

back street heroes

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HIGH ROLLER

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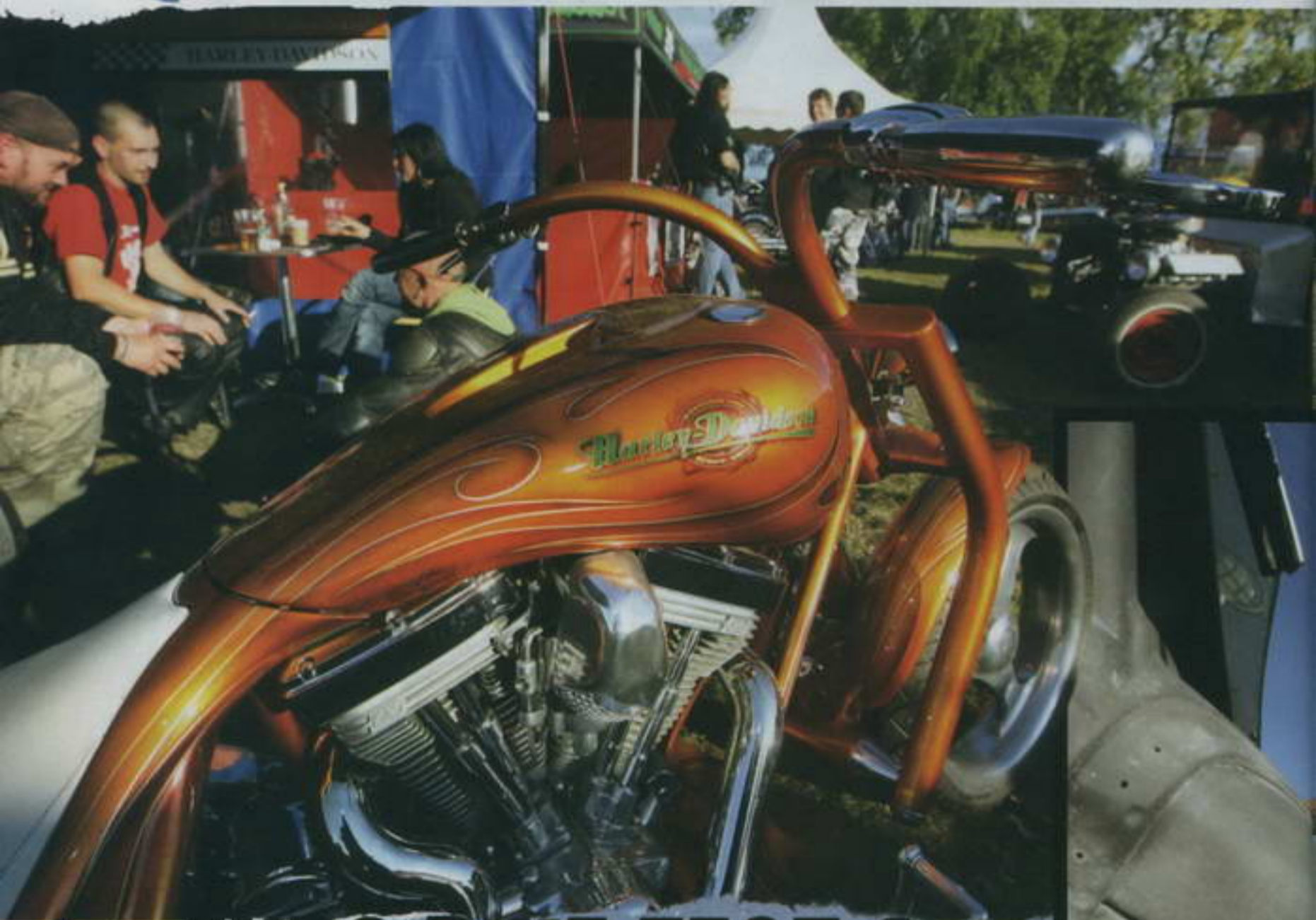
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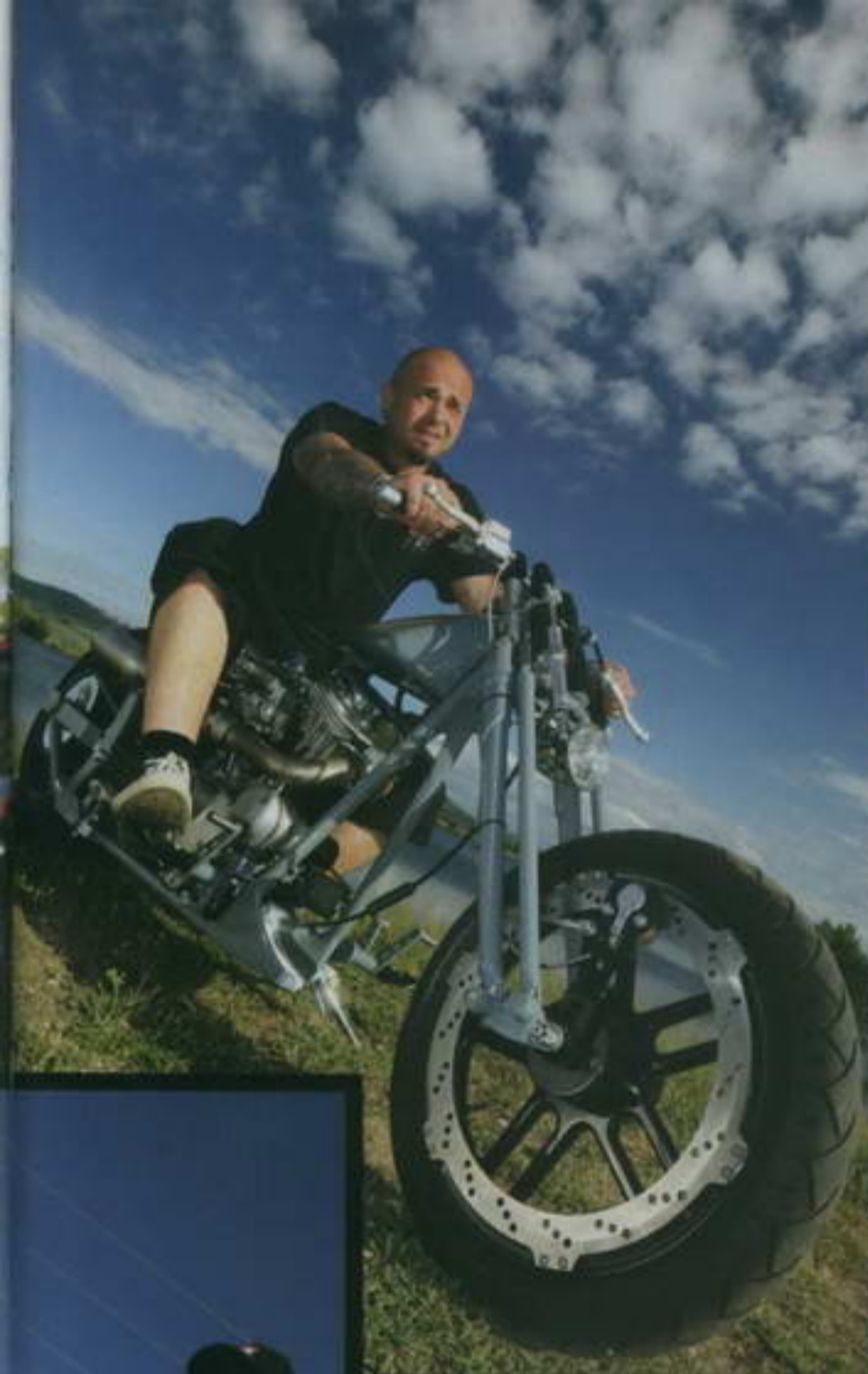
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One of the benefits of the fall of the Iron Curtain has not only been the opening up of a new motorcycle market to the international motorcycle manufacturers, but the opportunity for eastern European bikers to obtain modern machines. There was, of course, already an established bike scene, but one in which many riders had little choice but to depend upon their classic (and often antique) bikes, carefully nursing them to last as long as possible. Indeed, the Harley-Davidson Club Prague is the oldest Harley club in Europe (and, possibly, the world), with a history that stretches back more than eighty years and an abiding pride in a heritage that has survived German occupation, a world war and communism.



1ST EURO BIKE FEST & 4TH BOHEMIAN CUSTOM SHOW





However, even twenty years after the Iron Curtain was thrust aside, many of the countries that lay behind it are still virgin territory for custom parts distributors, although, as home markets falter in these times of economic hardship, that situation is likely to change. Despite the tardiness of aftermarket parts to reach these new markets, there are creative builders all over the former Eastern bloc not only winning shows in their home countries, but who are being increasingly recognised further afield. In May I found myself with a chance to see the Eastern European scene for myself with a visit to the Bohemian Custom Show and Euro Bike Fest.

Even with the entirety of the continent from which to choose, it frequently seems that there are very few locations that really serve the needs of bikers. So it came as a surprise, after riding several hundred kilometres down to the Czech-Austrian border, and expecting nothing really special, to find the perfect

location for a real biker event. The ATC Merkur campground at Pasohlávky is located on the beaches of the Nové Mlýny reservoir and offers facilities for thousands of visitors. There are pubs and small bars by the dozen, a huge camp site, and even bungalows and an accompanying hotel complex. The surrounding countryside is perfect for riding, with vineyards and hills crowned with castles



and ruins. It's a landscape where time has stood still for decades, yet you can find everything you need to enjoy a superb riding weekend.

The organisers say that the Euro Bike Fest was inspired by the biggest biker events in Europe like European Bike Week at Faaker See in Austria, the Hungarian HOG Rally on the shores of Balaton Lake and the Bulldog Bash, among others; the smooth organisation and high class programme of music and entertainment bore this out all weekend.

This year, the 4th Bohemia Custom Show had teamed up with the 1st Euro Bike Fest, creating a showcase for custom builders from both east and western Europe,

as well as the chance to win some choice prizes from main bike show sponsor, Custom Chrome Europe. There were more than eighty entrants spread over six classes which, as well as the more familiar choices of Old School and Chopper, featured a more unusual (and certainly interesting) one by the name of 'Tuzemák'. In this category, there were no guidelines or rules on styling, number of cylinders or year of construction. The one criterion was that the engine had to be of Czechoslovakian manufacture. While that might at first seem somewhat limiting, few people realise that what is now the Czech Republic was one of the birthplaces of industry in Europe, housing some of the biggest production plants of the time, and a huge number of car, weapon and motorcycle manufacturers. Among the latter were Jawa, CZ, Walter, Eso and Ogar, to name just a few. I asked entrants and organisers what 'Tuzemák' meant, but nobody seemed too sure.

Fortunately, the internet has the answer to (almost) everything, and I later discovered that it's a brand name for a well-known Czech rum, so this class could also have been called 'alcohol-inspired', which would account for the strangeness of some of the bikes. In actuality, it was the 'Domestic' class, with only machines modified or constructed in the Czech Republic being eligible. Tuzemák bikes didn't have to be registered, which was just as well because most of them probably wouldn't have passed the country's vehicle inspections. But today's eccentric and extravagant could well be



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tomorrow's mainstream – and I spotted CCE General Manager, Andreas Scholz, taking a close look at each bike.

After some intense work on the part of the judges, '19', a Sportster built by Pavol Faragula from neighbouring Slovakia, took top honours, while Roman Bus's 'Don Scalfare' walked away with the trophy for 'Radical Custom', a bike which featured a complete one-off frame and fully enclosed disc brakes.

As well as the bike show, visitors were entertained by some excellent and, well, diverse music. The Abba tribute group and the violin duo seemed a little out of place, but they were still given a rousing

reception by the good-natured crowd. There were also stunt shows and a spectacular jet ski display on the lake, and if you wanted to be a little more adventurous, both cheap paragliding and helicopter flights were available. The only problem was that, in spite of the reasonable ticket prices (25 Euros for the weekend) and backing from the magazines, CNM and the independent Czech edition of Easyriders, the organisers hadn't allowed enough time to effectively promote the show internationally. Pouring rain and cold weather before the event deterred many, and the decision of Harley-Davidson to stage its first Vienna 'Harley Days' just forty miles to the south affected visitor numbers.

But this is an event which should, in time, succeed. The area is ideal for touring, with historic towns, castles and countless vineyards (when the sun finally appeared on Saturday afternoon I realised just why this area grows so many grapes), while accommodation and food is far cheaper than in much of Europe. The 1st Euro Bike Fest may not have got off to an auspicious start, but let's hope that it does return next year. Both the organisers and the location deserve nothing less.

words & photos: **HORST ROSLER**

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