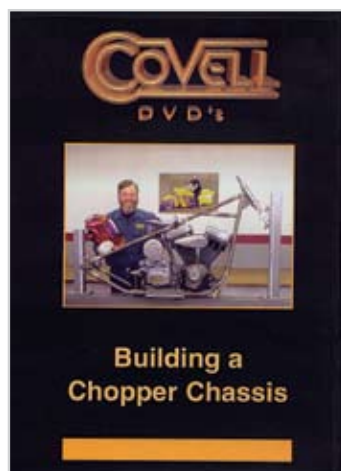


DVD Reviews



BUILDING A CHOPPER CHASSIS Covell DVD

This, the most unusual video I've seen in a long time, takes you stage by stage through the physical work of making a custom motorcycle frame. Ron Covell painstakingly takes you through each process from the original specification of the materials, cutting, notching and bending them, offering the use of a range of alternative tools where appropriate, and explaining the reasons why some tools are better than others in some applications.

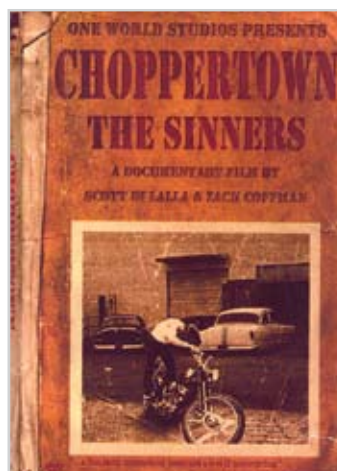
Not intended as entertainment – or at least I hope not – it is a “Shop Class” for your TV, and really works at its best when used in conjunction with another media, introduced at the very beginning: Gary Weishaupt's Chopper Builder's Handbook, or more accurately the online version of it at www.chopperhandbook.com.

Ron is a natural teacher and presents workshops in a range of auto-related metalworking disciplines – two wheels and four – with a deadpan delivery and using repetition to hammer the point home. Full of good advice, a favourite is 'sneaking up' on a final fit – checking a component against the jig or the rest of the frame, before you get as far as the marks you're working to, because you can always take more off, but it's not so easy to put it back. Those sort of tricks alert you to the perils of screwing up the last notches on any given tube that you've just spent time and effort accurately bending – he does skimp on some of the theory, especially the cover-promoted explanation of the concepts of rake, trail and stretch, which actually translated as showing the picture of the bike he was working from. I've forgiven him though, because he said where he got that information from – the aforementioned Chopper Builder's Handbook – and that goes into massive detail.

What the DVD does brilliantly is to show the production process from all angles, and by shooting in real time, give you a better idea of the speed at which things happen ... and make you realize that you don't really want to build one frame but at least two because you could get a little production line going with the second one taking much less than 50% as long as the first, and so on.

It will leave the layman with a better appreciation of the work involved, but also the simplicity of the task when broken down into individual tubes, but mainly an understanding as to why frames aren't cheap. And it will leave the accomplished engineer with the certain knowledge that their next build could be based around their own chassis, but not enough information to help them design it.

Covell's distributor in the UK is Frost Restoration Techniques (www.frost.co.uk), on **01706 758252**, for other countries see www.covell.biz



CHOPPERTOWN: THE SINNERS One World Studios Ltd.

Every now and then something happens that thrust custom motorcycling, and its associated lifestyle blinking into the glare of the spotlight. Life magazine started the ball rolling in 1947 with their Hollister cover story, it was picked up by The Wild One in '53, and then Easy Rider in 1969. There has been a myriad selection of others with lurid titles and plotlines since, the majority has been commercially, and shamelessly exploiting the genre, or the fears of an impressionable public, with few breaking the surface and establishing a fan base.

I'm going to stick my neck out and suggest that Choppertown, the independently produced film by One World Studios, is up there with the giants as a potentially life-changing classic that will find a broad audience, not least among men, and could re-establish a grass-roots motorcycle culture. Strangely compulsive viewing, it is a frank, intimate and disarming look at the relationships of a group of exclusively male riders – the Sinners of the title – centred around the story of one member, Kutty Noteboom, building his first ground-up bike with the help of fellow Sinner, Rico, and his workshop.

Kutty's bike is an Old School chop based round what is identified as a 70's Paughco hardtail, and the tale takes you with him as he seeks out contemporary parts, often used, and there is much made of the soul of the old parts and their scars, imperfections and their worn appearance, from the frame itself though a solo Bates seat from the sixties, Triumph rear mudguard, oil tank of uncertain vintage and manufacture and a fuel tank that once masqueraded as some kind of bizarre baby, and which was fundamentally remanufactured to tie it into the style Kutty was looking for. Sitting on new rims, but new old rubber – a classic combination of Avon's 5.00x16 SM with a 21-inch Speedmaster up front – and with a kicker and open primary belt, it was representative of the machines favoured by other Sinners and, thinking on, I don't recall seeing a rear shock absorber for the duration of the movie.

With plenty of light relief, often comic from a bunch of real people who don't take themselves too seriously, through the comings and goings at Rico's shop, the odd party or two, and many, many road miles tracking unsilenced, raw American motorcycles, Choppertown shows a slice of an idyllic lifestyle that explores one element of the the now-unfashionable bond between men, and celebrates it. One member tells us how he struggles to explain to his wife why he wants to spend a couple of days a week at the shop with his buddies, building bikes and drinking beer, while Kutty refers to his three families – the Sinners, his homelife with his beautiful wife and kid, and the band – with an unspun honesty that gives an idea of how close the film crew got to the people they set out to portray.

The whole thing could be written off as a feel-good exercise for the Sinners, but the lack of any pretentiousness or attitude, expectation of approval or apology, gives it an authenticity that is refreshing in the 'Reality TV'-corrupted world that we live in, and is better for an atmosphere created by the sounds of real life, punctuated by unsilenced motorcycles, machine tools and a cross section of music provided by members of the club – some more famous than others – rather than unrelated irrelevant music for its own sake.

You come away with an odd sensation, as though you have been sitting in on the build yourself, as though you were at the parties and as if you were on the road with them but sadly only from the passenger seat of a car – but that only makes you want to get out and do it for yourself.

If you're a bloke who has ever thought you were born too late and missed the halcyon days when men were men and bikes were raw, loud and elemental, think again. And if you're looking at buying this as a gift for your bloke, don't be surprised if he goes all wistful and wants to spend more time with his mates.

www.choppertown.net \$24.95 plus shipping