

Agile Beast

He's got a devil in his heart

By Mike Schulte » Gregg DesJardins' lifelong passion for the welder's art was initially sparked out of frustration. As a 15-year-old boy building a hot rod with his father in the family's garage, DesJardins' vision for the project was thwarted by the duo's lack of welding ability. That hindrance catalyzed within the teenager a profound determination to master the discipline. DesJardins received a wire-feed arc welder as his high school graduation present and embarked upon an autodidactic apprenticeship. In college, he graduated to the machine shop's TIG welder and quickly became proficient in that complex process. Since then, DesJardins has been successfully executing his artistic vision under his billet aluminum shingle, Gregg's Customs.

His fusion of passion and technical acumen garnered acclaim for DesJardins in 2006 when he debuted his first ground-up custom build, the Honda RC51 based GC-1000 (RRMC, Feb/Mar 2007). Now, the talented young multi-disciplinarian looks to raise eyebrows by transplanting the enlarged heart of a cruiser into an aggressive, nimble sportbike chassis with his sophomore effort, the genre-busting Gregg's Customs Hellion.

DesJardins had been immersing himself in books about the Can-Am racing cars of the late

'60s and early '70s—with their big-block Chevy engines and huge tires—when the raw, muscular lines of the Hellion began to form in his imagination. He had fallen for Yamaha's MT-01 concept bike when it was unveiled in 1999, making the 102 cu in Yamaha Road Star Warrior engine a natural choice to serve as the Hellion's heart.

A lifelong sportbike zealot, DesJardins was determined to keep the Hellion's wheelbase short and its countenance narrow. That objective presented a host of packaging challenges, given his choice of powerplant; it also led him to some striking design innovations. DesJardins switched the Road Star's traditional left-hand drive to the right side, an unusual configuration in the sportbike realm. He amputated the entire jackshaft assembly, which trimmed the engine by nearly 10 inches, addressing wheelbase concerns. It also allowed him to push the swingarm pivot as close to the engine as possible.

The sinuous, tapered swingarm mounts onto the left side of the bike and pivots directly on the frame, using a system of bearings. This feat of engineering minimalism allowed DesJardins to discard many of the standard components usually required to keep a swingarm in place. Viewing the Hellion from the right side reveals the gorgeously trellised assembly. Noticeably



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absent, however, is any device that might actually absorb shock. Walk around the bike and you discover that DesJardins has ingeniously mounted the rear shock on the left side, tucked in against the engine and extending the visual line of the subframe. Side holstering the shock also contributed to the mission of shortening the Hellion's wheelbase to a crisp 57 inches.


The chromoly frame is a masterstroke of functional design that produces the Hellion's hunched, predatory stance. DesJardins eschewed the conventional twin-spar architecture for a more open setting that exposes the bike's onyx V-twin gem. Lifting the frame rails up over the top of the cylinder heads also narrowed the Hellion's wrathful visage. Seeking a raw, utilitarian finish, DesJardins employed Scotch-Brite and clear powdercoat, which had the unintended side effect of lending a handsome patina to his meticulous weld beads.

While much attention is paid to the Hellion's observable mechanical design, DesJardins also invested countless hours crafting details that are likely to go unnoticed without a spec sheet. That seems to be of little concern to DesJardins, who approached the Hellion's design and build as though he were crafting a 1670cc Swiss watch.

DesJardins converted the cable-actuated clutch to hydraulic, fabricating his own

slave cylinder. The swingarm's main spar appears to be machined from a solid piece, but is actually painstakingly fabricated from a tube that was split and flared to achieve its tapered appearance. Nearly every part of the bike that pivots, does so on bearings. To wit, the side stand contains a ball bearing for thrust, while a needle bearing addresses axial load.

Gregg's Customs' signature billet aluminum work is present in the drilled out triple clamps, risers and other sundry details. The tastefully sculpted tank and tailpiece testify to DesJardins' skill at hand-forming aluminum. The only medium with which he had no previous experience is the handsome titanium bracketry that adorns the Hellion. In one of the few elements not produced in-house, Craig Fraser supplied the chocolate brown and baby blue scalloped paint, a scheme that pays homage to the machine's Can-Am series influences.

With the magnificently feral Hellion, Gregg DesJardins has beaten the sophomore jinx and planted his flag among the custom world's elite builders. The multi-talented designer now intends to outsource his talents by coaxing exclusive one-off customs from the raucous imaginations of his clients. 

www.greggscustoms.com
www.gc-cycles.com

SPECS

Gregg's Customs Hellion

ENGINE

102 cu in Yamaha
Road Star Warrior

CHASSIS

4130 Chromoly
tubing and sheet

SUSPENSION

Front: Marzocchi
50mm Road Race Forks
Rear: Penske remote reser-
voir shock w/ titanium spring.

WHEELS

"Skyway" by
Gregg's Customs

TIRES

Front: Pirelli Diablo 120/70-17
Rear: Pirelli Diablo 240/40-18

BRAKES

Front: P.M. radial front cali-
pers with custom G.C. rotors
Rear: P.M. rear caliper with
custom G.C. countershaft-
mounted floating rotor.

EXHAUST

GC Stainless 2 into 1

BILLET PARTS

Triple clamps, risers,
machined in-house
at Gregg's Customs

LIGHTING

From: V-Rod headlight
Rear: Machined acrylic taillight

BRACKETRY

Front fender brackets,
footpeg brackets, and
headlight brackets from
titanium by Gregg

PAINT

Chocolate Candy with
Ice Blue Scallops by
Craig Fraser at
www.gotpaint.com;
House of Colors Paint

SEAT

Custom made
leather by Corbin.

NEARLY
EVERY
PART OF
the bike that
pivots, does so
on bearings.