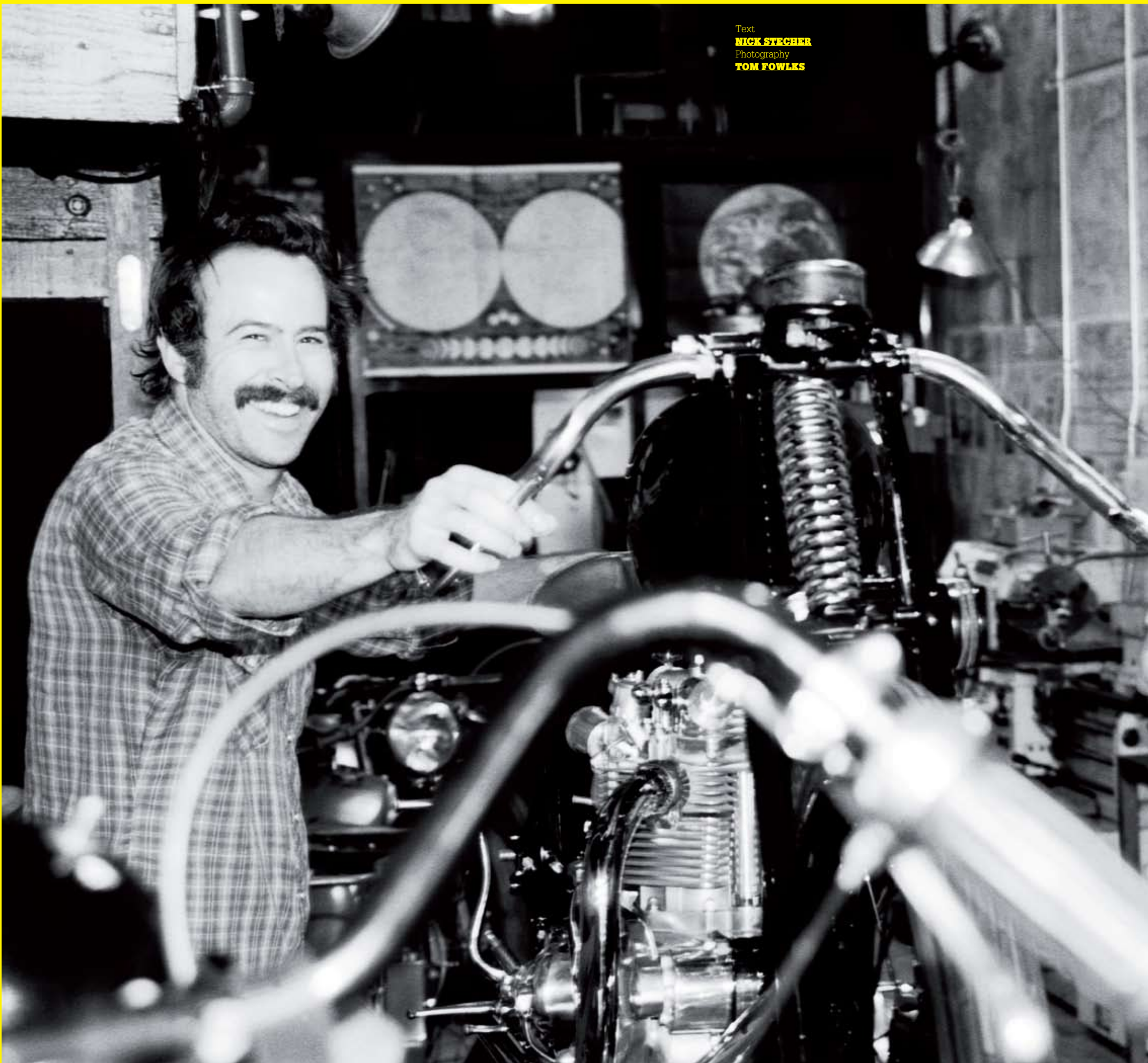
INTERSECTION

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SHORT CUTS

'IT'S KINDA LIKE GETTING THE TOY YOU WANTED ON CHRISTMAS MORNING'

JASON LEE FINALLY GETS HIS CUSTOM-BUILT FALCON

Hel-lo! *Guten Morgen!*" calls out Jason Lee cheerily in a faux-German accent. As he swings open the heavy steel doors of the Falcon Motorcycle shop, clad in western shirt, Wrangler jeans, grey suede Clarks and what has become his signature broom sweeper moustache, Lee is the scruffy manifestation of unkempt give-a-fuck. Not that it matters, or seems out of place. There's not a body in the dingy, cavernous workspace that appears to have seen the business end of a shower nozzle in the last couple evenings. "Did you catch a nap?" he asks turning to Ian Barry, owner, designer, and brainchild behind Falcon. "It's been 20 hours straight," answers Amaryllis Knight wearily, Barry's business partner and girlfriend. "Careful, he hasn't even washed his face."

It's just about noon on a glorious spring Saturday in Silverlake, California. The sun is out and the birds are chirping merrily outside the corrugated metal and cement walls of this workshop, but Ian wouldn't know if it were dead winter on the fourth moon of Jupiter, because he's basically been up for three days straight. Without a nap since midweek, trying to finish a mechanical work of art for his client and friend Jason Lee. And Ian has that spun-out but manic glow of an artist in the squeezing grasp of inspiration.

Then Lee sees it, locking his eyes on the black oeuvre lifted on a work rack. Silence as he holds his gaze on the motorcycle, circling it to the back and holding position, hand unconsciously rubbing his chin. A look of deep concentration on his face, as if contemplating a masterpiece seen for the first time. A pensive mixture of intense scrutiny and awed disbelief. Then, a smile.

"I think you gotta throw all the other bikes out buddy, and start all new." The room laughs.

"Well, what do you think?"

"It's like...it's disturbing," says Jason. "I'm gonna start eating my own feces. I took Pilot (his child) to the zoo yesterday and it is true that gorillas eat their own shit. They just squat, in the shade, look around, and...there you go!" More laughter.

The word on the street is that Jason Lee is a very easy guy to work with. And for. You know, the practical joking kind of colleague, and there are plenty of stories to back it up. Seeing him in this grease-streaked workshop, in what seems more of a natural habitat than a sitcom backlot, there's not much proof to the counter. He just carries himself in a way that eludes pretension or any kind of fallacy.

Kind of what you'd expect from someone who's first initiation with fame came through the frequent handover of skate videos, passed around from couch session to house party with the frequency of a Mickey's 40 oz and cheap pinners (including the landmark *Video Days*, directed by a fresh-faced Spike Jonze). When your fame came from the fact that you could nail one helluva 360 kick flip, one would certainly hope not to encounter a primadonna.

"And the brake on the left side, with just emptiness here..." he says shaking his head, pointing to the reversely-placed brake levers, which come out from the end of the handlebars and forward, as opposed to clamped inside the grip. The bike is riddled with details such as these, intricate customizations original only to this bike. And to Ian Barry's mind. But most are customizations to make the bike cleaner. Simpler. Sleeker. Almost never flashier, and never ever ostentatious. Jason points to the naked fork, which has no exterior tangles or messes complicating its straight simplicity. In a meditative drone, almost to himself, he mutters, "running the cable through the fork...I mean that's just wrong."

Falcon Motorcycles is a world apart from most modern custom bike shops that fashion gaudy, hyper-masculated

monsters of glitter – mechanical abominations whose sole reason of existence is to bequeath their owner with an aggrandized sense of potency. American choppers coiffed in emerald green metallic chip paint and custom airbrushed idiocies, bulging with oversized ape hangers, absurd fork extensions and 12” Fat Boy rear tires. Motorcycles on anabolic steroids, the two-wheeled equivalent of Lou Ferrigno in ripped jeans.

The Falcon’s raison d’être, however, could not be further from the bulge and preen of its contemporaries. Ian Barry’s creations are creatures of subtlety, of form and design. Of linear cleanliness complimented with the occasional, unexpected fine-toothed flourish. They are more I.M. Pei than Frank Gehry. And this bike, dubbed Bullet (as in the species of falcon), is arguably Barry’s finest work.

“On these bars, you just don’t put a clamp-on lever,” mandates Lee authoritatively. “No you can’t. You can’t.” Truth be told, it feels a bit voyeuristic to be here watching Lee see his baby for the first time. It’s like a mechanical adoption, Barry handing over his lovechild with Lee to him. Almost as if we’re peeking into the windows of some vehicular maternity ward, like that scene in *Juno* where Jennifer Garner holds her baby-to-be for the first time. Only, the gestation period for this Falcon has actually been longer than a human’s. Jason has been waiting for his bike for over a year. (There was an actual voicemail he left a couple months back. It said simply: ‘Where’s my bike, Ass?’).

So, Jason has had to wait, like a boy with a birthday around the corner. Except, of course, this is Jason Lee, one of the ten most legendary skateboarders of all time, a hero to scruffy-haired legions the world over before the age of 20. The film actor who stole the limelight in some of the ‘90s most memorable indie films (*Chasing Amy*, *Mallrats*, *Dogma*), and even some majors (*Vanilla Sky*, *Enemy of the State* and his unforgettable turn as an egomaniacal rock star in *Almost Famous*). And this is Jason Lee, the titular character in NBC’s hit sitcom, *My Name Is Earl*. This is a man who gets what he wants, pretty much when he wants it. It’s not often that he’s asked to wait for much gratification. When a network star with massive street cred asks for a coffee, chances are he gets it before the pot has finished percolating. And a motorcycle? Don’t think it takes much longer. But yet he has patiently waited a year for this moment. And still, he will have to wait just a little bit more to ride this bike out of the workshop for the first time, as the final tweaks need to be performed on the engine.

“It’s kinda like getting the toy you wanted on Christmas morning as a kid, but your mom forgot to buy the batteries for it,” Lee laments. “But I have other bikes, and I’m busy on the old TV program, so I can wait.”

“And the batteries are on their way, my friend,” coos Ian soothingly. “Mom’s out right now to the 7-11 to get the batteries.”

One reason for the protracted birthing process is it can take months simply finding that one elusive piece to make it just so. The front wheel of the Bullet, for instance, was a model made only one year. Each Falcon is a one-of-a-kind sculpture, made up of a puzzle of re-engineered or completely machined new parts, modified originals and modern electronics enhancing performance without compromising aesthetic value. The alternator was handmade in Paris. The leafspring for the seat came from

a 1940s tractor and had to be modified to fit the Triumph. No aftermarket part is simply bolted on. Every time you change something from the original design, it creates the potential for more engineering, more troubleshooting. And you’re going on an untried blueprint.

A huge part of Amaryllis’ job is scouring for parts. Hours each day are spent combing the Internet’s far-reaching global bazaar for arcane components, handpicking through both the giant eBay listers of the world to the tiny distant corners of online mom ‘n pop vintage shops from rural England. Of course, many of these vendors have yet to plug into the great worldwide web, necessitating voyages to far-flung distant lands. The tail lamp they found for Lee’s bike, for instance, was unearthed in a small used-metal shop while on a road trip in the rolling Austrian hinterlands. Their search is never ending, each nook of the planet the possible (but quite unlikely) source of a future headlamp. Or brake clamp. Or modified peg stand.

“There’s a part that we’ve been waiting for to come in for this bike, it’s called a revulator, they only made it for one year,” explains Amaryllis. “And it’s really beautiful, but it’s so hard to find them. We found one that’s for some reason randomly been sitting in a drawer in this guy’s attic in England, and he doesn’t love motorcycles; he has no idea how it got there. But literally, that was a solid month worth of, no exaggeration, a couple hours a day looking.”

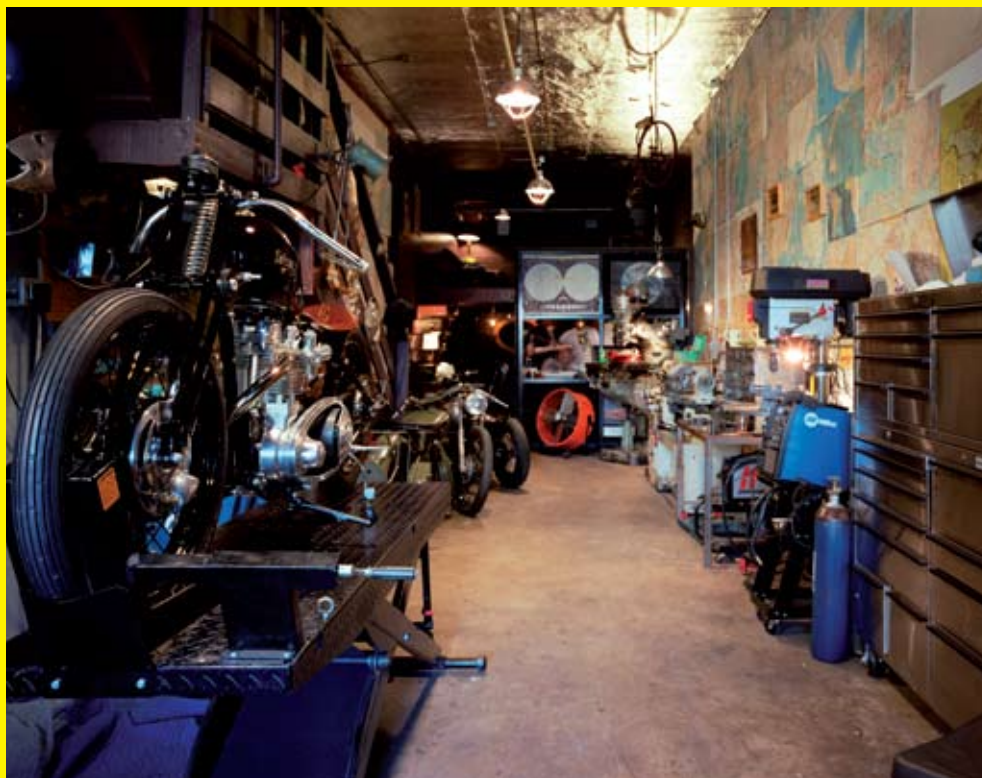
Like most Falcons, the Bullet is based on a vintage Triumph (Ian also works on the occasional Norton), in this case, a reclaimed 1950 Thunderbird, with matching numbers on the frame and engine. And the inspiration for its redesign is from early board track racers, which look very similar to bicycles, with exceptionally thin wheels and pedals. Board track racing was a growing motor sport the first two decades of the 20th Century, involving racing on impressively wide tracks with steep embankments, all made entirely of

‘THIS IS A BIKE I WOULD NEVER SELL - EVER!’

wooden planks. The wooden surface allowed for incredibly fast speeds for the time, and also added a deadly element as accidents were all too common. In one famous incident, a top driver, Eddie Hasha, spun out and hit the top of the turn, decapitating a boy that had his head over the rails to watch the race closer. His bike flew into the stands after taking out another racer. By the time the bloodbath was over, two racers and five fans lay dead, madness ensued, and the motordomes were dubbed “murderdromes”. The sport died shortly after.

The allure of the bikes, clearly, has not. Although one earlier Falcon had some board track influences, this is clearly Ian’s first pure board track-inspired bike. And it is as close to a masterpiece as he’s achieved. The handlebars were like the original board track racers, which just bent straight down. But with Jason being 6’2”, and with the fact that he’s not going to spend his time perpetually pinned down running at top speed, a few modifications were made for the sake of sparing his spine from scoliosis. Hence,

Right:
Jason and his almost finished bike
Below:
Original board track bike racing
Bottom:
The Falcon workshop



the handles were bent back just a touch. Auspiciously, all of Ian’s previous customer-made bikes are presently in the shop for this handover, the first official Falcon bike. Or at least, the first Falcon bike to be born with the Falcon logo attached. Previous to Jason’s, all bikes retained either their original branding, or had it completely removed. Jason’s is the first with Falcon clearly emblazoned across his tank in a silver, almost mirror paint scheme. And that’s why the others have all been collected: to have the Falcon brand painted onto their fuel tanks. Giovanni Ribisi’s Altai is in the shop (fittingly, as it is because of Ribisi that Lee is even here. “I ride a lot with Giovanni, and without him I wouldn’t have this bike,” noted Lee earlier. “Cause I saw his and said, ‘holy shit balls.’”). Queens of the Stone Age frontman Josh Homme’s Saker is also regally in attendance, as is the first bike Ian ever custom-made for a client, the Peregrine (created for his friend Manhattan).

“I think what’s important about what Ian’s doing is that it’s not typical motorcycle culture; it’s more about the aesthetic of it. And a respect for early bikes instead of doing something that’s more common today because it fits a sort of ‘motorcycle culture mold’. You know, choppers, the whole scene. It’s more about the respect of the craftsmanship and the mechanics and the early aesthetics. Having your own take on it but staying true to the way things were – as opposed to fitting into what’s cool or the way it’s supposed

to be now. It has to be timeless.” Indeed, the very idea behind Falcon is that these bikes are retro-futuristic prototypes for the original motorcycles. In other words, if one time-traveled to ‘50s London for the Annual Triumph Bike Show, Giovanni Ribisi’s Altai bike would appear as a concept vehicle for the next generation of Triumph Bonneville’s. The modifications have to appear natural, organic on the bike, even if they never appeared on the original. Even if they’re a bit exaggerated, boastful, even arrogant. Just like concept vehicles today, primed and puffed and put on display by vehicle brands as the prize (if totally unavailable) offspring of the marquee.

“Making these bikes with someone, it’s like an interview process,” explains Barry of the long and involved arc of creation. “What do you want to do, and is it something that we can fulfill? And equally, is it fulfilling to us, because ultimately a bike that’s truly special doesn’t get built if somebody just has a design and says, ‘here, build this’. It just doesn’t work like that. It’s a synthesis of all of these things; it’s a synthesis of another person’s ideas, our ideas, and then the physical thing that has to happen. The thing that’s in all of our minds. It’s an alchemical process, with metal and transformation. These things start out as a pile of forgotten metal most of the time.”

And they end up, at least this time, as priceless. “This is a bike I would never sell,” states Lee emphatically. “Ever.”