

by other riders on Reiser-built machines: Randy Gabriel in 1974; Tom Jr., Reiser's son, in 1981; Steve Dresser in 1995; and James Large in 1997 and 1998.

With this kind of record behind him, Reiser has become one of an elite group of master engine builders, fuel handlers and chassis designers within the professional hillclimbing community. Only two or three other men can equal him for engine preparation, and it is arguable that no one else comes even close for innovative chassis development. His tool of choice has always been Harley-Davidson, and today he bases his hillclimbers on the alloy XR engine, introduced more than 25 years ago for AMA dirt-track racing.

Now, understand that professional hillclimbing machines are beastly creations. With some eight feet of wheelbase, an overall length of 10 feet, more than 18 inches of ground clearance and a truly vicious-looking chain wrapped around the rear tire, they are menacing even at rest. And when their unmuffled, high-compression engines come alive, *get back!* Nothing makes an ear-splitting sound like a Big Twin burning nitromethane. Whereas an XR750 engine prepared for dirt-track racing is considered competitive with about 100 horsepower, Reiser pulls nearly

twice that out of his XRs. Compression is raised to over 13:1, and the injectors pump a 92-percent mix of nitromethane, cut with a little alcohol and propylene oxide, into the combustion chambers. While XR dirt-trackers are tuned to deliver smooth power out of the turns, Reiser's hillclimbers are designed to bring the power on instantaneously, like a big hammer slamming onto an anvil.

There are, in all probability, fewer than a couple of dozen such machines in America, and Reiser's are especially clean examples. Using C&J-built frames of Reiser's own design, they lack the backyard cobbiness characteristic of some hillclimbing equipment. This sense of style is carried over to his team members, who wear crisp uniforms and are expected to behave with the self-discipline Reiser has learned in the years since the dreaded V-Eight released its hold on him.

Reiser's own hillclimbing career was interrupted in 1994 by a badly broken leg. Like any veteran motorcycle racer, he is fond of ticking off his fractures: two arms, four legs, six collarbones, ribs on the average of once a year, innumerable toes. He laughs, "Beulah always said toes and ribs don't count. Then one day she fell off her own motorcycle and broke a rib. Guess what? Now ribs count!"

Fit and trim, Reiser looks much younger than his 61 years. While he still builds some of the most powerful Big Twins in America, his motor madness is long behind him. He spends his days doing overhauls and custom machining on Harley engines. He rides his new Twin Cam FLH for enjoyment, and on summer weekends attends professional hillclimbs, always ready and willing to share his wisdom and experience with a younger generation of hopeful riders. He refuses to speak of retirement but devotes a lot of attention these days to furthering the careers of young lions such as James Large.

Tom's Bomb, the infamous V-Eight-powered monster, still sits in the front window of Reiser's Cycle Service, still looking like a boulder rammed through a sheet of plywood. But today it is no longer his addiction. It is kind of like an old friend, a strange and quiet monument to an exciting era that was understood and described by Tom Wolfe better than any other writer in America.

A lot of nitro has flowed through the ol' Hilborn since Wolfe's article appeared in 1965. If he were to walk into Reiser's shop today, he would probably no longer see Tom Reiser as a wild, underground motorcycling hero, but find him rather a man in full. ■