



TEST DRIVE

ICON SHEENE

The top names in motorcycle racing will be in the UK for the MotoGP British Grand Prix this month, which makes it the perfect time to remember one of the heroes of the sport, Barry Sheene. *The Paddock* takes the exclusive Icon Sheene tribute bike for a whirl.

By Michael Neeves

The late, great double 500cc Grand Prix World Champion Barry Sheene stands as the most famous and revered motorcycle racer Britain has ever produced. Back in his heyday he had his own TV shows and advertised aftershave alongside fellow national sporting hero, boxer Henry Cooper. Even now, if you're stopped by the local constabulary for riding a bit too enthusiastically, it's likely the first thing the nice policeman will say is, "Who do you think you are, Barry Sheene?"

He still has an army of

adoring fans, but to one man, Andrew Morris, the late, great Barry Sheene is such a hero that he launched a motorcycle manufacturing company, Icon Motorcycles, specifically to create a tribute motorcycle, and here it is: the Icon Sheene, yours for an eye-watering \$155,000 (£107,000).

Morris says: "Only 52 will ever be made, one for each year of Barry's life. I designed and built this bike as a tribute to the irreplaceable Barry. We've been blessed to have the support of his family, in particular his wife

Stephanie and the project has been overseen by his life-long friend and team-mate Steve (Stavros) Parrish. Barry broke the mould and brought glamour and excitement to motorcycling in the 1970s and 1980s and we'd like to think, if he was here today, this would have been a project he would have dearly loved to be involved in."

There are numerous painstakingly-built replicas of the motorcycles Sheene rode during his career, with some people even lucky enough to own his actual race bikes. So what has this handbuilt, 1.4-litre, 250bhp, turbocharged Suzuki-engined

motorcycle, built using Formula One and MotoGP technology, actually got to do with Sheene? Morris is a successful businessman in the world of freight handling and logistics. He is also the owner of a classic ex-works 1990 F1 world championship Lotus driven by Derek Warwick and Martin Donnelly. He and Clive Chapman are aiming for the car to do demonstration laps at some of the GPs in 2011. Reference Icon Sheene, Morris explains: "Some people have asked why the bike is not a race replica, but it had to be more than that. I wanted something which captured the spirit of the

The Icon Sheene combines style and muscle in a \$155,000 package (above); Barry Sheene and team-mate Steve Parrish (above left)

man, today, now. It had to be different, individual and non-traditional, but at the same time be an expert in its field – a bit like Barry. We think we've created just that."

The Icon Sheene is powered by a tuned and turbocharged Suzuki GSX1400 engine. Morris says this is the first link to Sheene – he won his two 500cc world championships with the Japanese factory. Big capacity, turbocharged engines like these were the thing to have back in the early 1980s, too.

The muscular motor, which is exposed and not hidden behind a fairing, is housed in a handbuilt tubular aluminium frame made

by Spondon, carbon fibre wheels are by Dymag and the billet aluminium brake calipers are from ISR. Morris tells me these companies that supplied parts for the Icon Sheene also helped Sheene during his career.

Each machine sold will feature its own unique 1940s style airbrushed pin-up girl and playing card and the owner can choose their playing card from a 'pack' of 52. This feature and the bodywork concept and design is by Mike Fairholme, the man responsible for designing and painting Sheene's crash helmets, plus those of Senna, Mansell, Coulthard, Piquet and Hill. »





steers and goes around corners. However, as the forks, shock, turbo boost, power curve and everything in between is infinitely adjustable, like a giant jigsaw puzzle this new machine bike needs to go through its development process to be dialled in 100%.

During my ride I was able to get a taste of what the Icon Sheene will be like when it's finished and released to the world. Despite having lots of power, its delivery is predictable and linear, which gives you confidence in the corners. There's some turbo lag at low revs but the Motec-controlled variable boost keeps it to a minimum. It's a heavy machine compared to a conventional sportsbike.

I've been told a number of modifications have taken place since my shakedown ride. The bike has been tested by Barry's nephew and BSB rider Scott Smart, in time for its public launch at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, ridden in the hill climb by Barry's son Freddie Sheene.

Morris says Stephanie Sheene has been behind the project throughout its development. She says: "To have a motorcycle designed, built and dedicated to the memory of Barry is the ultimate accolade, I know he would have had fun being involved with this project, whilst at the same time putting his own special stamp of approval on the detail."

Steve Parrish, who helped Morris with his vision, says: "I am so very pleased the Icon Sheene has been sculpted, a living, shrieking, whirlwind of a tribute to a great man. For me, Barry was like having a father, brother and mate, all in one amazing person."

"Barry's last words to me were, 'Stavros, at least we're not going to die wondering', which meant, if you ever wondered what something was like, you ought to experience it for yourself. That was our philosophy and we lived by it." ■

For more information, general enquiries to info@iconsheene.com or telephone 01293 823890. Web: www.iconsheene.com

"A living, shrieking, whirlwind of a tribute to a great man"

Sheene-inspired details adorn the machine. The top yoke is engraved with Barry and Stephanie Sheene's signatures and in inlaid with a solid silver version of Barry Sheene's own take on Daffy Duck, produced by a leading Swiss watchmaker. The Alcantara-upholstered seat is embroidered with Sheene's lucky number 7.

Sheene connections aside, the attention to detail and build-quality is impressive. The swingarm is created by FTR, a MotoGP chassis specialist, the bespoke bodywork is hand-laid in carbon fibre and the hand-beaten aluminium fuel tank takes a month to build. The moulds used to create the tank were originally for the sidepods of Jenson Button's F1 BAR Honda.

A fully adjustable and programmable F1-spec Motec electronics system takes care of the Icon Sheene's engine management system and features aircraft grade data cabling and a keyless ignition. Fully-adjustable Bitubo suspension and hand-crafted footpeg

assemblies and exhaust are a few more of the mouth-watering details.

Morris conceived the bike and all of these design features when rowing across the Atlantic in 2005. "While I rowed I visualised every part of the bike," he explains. "The race took two months to complete and now five years later the bike is ready to showcase to the world. It is really exciting to see the first production bike."

I got the chance to ride the Sheene Icon in its first ever shakedown test at Silverstone's breathtaking new Arena Grand Prix circuit. Knowing this is a one-of-a-kind exclusive motorcycle with a price tag to match, my biggest concern was not to crash it, under any circumstances.

Fortunately we didn't have any problems during the test, but just like an F1 car run for the very first time, there were minor teething problems with everything from the engine's power delivery, to the brakes and suspension, which affects the way the bike stops,

MINIMOTO, MAKI RETURN

WHAT'S DRIVING THE LATEST BIKE CRAZE



Just 20 years ago few people bought motorcycles to use as toys. Now they have become must-have accessories.

The one person who is really responsible for the interest in motorcycle racing which has swept the globe is not MotoGP chief executive Carmelo Ezpeleta but race ace Valentino Rossi. The charismatic Italian made his mark by winning four consecutive MotoGP world championships from 2002 and then taking two more in 2008 and the following year. However, what is less known is that his first bike races were on minimoto miniature motorcycles and in 1992 he became an Italian regional champion in this category.

Rossi's success has stimulated interest in these baby bikes which usually come decked out in the same liveries as the MotoGP

counterparts that they take their inspiration from. As the internet has made importing easier and reduced costs interest in minimotos and their bigger brother dirt bikes has boomed. One company is cornering the niche when it comes to selling them.

UK-based FunBikes was founded early in 2001 as a wholesale supplier, selling quad bikes and junior motocross bikes throughout the UK's Midlands. This put it in pole position to take advantage of the boom which was to come. Jon King, the company's founder, explains that "in 2004 the mini and midimotos markets exploded and from day one we have been supplying top quality mini and midimotos to both retail and trade customers."

FunBikes soon expanded its supply of minimotos, midimotos,

FunBikes' founder Jon King with co-director Jane King

"In 2004 the mini and midimotos markets exploded and from day one we have been supplying top quality mini and midimotos to both retail and trade customers," says King

minimoto parts and bike spares to cover the whole of the UK and Europe. King adds that in the past three years sales of mini dirt bikes have increased by 100% and in 2009 the company's revenues nearly doubled from £570,000 to £1m with Finland, Spain, Sweden and the US providing the bulk of foreign customers.

King says that FunBikes' success has been due to its focus on the quality and reliability not just of its products but also its service. "We buy in our mini and midimotos, minimoto parts and bike spares from the best manufacturers in the far east and as such the quality and reliability can be guaranteed," he explains. It has given FunBikes a celebrity following with UK football coach Gary Speed and television presenter Noel Edmonds both buying from it.

King adds that the interest in minimotos has been driven by their unit price of £200. "It is an affordable entry level product for everyone. If they like it the bikes can have their performance and specification easily upgraded, or they can move onto the next level."

In May FunBikes received 75,000 hits on its website with minimotos getting the second highest percentage of page views after dirt bikes. Mini dirt bikes and pit bikes comprise the bulk of sales, bringing in 55% of FunBikes' revenue, and last year its best selling item was the Cobra mini dirt bike. This ranges in price from £199 to £299 and in 2009 FunBikes sold a total of 1994 units, outstripping the 320 sales of minimoto race bikes.

As the small bikes have far lower costs than their bigger brothers it is perhaps unsurprising that sales have not slowed during the economic downturn. As the sector shows little sign of contracting there is room for FunBikes' sales to continue accelerating. ■