

Few have combined leather, rubber and, steel studs to give us as many thrills as famed saddleman Mike Corbin; however, most outside motorcycling's inner circles know little about the craftsman's fascination with racing.

The smooth flowing lines that are a signature of Corbin's handiwork might give it away. "It really gets his juices going. Mike gets very excited about any project involving aerodynamics and speed," said Corbin spokesman Greg Hurley. "No sooner is the sketch-book out of the drawer than we're mashing foam rubber, bondo and cardboard into new shapes."

Corbin's Castroville, California, shop doesn't race. They don't build race bikes, they just make them go faster. Corbin's recent track and Salt Flat work focused on two California motor men—Vance Breese, the owner of Santa Maria Harley-Davidson, and Carl Morrow, the speed behind Carl's Speed Shop in Sante Fe Springs.

Breese brought his 220-plus mph single-engine Sportster Bonneville Salt Flats Unlimited Class streamliner to Corbin and asked him to wrap it in a body that would reduce drag to an absolute minimum. After some

# SHOOTING FROM THE SADDLE

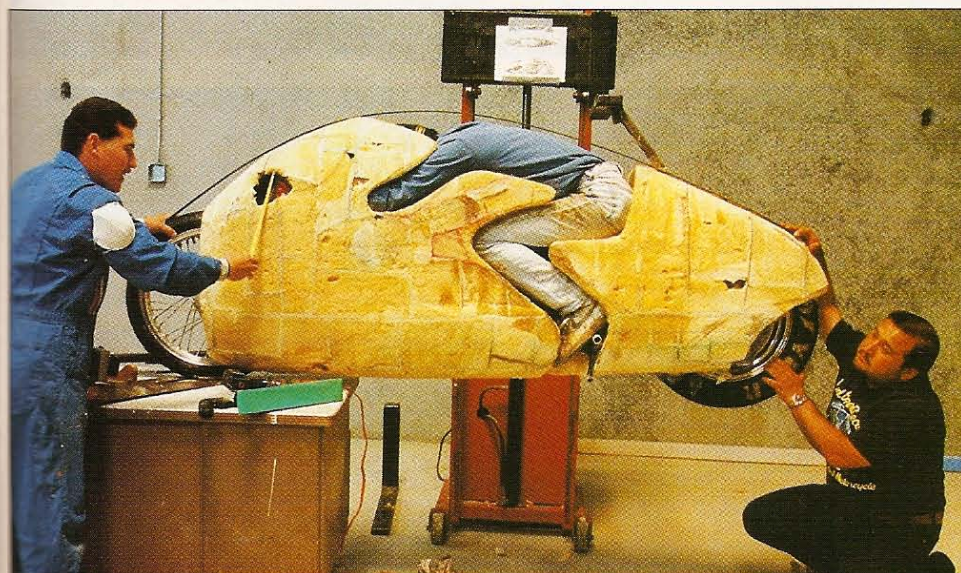
**MIKE  
CORBIN  
PUTS FAST  
STYLE  
INTO HIGH  
SPEED**

600 man-hours of design and refinement, Corbin and his team of John Ortiz, mechanical engineer, Vince Zavala, design engineer, and mold-maker, Ignacio Zuniga, presented Breese with something that looked a lot more like a missile than a motorcycle. Breese decided to call it Mariah, like the wind.

If this all sounds too much like a cute play on words, then you haven't seen the bike. The 15-foot aerodynamic shell was handmade with four layers of Kevlar, you know, the stuff they make helmets out of. Breese, who would pilot the bike himself, would have to lay nearly prone, feet first, to fit into the cockpit. Extremely strong and lightweight, the material would hold up to the stresses of blasting a motorcycle down the strip at speeding







bullet velocities. The material would also protect Breese from big-time bruises if he dumped the bike.

"Vance was doing about 220 when a skid pin broke loose and jammed into the drive sprocket," said Hurley. "The rear wheel locked and we thought Vance was a goner, but the Kevlar held up and Vance walked away."

"The bike wouldn't fully stabilize until it hit 180 mph," said Hurley. (Try telling that to a cop next time you see those flashing lights in the rear-view.) "It has small wheels, which provide less contact with the ground and consequently less drag, but it also means less steering control."

Hurley said the Corbin team is still working to perfect the bike's body design. "We change things as the project continues. Now, we're trying to

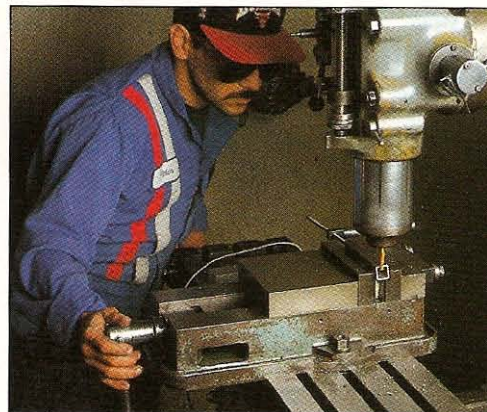


fabricate a virtually seamless single-unit body, which would add more strength to the hull. The seams have to be placed in areas that will not collect wind resistance.

Corbin's other client, Carl Morrow, had different needs. "Carl had a street-legal Sportster he called Top Gun. It was aimed at the All-Harley Drag Race Association (AHDRA) street races and the Sturgis FLASH race. He wanted clean lines and better aerodynamics," said Hurley, "and that's exactly what we gave him."

The R&D done for the Top Gun project inspired Corbin to build the new Warbird kit, which is a bolt-on fender, tail section, fairing, air scoop package available for FXRs (A Sportster Warbird kit will be available by April and a Softail kit by the end of 1995). Top Gun owns the AHDRA quarter-mile record of 9.96 seconds at 131.77 mph, set at Portland, Oregon's Woodburn Raceway. It also won three FLASH race categories at last August's Sturgis: Lowest E.T. Sportster; Top Sportster, and the overall title, Lightning Flash.

Morrow likes to test the Salt Flats with his own racer, a partial streamliner he calls 2001. "The Southern California Timing Association (SCTA), the governing body in Bonneville racing, has a lot of rules. Mike and Carl collaborated in following the book to the letter, while



creating a whole new look," said Hurley.

The team began with a full streamliner shape and made "the appropriate cut-outs so that the rider himself completed the aerodynamics of the machine. The pilot became part of the design," said Hurley. The bike holds several marks, including the Land Speed Authority record for a standing start mile. The motorcycle rocketed from 0 to 170 mph in a mile with an average speed of 115.996 mph.

After 27 years in business and about 300 departures from his mainstay, often-imitated Gunfighter saddle theme, this just proves Mike Corbin isn't running out of ideas, whether it's helping fast bikes go faster, or adding fast style to street stockers.

—Joshua Placa







Photos: Greg Hurley

