

Want a chopper? Build your own!

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By Michael Holmes

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Motorcycle chopper kits are a growth industry. But what does that mean to you and me? Well one thing that we know is that we will have more choppers to ogle at. There is not a single day that goes by without more and more pictures of chopper bikes that have just been finished showing up in all the motorcycle magazines. Then at the weekends, when we are on our "hot" rides, we will see four or five show finish level bikes. There are more choppers around now than there have been in the last twenty five years.

Most of these choppers have been built from motorcycle chopper kits, the "bike in a box" approach. But hey, don't knock it! Building your own chopper has never been easier. There are rolling chassis kits, complete bike kits, and frame manufacturers give you a multitude of choice when it comes to take the plunge and buy a motorcycle chopper kit.

Thirty years ago, the old school chopper builders had to start with a stock bike off-the-shelf and literally chop it to pieces. With the modern chopper kits, there is a viable alternative to taking the cutting torch to your favorite soft tail!

Nowadays, you have a cheap and easier way to build the bike from the ground up. When you take the cost of buying a new bike and the expense of chopping it, it works out much cheaper to start from step one, and your chopper kit. Instead of tossing away the parts that you'll never use again, you can start building your own bike with the parts that you really need. All the parts are included in the motorcycle chopper kit, along with comprehensive instructions.

One of the first questions that people ask when considering buying a kit is how will my bike stand out from all the other chopper kits? Well think of it this way, you are going to buy a chopper kit. A pile of unassembled raw metal. No paint, no real finish, just a blank canvas. Is your taste in paint jobs likely to be the same as the next guy, who buys the very same kit? I don't think so. What about your taste in bolt-ons, seats, exhausts? Just because you buy the kit doesn't mean every little thing has to be just so. That is the whole point isn't it? It's very easy in this way to build your own custom chopper from a

chopper kit.

Another big question is, "How long"? The answer to that is as long as it takes. Even on the kit bikes, which are supposed to be designed to fit together like a glove, you are going to run into some snags. It can't be avoided!

If you want a more concrete guide, try this. An experienced kit builder (though not a professional) I spoke to reckons it took 10 full days to build his last chopper from a kit. For someone less experienced it could take a couple of days longer. Twelve 9 hour days works out at 108 hours. Over evenings and weekends, this could drag out to three or four weeks of living in a pile of motorcycle parts! So be prepared to literally live the experience if you are going to take the plunge.

What about the practical side? Well, there is no substitute for experience. The place to start building up your experience with the mechanical side of building to kit bike is with your current ride. Make sure all you can do the basic maintenance on your motorcycle, and then start to do some simple disassembling. Take off the tires, take off the exhaust, real basic stuff; all of this will help to build a new confidence in the shop side of things. You can also get some great videos on maintenance, and even on building the custom bike of your dreams. Read the books, watch the videos, and buy the t-shirt! Believe me, all the preparation you make will stand you in good stead.

If you really are hopeless at the mechanical side of things, why not pay someone else to help you build it, or even get them to build the whole thing for you? The cost of the kit plus labor could well work out cheaper than buying a chopper "off the shelf".

And of course, when that beautiful chopper is standing on your driveway, and your friends are asking you "Was it worth it?" you can turn to the chopper, drag your hand across the flames on the tank and the polished chrome, turn back to them and say, "What do you think?"

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Custom Chopper Kits

By Kathryn Whittaker

Choosing the parts that your custom chopper will be made of can be very confusing, considering the

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large numbers of custom chopper bike kits available on the market today. Chopper innovators like Biker's Choice, Phantom Cycle, Paul Yaffe and many more sell chopper-in-a-box kits available for chopper enthusiasts. Thanks to these kits, custom choppers have become quite affordable and are no longer necessarily toys for millionaires or master mechanics.

Custom chopper kits provide the future chopper owner with all the instructions and just about every component necessary to create a perfect chopper of ones dreams. Jesse James, famous for his Discovery series "Monster Garage", offers a Big Book catalogue loaded with individual parts and accessories needed to create a fully custom bike with truly unusual frame configurations and groundbreaking metal sheet parts as seen on his TV show. However, the most exquisite details, such as an unusual tortoiseshell finish of the gas tank, can be obtained in your custom chopper only if you have your chopper built from scratch by Jesse himself.

Before you start building your custom chopper you need to ask yourself what kind of chopper are you interested in building. Then you have to set up a budget for parts, labor and inevitable cost overruns. The price of the parts has scared many chopper enthusiasts from building a custom chopper of their own, but if you have exact specifications and the time and skills to invest into the project, then parts can be fairly inexpensive. If you choose the parts for your kit at the lower end spectrum, you will still end up with bike that will look like a Jesse James creation but will still have enough money left to throw a party when your new chopper leaves the garage.

When you select the parts for your custom chopper kit, try to use the most genuine parts available on the market within your price range. Sometimes even if you have a beautiful design in-mind, you can end up with poor-looking chopper, due to a lack of attention to detail by different suppliers

Complete custom chopper kits typically consists of an engine, chassis kit, exhaust pipes, tires, steel tanks and other metal parts, taillights, various controls, a seat, headlamp and many more. The extras supplied with a chopper kit would vary depending on the brand of chopper chosen. To finish your project, you will need paint and sometimes battery acid. Most chopper kits do not provide mirrors, speedometers or other accessories. These you can buy separately according to your taste.

To avoid unpredictable result, experienced chopper builder recommend waiting until you can afford buying all the accessories from one manufacturer. Waiting may not be easy when it comes to building your dream come true. But when you finally complete your custom chopper, you will be really glad you waited.

Kathryn Whittaker writes articles on a number of different topics. For more information on Choppers please visit

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