

The Memory Lingers On

BY SAM WHITEHEAD
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL LICHTER

JAKE AND LEIF'S STARRY TRIBUTE TO THOSE LOST





“I got kicked in the nuts.” admits Leif Bottcher. “Real hard.”

Try as you might, it's impossible to glean glory from that statement. There's nothing celebratory or triumphant about it. You may have been the king a moment or two prior, but no more! You're crumpled and groaning. You're miserable. You're done. Now, what's your next move?

Before every guy reading this weighs in with his own post nut-kick pro tips, it must be noted that Leif, in this particular instance, is speaking metaphorically and didn't actually take a shot to the jewels. He got hit way harder than that. Three truly devastating blows, in fact.

It's been said that out of great suffering comes great beauty. If so, then the Knucklehead gracing these pages certainly stands as a grand testament to that idea. But first, a little history. To those hanging around motorcycle land in any real way during the last 40 years, the name of photographer Michael Lichter should instantly jolt you to attention. Even if two-wheeled machines (usually of the American V-twin variety) aren't really your thing, you've no doubt seen Michael's subtle and sophisticated work. His iconic images of motorcycles and the people and culture behind them are often as wrought of history and the human predicament



as they are of fire-breathing hardware. It's not a stretch to call Michael a documentarian or even an anthropologist, albeit of a very specific sort. The bottom line: If you're lucky enough to get a call from Michael Lichter, you damn well better pick up.

Every year at the Buffalo Chip in Sturgis, South Dakota, during the Black Hills Rally, Michael presents and curates the stunning Motorcycles as Art exhibit. For 2017 his theme was Old Iron – Young Blood, tapping 37 builders of the millennial generation (age 35 and under) to create machines that would reflect the attitudes and ideas of those who will no doubt lead and reinvigorate the industry in the future, if they're not already doing so.

Among those chosen was 32-year-old Jake Cutler of Barnstorm Cycles in Spencer, Massachusetts. Jake grew up riding BMX bikes, then dirt bikes and eventually street machines. When he was 19, he and his dad opened Barnstorm. The year was 2004, and since then Jake has earned considerable acclaim in the custom world. But he'd never attempted a bike as radical as the one you see here. Built out of a combination of anguish, desperation, and inspiration, this one tapped every bit of Jake's creativity and talent. And soul. If ever there was a labor of love this bike is it.

Take a look at the headbadge on the outrageously unique, solo neck (no triple trees here!) of this sled. Designed and stamped by Jen Green (of Jen Green Headbadges), you'll see the name Sandra Lee along with three stars. The tri-star motif appears in two other spots on the bike (try to find them!). Then there's the number 7, Sandra Lee's favorite



digit, emblazoned on the tank. Remember Leif getting kicked in the nuts...only much worse? Leif is Jake's uncle. Sandra Lee was Leif's mom. Leif had two young 20-something sons, Jake's cousins Tony and Eric. All three of them, Sandra Lee, Tony, and Eric died unexpectedly within nine months of each other a few years ago. By anyone's standards, that's an almost unimaginable hit.

Like more than a few of us (myself included), Leif has occasionally found solace in the rooms of AA and NA. But not this time. "I couldn't do meetings because everybody just looked at me like the kid whose puppy got crushed by a car," Leif states. "My world had caved in. I didn't want people coming up to me like, 'I don't know what to say to you Leif, but you know, God has a plan.' Seriously? Come on! I wanted nothing to do with that."

So, Leif, an amateur builder of Knucks and Pans, turned to his young pro nephew Jake. Both guys were in deep pain following their collective loss and figured pouring their grief into something positive was the best therapy imagin-

able. And thus the seeds of the Sandra Lee were sown. That happened to be around the same time that Michael Lichter tapped Jake to create a custom for his annual Sturgis show. Ain't serendipity grand!

Obviously, the Sandra Lee is a special beast. From the aforementioned single-stemmed neck to the seating area and all points south, the Sandra Lee stands alone. Lacking a jig at the time (no longer a problem at Barnstorm), Jake enlisted Thompson Choppers of Springfield, Missouri, to twist up a frame to Jake's extremely specific requirements. Though Thompson did a fine job, it wasn't exactly what Jake had in mind. So he began cutting and recreating. A lot. "Basically, all that's left of Thompson's work are the motor mounts and the lower frame," Jake explains. "Thompson did everything using half-inch plate. I redid everything with heavy-walled DOM tubing."

Other of Jake's (and Leif's, to a lesser extent) flourishes include, well, just about everything! Of particular



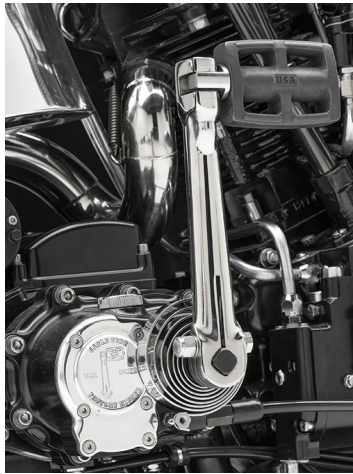
note is the front end (dubbed a Leif Spring) and all of the hex-head hardware. Jake spent over 40 hours machining and modifying every single bolt so that they each had a slight dome, thus mimicking the knuckly gnarl of H-D's legendary mill (or, in this case, the 93" S&S re-pop version). "I know it seems pointless, but it really does add to the look of the bike." In other words, it's all in the details! Pointless? Not even close.

Another interesting choice is the Rigid Industries headlight. "I didn't want to put a big, honking headlight hanging way out there on the Sandra Lee," Jake explains. "I wanted to keep it small and subtle—and bright! I thought this headlight—square but not boxy—also reflected the engine fins. It's different, for sure, but not so weird that it draws undue attention. I hope." Jake hopes, and Jake is right!

Getting the bike finished in time for Lichter's Sturgis show obviously lent the project a bit of urgency that was not necessarily welcome. Don't forget, this all started, in many respects, as survivor therapy. Even though there was a moment when Leif got a little anxious to wrap things up, Jake made sure the focus remained true. "Honestly," Jake remembers. "Neither Leif or me were quite sure what the hell we were going to do once this bike was finished."

"Seriously," Leif concurs. "One side of me wanted instant gratification. But the other was so grateful to work on something with Jake that represented so much to both of us. Eventually, I began to think if it takes 10 years to finish this bike that's okay because in the meantime Jake and I get to hang out and laugh and talk and love and remember those we lost. I needed this project. And I needed to be with Jake. We needed each other and this bike to get through the pain."

Jake and Leif finally finished the Sandra Lee and proudly delivered her to Michael Lichter and his Old Iron—Young Blood South Dakota smack-down. Surrounded by the finest examples of millennial motorcycle machinery, the Sandra Lee shined brightly, garnered great accolades, and made Jake and Leif extremely proud. And in ways that have nothing to do with nuts and bolts she always will. Sandra Lee, Eric and Tony Bottcher. Three stars, one bike. The build may be done, but the legacy lives forever. **AIM**



Tech Sheet

Bike name	Sandra Lee
Owner	Leif Bottcher
Builder	Jake Cutler, Steve Berthiaume, Leif Bottcher
Year/model	2018 Barnstorm Cycles, Spencer, MA
Time to build	500-plus hours
Chromer	Chaby's Coatings, Millbury, MA
Polisher	New England Metal Services, Spencer, MA
Powdercoater	Jake Hubacz Powder Coating
Painter	Tyler Gagnon
Finishes	Frame, swingarm and front end are black oxide coated, tanks and battery shroud are polished aluminum.
Powerplant	
Engine	S&S Cycle KN93
Builder	S&S Cycle/Steve Berthiaume
Displacement	93"
Cases	S&S
Flywheels	S&S 4.5" stroke
Connecting rods	S&S
Cylinders	S&S 3.625" bore
Pistons	S&S forged, 8.2 1
Heads	S&S KN
Cam	FHP 420
Valves/rockers	S&S
Lifters/pushrods	S&S
Carb	S&S Super E
Air cleaner	Boyle Custom Moto "Ribsey," Carlsbad, CA
Exhaust	Barnstorm Shorty Turnouts
Ignition	S&S
Coils	Ultima
Charging system	Cycle Electric
Regulator	Cycle Electric
Oil pump/cam cover	S&S
Transmission	Baker Frankentranny
Case/gears	Baker
Mods	N1 shift drum, custom powdercoat

Clutch	Rivera Primo
Primary	Rivera Primo 3" belt drive with oil filter mounting
Primary cover	Barnstorm Tri-Star
Final drive	Chain
Kickstarter	Baker
Chassis	
Frame	Thompson Choppers/Barnstorm
Rake	40 degrees
Stretch	6" out, 2" down
Forks	Barnstorm Leif Spring
Swingarm	Thompson Choppers
Shocks	Shotgun shocks air ride
Front wheel	26" Ride Wright Spoolie
Rear wheel	18" Ride Wright wheels
Rear brake	Performance Machine sprotor
Front tire	120/50-26" Shinko
Rear tire	250/40-18" Dunlop E3
Rear fender	Custom B'Cool CNC Spun Blank
Fender struts	Barnstorm
Accessories	
Headlight	Rigid Industries 4" light pod with HI/LO
Taillight	Custom LED integrated into axle blocks
Fuel tank	Barnstorm Cycles custom aluminum Tank
Oil tank	Barnstorm Cycles custom aluminum tank
Gas/oil caps	Speed Dealer Customs
Handlebars	Barnstorm Cycles
Seat	Counter Balance Cycles /Barnstorm Cycles seat pan
Pegs	Lowbrow Customs "Pursuit" pegs
License bracket	Barnstorm Cycles
Hand controls	Nash Motorcycle Internal Sticky Throttle / Exile Cycles Twist
Foot controls	Barnstorm Cycles
Grips	Lowbrow Customs "Pursuit"