



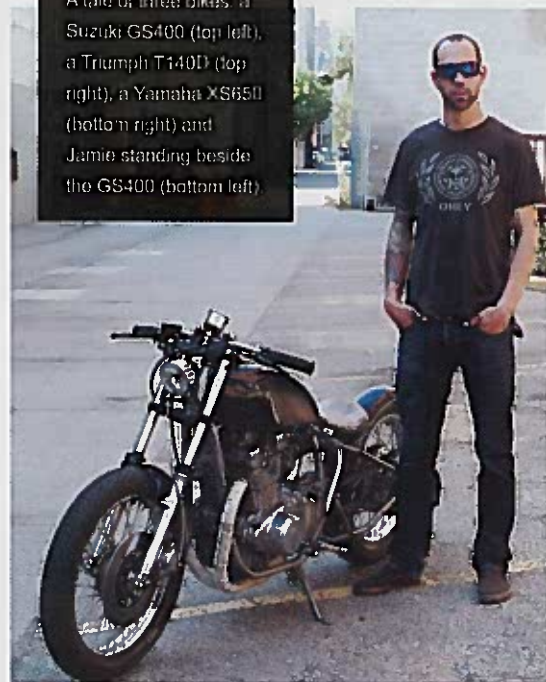
BUILD IT *and* They Will COME

Starting at a grassroots level, this builder proves you don't need a pocket full of cash to create a custom

Story and photos by Neil Ingroville

What do you do when you want to break into the field of custom bike building? You peruse websites and magazines for the latest, greatest offerings, custom S&S motors, Brembo radial calipers, machined billet triple clamps. But how do you start building? Without the financial backing to order the latest and greatest parts, you have to rely on ingenuity and artistic vision, and not be afraid to use some elbow grease to make it all happen. And you probably don't start with pristine over-the-counter parts.

A tale of three bikes: a Suzuki GS400 (top left), a Triumph T140D (top right), a Yamaha XS650 (bottom right) and Jamie standing beside the GS400 (bottom left)





From basket case Suzuki GS400 to finished product.



Steel lunch box mounted on the lower frame hides the bike's wiring and electrical components. (above)



If you're anything like Jamie Burdett, you just start building and see where it takes you; a few years back, he caught the modification bug. To go from being a bartender with a passion to a bike builder with product took some planning. He had ideas that needed refining and designs that needed metal to complete. A local community college provided knowledge and a welding course to set him on the right path.

Basket Case Suzi

It seems that, while a dedicated motocross rider and full-time bartender, Burdett was actually an enthusiastic

sculptor looking for a block of material. That block turned out to be a 1977 Suzuki GS400.

Like many restoration and custom projects, this one started out as a basket case. Burdett first rebuilt the bike to a point where he could ride it and find the character hidden within. He did a minimal amount of restoration work and rode the little GS around Calgary for a few months. Naturally, he wasn't satisfied with the bike. The performance was weak, the handling average and the looks, well . . . there was so much he could do to improve on the basic machine. The ideas started to formulate.

As the winter weather started to come to Calgary, the GS went back into the shop. Burdett had planned that the GS would become a bobber. He tossed anything that wasn't needed into a pile in the corner of the shop; very little of the original hardware was reattached. Jigs were built and the frame was cut, lengthened and turned into a hard tail. He tore the engine down to the crank and rebuilt it. Burdett cut the exhaust pipes and welded them to fit the new frame dimensions, and the chain was lengthened and fitted with a custom tensioning system. He replaced the stock bars and seat with custom pieces.

To keep the wiring tidy, he fitted the electrics into a steel lunch box tucked under the seat. Various parts needed to be custom manufactured to fit the new frame. But it wasn't a matter of being able to go to the local shop and buy the parts that were needed. Quite often, napkin sketches combined with trial and error formed the finished product. Over a period of several weeks, the tank was reshaped to provide knee cut-outs. The rims were polished and era-friendly Cheng Shin tires installed. Minimalism was the defined path and the pile of leftover bits showed that Burdett's GS had been through a serious weight-reduction program.

A Reputation in the Making

The final result: a chopped GS that draws a crowd wherever it is parked. The flat black on gloss black paint job showcases the work done to the tank.

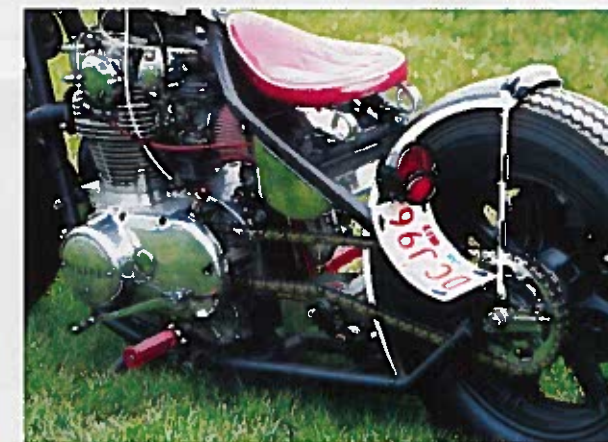
The dark blue pinstriping was the finishing touch. Weighing in around 100 kg, the little GS has some serious get-up-and-go and makes an excellent "TT" (tavern-to-tavern) bike. The lengthened wheelbase provides cornering stability. For a short time, all it took was for Burdett to park his bike on the street to receive inquiries from riders who wanted their bikes modified.

Seemingly almost overnight, Burdett's reputation soared – in reality, it was a couple of years in the making. Older Japanese singles and twins were being offered up almost weekly. But as far as bike building goes, the little GS was just Burdett's entry-level project. As he was putting the finishing touches on the GS, another bike had arrived in the shop. This time the base bike would be a '79 Yamaha XS650.

The Yamaha received much of the same treatment as the GS. It, too, was

stripped down to a pile of parts. The engine was torn down and rebuilt to near-stock specs. Burdett replaced the airbox with K&N filter stacks. The frame was also chopped, lengthened and modified to a hard tail. He designed a custom rear fender with signals and brake lights integrated into the support struts. The exhaust was modified with a 2-into-2 speedster-style exhaust. The bike retained the stock front and rear brakes but with rebuilt calipers.

A minimalist speedo is the only instrument on the bars. The electrics are housed in a custom-built stainless steel box that sits on the lower frame member under the seat. The tank and rear fender received a very nice white pearl finish, and Burdett personally added the black pinstriping onto them. The front and rear rims are fitted with IRC Road Winner rubber.



Word of mouth was all it took. After putting the finishing touches on the GS400, this XS650 showed up at the door for a makeover.



Dug out of the mud from the 2014 Calgary flood, this Triumph T140D received a new lease on life at the hands of Jamie Burdett

Another Crowd-Pleaser

The build took about four months to complete, and the final product is another bike that draws a crowd wherever it's parked. The pearl white paint, and the minimalistic nature of the 650 twin in a custom frame with not much else attached offers an aesthetic that is pleasing to the eye.

Not to be slowed down, next on the list was a Triumph T140D, better known as the Bonneville. This bike was a bottom-up restoration that the owner dug out of the mud after the 2014 Calgary flood. The owner had called up Burdett and asked if he'd take on the job of making it run again, this time with modifications.

The first step was to strip down the bike to clean it. The mud and grime was sandblasted off. It came back together over a six-month period. Burdett strengthened the swingarm with some custom bracing. Öhlins shocks replaced the originals and provided onlookers with the realization that this bike handles curves.

The brown llama leather seat was custom-made in Calgary to emulate the brat/scrambler style. He upgraded the original electrical system from the original Lucas to include a modern Boyer Bransden ignition. The leftover parts pile started to grow. The goal was to put as little back on as possible and make it a daily runner. LEDs replaced

the back-end light requirements, while an aftermarket halo-style headlight provides the light for late-night runs. To keep things quiet during those runs, a pair of CRF250 exhaust cans were baffled and repurposed to keep the roar down.

Finishing off the visual is Wildberry Mica, which looks black in the shade but shines hues of purple in the daylight. The end product is a one-of-a-kind daily rider.

Desire to Succeed

What's next? There's another Yamaha 650 that's been staring at Burdett from the corner of the garage. Maybe he'll get time to work on it. The recent builds are attracting attention and people approach him on a weekly basis to take

on another project. It goes to show that you don't need bottomless pockets to create a custom bike. It takes a concept of what you want the end product to be, some elbow grease, a desire to make the part before diving into a catalogue and perseverance to work through the problems you encounter along the way.

For Burdett, the enthusiasm for his end product on the street drives him forward. From someone who can build something from scrap to the guys that sweated and fretted over jetting 40-year-old carbs to operate at different altitudes and modified air intakes, to the artist that crafts a product that then has to let it go into the wilds - Burdett represents the builder in all of us. Design it, make the parts you can't find, build it up and admire the finished product... for about a week. Then it's off to the next one. **MM**

 For additional photos of Jamie's bikes visit: motorcyclemojo.com