

Left: Tom McCormick's Harley Davidson features a rat breaking through the front fender. Top right: The right side of the gas tank shows a Bell Labs' Trapper T-Rex Rat Snap Trap preparing to capture a rat. Bottom right: The right side of the bike includes an image of a well used bait rodent box.



Riding in

Style



PMP Tom "Curly" McCormick combined his pest control expertise with his passion for auto body design to create a unique motorcycle.

By Kierra Sondereker

It all started with the skeleton of a rat. This odd Christmas gift gave Tom "Curly" McCormick an idea for a pest control vehicle unlike any other. With his years of experience in the pest management industry and his love of vehicle design, McCormick was able to steer away from the vans and trucks often associated with pest control companies. Instead, he designed a one-of-a-kind, pest control-themed motorcycle.

STARTING OUT. At 14 years old, McCormick knew high school wasn't for him. It was 1974, during Christmas break of his freshman year, when he told his mother he was done. McCormick remembers his

mother, in tears, telling him, "Tom, I can't stop you...If you're going to insist on dropping out, then you're going to work, and you will begin paying your way."

And that's exactly what he did. McCormick got a job as a sander at his brother-in-law's auto body shop and spent his early teenage years sanding cars. He eventually made friends with the shop's painter, who began mentoring McCormick in the art of painting cars. Between painting and sanding, his skills grew, and soon his painting was noticed by the owner of the auto shop. The owner offered McCormick a job as lead painter, and he accepted.

"It was a nice place; I enjoyed work-

ing there," McCormick said. "A few years passed, I (was) 21 years old, married and living well."

However, discord made its way into McCormick's personal life when his wife, unhappy with the hours he had been working at the shop, called and said he needed to change his routine. In a panic, McCormick left work early to talk to her.

The next day, he was called into his boss's office unexpectedly. "He expressed his displeasure concerning my departure the day before. I told him I had a personal dilemma," McCormick said. "He then informed me that my job was important, and I should remember that."



CAREER TRANSITION. Just then, serendipity struck. While getting back to work, McCormick's sister called him to say her boss had a pest control company, General Exterminating in Youngtown, Ariz., and he wanted McCormick to work for him. McCormick was reluctant to do so because his job at the auto shop paid almost four times what the starting salary was at General Exterminating. He told his sister that he couldn't survive on that amount of money.

But he did give the job offer some thought. "I thought of what all had happened in the last 24 hours," McCormick said. "My wife is threatening to leave me, and my boss says he's the most important. 'When does he want me to start,' I asked?"

His sister responded, "Tomorrow."

Everything came together for McCormick. With his mind made up, he quit his job at the auto shop. "Now I do not condone walking out, but sometimes we make decisions based on impulse," he said. "On July 9, 1981, I began my employment in the pest control industry."

GENERAL EXTERMINATING. McCormick had no intention of staying in the pest control industry. He hoped this new job would last only about three months, or for as long as it took for his wife to be happy with his new hours. Then, he told himself, he would get back to his love of auto painting. However, McCormick and his wife soon divorced, and instead of moving back to the auto shop, he stayed with General Exterminating.

McCormick's newfound commitment to General Exterminating had much to do with his boss, Robert Wilbanks. He was impressed with how Wilbanks treated everyone fairly and seemed to be invested in each employee. From Wilbanks, McCormick learned many things about pest control, including what his boss called "The Golden Rule."

"He would always tell me, 'The Golden Rule, Thomas. Live by The Golden Rule,'" McCormick said. "Always give your customers a dollar's worth of service for every dollar they spend. Never cut corners. And your crew, always treat them better than

they will ever find at any other pest control company."

After a couple years of hard work, a few raises and living by The Golden Rule, McCormick became a manager, and his friendship with Wilbanks grew.

"He became someone that was like my big brother, dad and best friend all wrapped into one," McCormick said. "A wonderful mentor."

THE BIKE. In between home inspections and setting up bait stations, what started out as a means to an end became a passion for McCormick. However, his new love of pest control didn't mean he relinquished his desire to paint vehicles.

McCormick started a small auto body and paint shop at home, which he ran for many years as a side business, called Curly's Customs. But as time went on, McCormick said his attitude towards painting cars began to change. He wanted more.

McCormick didn't like seeing the vehicles he worked so hard on "be beaten up in a parking lot or a truck that they



The wheel on this 2002 Harley Davidson Road King features hind rat legs.

Left: Tom "Curly" McCormick. Middle: On the rear fender of McCormick's motorcycle, a Grim Reaper rat ushers dying rats into eternity.

land in the Southwest made it a perfect area for riding, which contributed to his continued enthusiasm for motorcycles.

Four years ago, the idea of designing a custom motorcycle that showed off his painting expertise and love of pest control came to McCormick when he received that unusual Christmas gift.

"One Christmas, I was given a skeleton of a rat," he said. "And I thought, this would be great to have my artist complete a rendering of a wheel with the spokes being the hind leg of the rat."

So McCormick took his craftsmanship to the next level and began the process of creating a rodent-themed motorcycle. He sent the renderings to a company in California to design the wheel, which took about eight months to produce. Over the next four years, McCormick would design other key features of the motorcycle in a rodent control theme, like the custom floorboards made to look like glueboards.

Other components, such as the stretched tank and side covers, featured rodent-themed artwork made to appear as if rats were trying to tear through the top layer of red metal flake paint. The back fender of the bike displays an ominous rat dressed as the Grim Reaper, its beady red eyes glowing underneath its hood.

Also featured on the bike is a Bell Laboratories logo, which McCormick said he included because he often uses their

products at General Exterminating. But at first, Bell Labs was a bit hesitant to let him feature a reference to the company.

That was understandable, McCormick said. "Think about it. Some guy calls that is in pest control. He uses your products and has a 'vision' of a custom motorcycle." And at the time, Bell didn't know McCormick was an accomplished motorcycle painter.

After learning more about the project, Bell Labs agreed to let him feature the company's logo, since the motorcycle was representing the pest management industry in a positive way. "Bell Labs is honored that Tom chose our company's products to use as a muse for his creativity," said Patrick Lynch, vice president of sales U.S. and Canada for Bell Labs. "The finished product is amazing. We celebrate the passion he has for rodent control and appreciate his support of our products."

PERFECT MUSE. McCormick said he chose a rodent control theme for his motorcycle because in pest control, rodents command the attention.

"Whether you like them or not, there are so many aspects of a rat. And to be quite honest, they fascinate me," said McCormick. Because rats are so active and have unusual habits, "I can keep adding to the project."

The bike continues to be a work in progress. McCormick said he is in the process of making highway pegs in the form of bait blocks on a road, along with foot shifters being made to look like packages of soft bait and pellet bait.

"The reactions to the bike are fun to observe," McCormick said. "Whether it's an industry member or not, they are overtaken by the detail. Homeowners/potential clients start out by saying how much they dislike rats but then continue to walk around the bike commenting on not only the creativity, but they start asking questions about rodents and their control." **PCT**

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just throw shovels in the back," he said. "When I create something, I want it to be beautiful. I hope it is appreciated. I enjoy seeing people look at our work and enjoy the craftsmanship."

McCormick soon shifted his painting efforts to motorcycles, which he had loved since he bought his first bike in the 1970s. Born in Indiana but raised in Arizona, McCormick said the dry heat and flat

FAB FIVE

Tom "Curly" McCormick says there were five men who were a driving force behind the creation of his motorcycle. "They brought this project to fruition," he said.

Artist: Matt Andrews
Painter: Lee (Tiny) Hicken
Painter: Dan Bong
Fabricator: Brett Geiser
Fabricator: Tom Dillard

Visit www.curlyscustoms.com to see photos of the motorcycle as it is worked on and completed.