

STORY BY MICHAEL SCHULTE

➤ FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, cable television has launched custom bike builders into the celebrity firmament with the same mechanical efficiency it churned out TV chefs in the 1990s. Like celebrity chefs who rarely pick up a sauté pan, full-time motorcycle “personalities” are often elevated by the medium over quiet artisans who are the true exemplars of their craft.

Designer and builder Roger Goldammer may be unrepresented on Wal-Mart’s T-shirt racks, but the earnest multi-disciplinarian with the rigorous work ethic has emerged as the custom world’s Northern Star. His beautifully engineered, flowing sculptures have won his peers’ admiration and respect, along with an impressive inventory of commendations.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORDERO STUDIOS

# The Quiet Master

Roger Goldammer’s simple complexity



Goldammer began gathering laurels in 2002 when he picked up a troika, including a best engineering nod for his Project X bike and top overall honors for his plasmic take on the fat-tired chopper meme, Dragon Bike, from the Oakland Roadster Show. He also earned a best new product citation for his G Force Billet Front End at that year's V-Twin Expo.

Most recently, the unassuming founder of Kelowna, British Columbia-based Goldammer Cycle Works won the recognition of his native Canada when he picked up the British Columbia Creative Achievement Award for Industrial Design. This home-grown accolade came after Goldammer played an astonishing pair of deuces in Las Vegas, walking off with first place in Bike Fest's "Artistry in Iron" show and the prestigious AMD World Championship of Custom Bike Building in 2004 and 2005, running both tables two consecutive years.

The "Artistry in Iron" accolades are especially fitting, considering Goldammer's upbringing. This architect's son grew up working on his father's E-type Jaguar and airplanes, while absorbing his mother's artistic aptitude. "You can't help be influenced by your surroundings," the thoughtful, soft-spoken Goldammer says. "I combined my love of the arts and all things mechanical, and here I am today, building bikes."

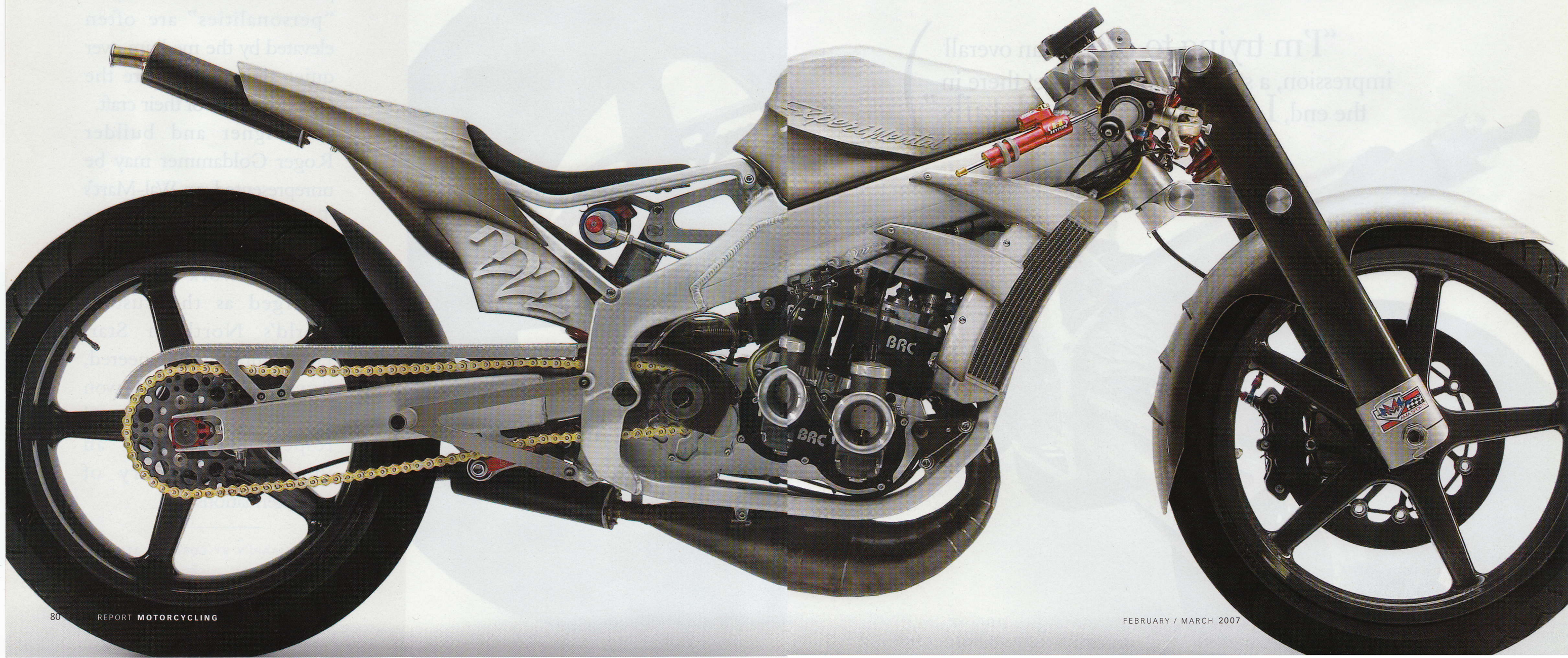
After an eight-year apprenticeship as an automotive machinist out of high school, Goldammer relocated to Phoenix, Ariz. and underwent a full-immersion baptism, attending the Harley-sponsored Motorcycle Mechanics Institute by day, and working in bike shops at night. "I'd escape from school, go to work and get home around 11:30 at night," Goldammer recalls of his seminary years.

Returning to Canada, Goldammer began building high-performance engines before progressing into custom bike building and manufacturing. While crafting bikes for customers provided an effective sharpening stone for his skills, Goldammer yearned to build the bikes that were racing around in his head. To a large degree, Goldammer's manufacturing enterprise has provided him the resources to do just that.

Goldammer Cycle Works produces a small selection of top-shelf components, including the sleek, aggressive G-Force front end, widely considered the best custom front end in the business. "I set as a personal goal, years ago, to only build products that I truly believe in," Goldammer says. "I didn't want to build cheap grips and mirrors. 'Never sell out' is an ideal that I've always had."

His assiduously crafted custom machines rarely bear reproducible fruit. "Most of the bikes that I build have no marketable parts on them," he states. "[The components] are so labor intensive, I wouldn't dream of mass-producing them." There are notable exceptions, such as the sweeping teardrop-in-the-wind Airtime air filter that was originally designed for his BTR#3 bike (which graced the Spring 2005 RRCM cover).

Goldammer's commitment to integrity results in the fully formed, anatomical presence of his machines. While some builders are content to bolt on a cluster of catalog parts to create a custom "look" and boost parts sales, Goldammer hand-builds each part, on principle, even if he is the only one who knows it. "I'm not going to put my front end on a bike just to promote my product," he says of his organic





approach. "It seems counter-productive, but, in some strange way, it seems to have worked for me."

An astute engineer, welder and machinist, Goldammer's design process relies more on inspiration during the build, than to meticulous preparation beforehand. "I intentionally don't blueprint everything on a bike because it loses something if you plan every little detail," he says of his flexible approach. "I'm trying to create an overall impression, a stance. As long as I get there in the end, I don't sweat the details." His intricate creations often emerge from an elementary nucleus. "I'll usually build a bike from a simple little sketch I made in the middle of the night when I was working," Goldammer reveals. "After the bike is finished, a lot of times I'll find that scrap of paper in a drawer and it will be that bike."

Of all the bikes he has produced, Goldammer is probably best known for his two low-slung, retro-tributes: BTR#3

and Trouble. Spirit summoning phantoms from the perilous 1920s board track era, before minimalism was a "style", both bikes pay low, lean homage to the racing machines that daring young men rocketed around banked wooden velodromes nearly 100 years ago.

"I really wanted to capture and exaggerate the features of the era," Goldammer says of BTR#3. The bike's big wheels, exposed frame, turn-down bars and fenderless front end conjure the period's lust for speed and danger. A melding of modern and antique, Goldammer was determined that the bike be a rideable street machine as well. "I was willing to sacrifice a few things, but not much," he says of the era-blending racer's authenticity. "You're always weighing form and function." Unlike its board track antecedents, which lacked frivolous accessories, such as brakes, the BTR#3 features big, rim mounted discs that are as much about style as stopping power.

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His follow-up, the machinery green, supercharged Trouble recalls the single-jug Harley "Peashooter" of the era. Goldammer says, "Back around 1919 to 1922, before Harley produced its single engine, the race teams would actually plate off the rear cylinders on the V-twin cases to compete at the shorter race tracks that had displacement restrictions around 350cc." Goldammer's flash-forward take on the Jazz Age design uses the plate covering the lone pot's spigot hole as the bracket for the Rotrex supercharger, which is belt-driven 2-to-1 off the crankshaft. In an amiable melding of past and present, the Swedish made blower looks perfectly organic when incorporated into the bike's austere design. Further welding the eras, the kick-started 956cc big single combines a contemporary V-Twin bottom end with an Engenuity single head and barrel. An Evo-style crankcase and flywheel assembly come from Merch Motor Works.

The unique engine architecture is wrapped in a rolling, single loop rigid frame, the forward section of which serves as the engine's oil tank. Both halves of the rear section contain the traction oil for the blower. Eleven internal stainless lines pass through the exposed, bicycle-like frame to run electrical, hydraulic, oil return vent and other vital functions, contributing to the bike's immaculate profile.

The sculpted front suspension is an elegant take on the rigid front ends of historic race bikes, as seen through Goldammer's imaginative eye. The clean lines belie the front end's concealed complexity, which required over 250 hours to design. Goldammer explains the girder construction: "It has two leading links holding the fork assembly. The top link is a rocker that pivots and pushes down on a special hand built shock inside the neck of the frame. All this is almost completely hidden."

Large, narrow-diameter laced wheels with 21-inch custom rubber up front and a 23-inch in the rear add to the bike's vintage verisimilitude. "This kind of ties the look to the past with a slightly sloping, more aggressive stance," Goldammer offers, "But, it results in a much lighter steering feel than 23s front and rear." After a pause he adds, "It can ride circles around most of the choppers out there today."

Addressing contemporary safety concerns, a discreet, yet very visible brake light and turn signals run along the trailing edge of the rear fender with a small 12-volt battery tucked up in the assembly. "Applied art has to function, and be more or less legal," Goldammer says with a wry laugh.

Great art always takes risks and Goldammer certainly threw the dice with Trouble. "It was a gamble in that it was a huge investment in time, effort and money to build the engine configuration which was untested," he says of the pioneering design. "I didn't know until the last minute whether it would really work. There was no putting a V-twin engine in that chassis if it didn't work."

As swarms of admirers who have hunkered down and salivated over the bike in person can attest, it works; they just might not be able to tell you how it works. Goldammer's masterful engineering conceals much, leaving a spare, sinuous profile to the eye. "It's an exercise in minimalism," he declares. "What people find intriguing about the bike is what you don't see."

The lean, Machine Age aesthetic is a welcome reaction to what Goldammer calls the "overfed, unrideable, barges," cluttering much of the custom scene. A dirt bike enthusiast, Goldammer champions smaller, fun-over-flash machines, as he recently displayed during an appearance on Discovery Channel's *Biker Build-Off*.

Squaring off against Matt Hotch and the clock in a Bonneville speed challenge, Goldammer sliced a Honda CR250R motocross bike down the middle, keeping only the swingarm and twin-spar aluminum frame. He then grafted an unusual powerplant into the modified chassis. "I used a Rotax/Aprilia tandem twin 250cc two-stroke—two 125 cylinders, one in front of the other on a common crankcase," he says. The bike's unorthodox design isn't confined to the Superkart style, push-start mill. After being told it was impossible, Goldammer grabbed a pair of KTM radiators, a pair of wooden forms and curved the grills to fit the cambered, triangular downtube he had built for the project. "I asked a few people who said, 'Hell, no, you can't do that.' That's the fun part about bike building," he recalls of the audacious experiment. Goldammer unleashed his lightweight, high-tech bullet on the Salt Flats, immolating the existing record for its class by nearly 20 mph.

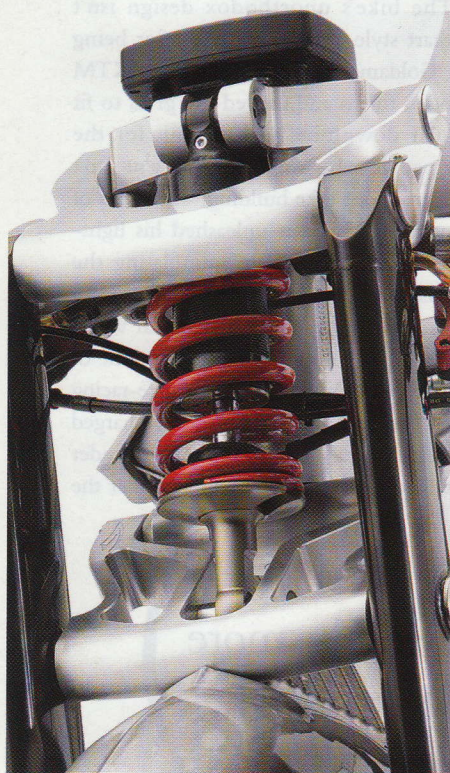
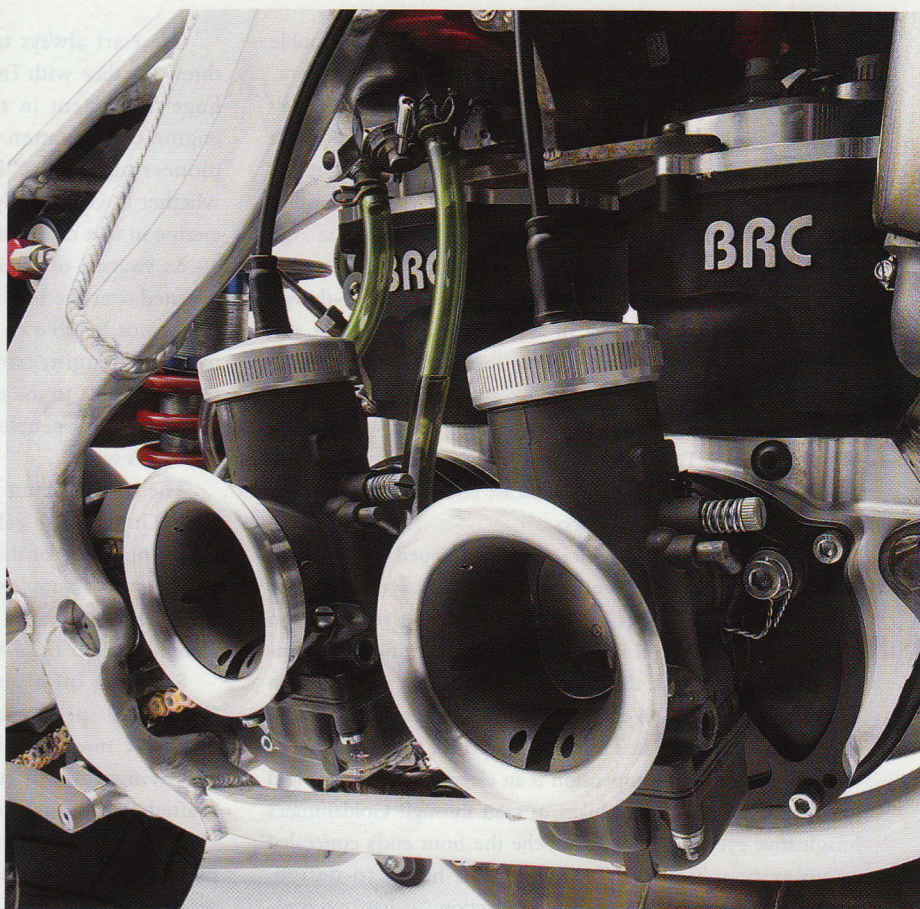
Now, the dexterous Canadian is applying his singular vision to another of his passions—the Norton Manx—using some of the technology he developed for Trouble. No mere café-racing thumper, the Manx will feature a fuel-injected, supercharged single-cylinder Harley. "I run a rear head on the front cylinder with a plenum chamber and throttle body assembly under the

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Unorthodox styling, powerplant selection and suspension design produce breathtaking results.



gas tank, on top of the cylinder head," he says of the configuration.

For many, the most exciting aspect of Goldammer's latest opus won't be what makes it go, but rather what makes it stop. "I've taken pieces of 12-by-6-inch round aluminum and machined hubs out of them, with air intakes and disc brakes inside," he says. If that sounds like a labor-intensive odyssey, Goldammer would be quick to agree. "I have weeks and weeks of work in the rear wheel alone. Building all the internal brake parts—it's insane," he admits, adding, "If I were to sell the wheel for \$20,000, I wouldn't be making any money, but that's what I had to do. It's what I wanted to build." Like his previous efforts, the Manx-inspired bike will not be confined to the shiny floors of exhibition halls. "I'm going to race it at Bonneville," Goldammer says, continuing with a grin, "A blown, injected

single cylinder Harley, running on nitrous ... It'll be fun."

Fun and hard work are synonymous in the mind of Roger Goldammer. A true throwback to the age of master craftsmen, his achievements in design are the result of a consummate technical prowess, an artist's eye and a work ethic that would make Martin Luther look like a slacker. Above all, Roger Goldammer is motivated by a true love of motorcycles and the kind of curiosity that has him bending radiators and breaking expectations of what it is possible to do with a motorcycle. Or as he says, in characteristically understated fashion, "I'm still learning, that's the fun part about it. That's what keeps you going, there's always the next project, the next challenge." **M**

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