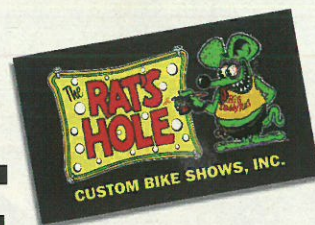


INTERNATIONAL BIKER BUILD-OFF

On top of the world at the Rat's Hole



JUST AS SWITZERLAND HAS GENEVA AND ITS Convention, the United States has Daytona and the Rat's Hole International Biker Build-Off. While the former has long been the voice for defining and redefining the core of international humanitarian law, the latter has spent the last three years defining and redefining the core of international motorcycle building talent. There's no denying that both are extremely significant organizations. Their profound impacts on the global scene can upset the

stability of a country in a split second. And yet, to really compare the two institutions is foolish. At least, that's what I've been told.

Although the famed gathering in Geneva is far from an annual event, the same can't be said for the Rat's Hole International Biker Build-Off. First held during the 2004 Daytona Bike Week,

the International has mushroomed into quite a spectacle. As always, this year's fiesta was held at the Peabody Auditorium. For those stuck in traffic, zonked out from the night before, or otherwise unable to make the scene, here's what went down on Saturday, March 11, 2006.

First of all, it's important to understand that the International isn't your average motorcycle show. Oh, no. Rat's Hole kingpin Ted Smith and his crew spend most of the year combing the world in search of three builders who will represent their respective countries by concocting the coolest customs they possibly can. "What I want on that stage," says Ted, "is just the best that country has to offer. It's as simple as that."

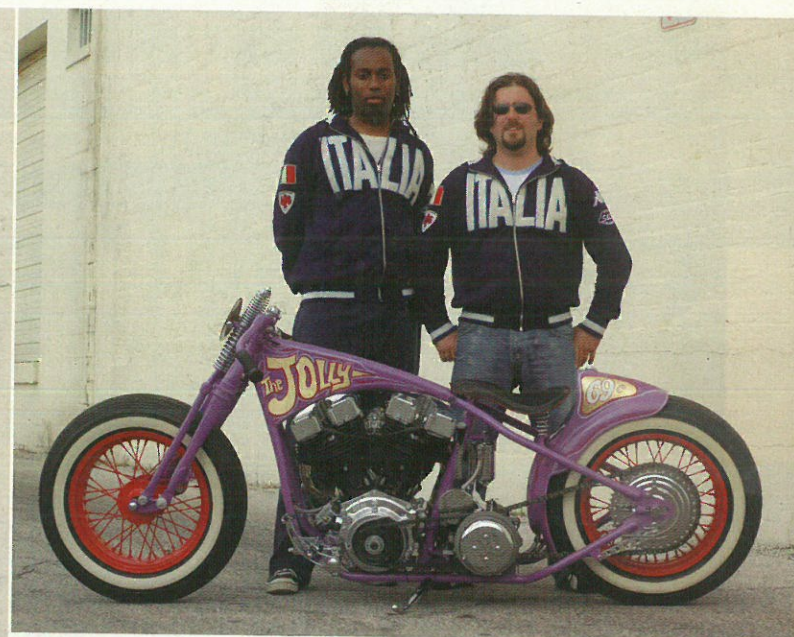
The rules, according to Ted, are somewhat fast and loose. "We don't require the guys build the bike in a certain number of days. That would be difficult for us to control, especially when they're in Europe or wherever. Nor do we demand that they build a bike specifically for this show. It would be nice, but these guys put so much money into the builds that, well..." The bottom line is Ted prefers the bikes to stay under wraps until their Rat's Hole unveiling.

One of the most distinguishing factors of the International is that it's judged solely by public ballot, rather than by a covert team of eagle-eyed experts wielding penlights in an

attempt to uncover anything less than a sensationally scalloped weld. For a show of this caliber, that's a true rarity. It's also the main reason why Ted aims for such a disparate trio of machines. "By and large, when dealing with the public, if you have two bikes that look the same, the third is going to win. So we try to get three totally different bikes. That way the public will judge them by how different they each look."

Now that you have some grasp on the rationale behind the International, let's cut to the players and their stunning toys.

Winging their way down from Montreal, Michael Long and Ben Marleau of Zeel Design pulled through with an undeniably futuristic (or would that be otherworldly?) entry they called Bulldog. Why the two uniquely talented special project engineers/hi-tech designers gave their machine such a name may be more



Aldo's U.S. business partner, Bruton Jones, left, poses with the Italian master and his Jolly Joker.