

BON-TRIKE

A MACHINE THAT GOES LIKE A GO-KART AND ITS PROUD AUSSIE OWNER



Words & Photos: Mark Bowdler

It sits in line over the horizon, its twin headlights beaming in your eyes and its wide countenance telling you it's a custom trike, probably a German Benetton chassis. But as it comes closer, there is a distinctive Harley-esque rumble that you don't expect. As it passes by, its rear end surprises you with a powerful V-twin, not the usual 1200cc or 1800cc Vee-Dub that lives.

View-Club the trike.

You have just witnessed a very rare sight indeed; the only Bon-Trike H54 in Australia powered by an S&S V-twin engine, according to its owner, Reiner Guld of motor Brabant.

He says only two Harley 8-powered H54 trikes were imported into Australia in 1990 in pieces and without the Harley 8 engines. Reiner also says that Bon-Trike general manager, Karsten Borsitz, bought two S&S engines in Sydney and fitted one to one of the two trikes to use at motor shows as a showpiece.

"It did run but vibrated badly so he never tried to sell them to the public," the Santa Clara lookalike says in his soft and lilting German accent from his native Datteln near the Dutch border.

Words & Photos: Mark Hinchliffe

It flies in low over the horizon, its twin headlights beaming in your eyes and its wide countenance telling you it's a custom trike, probably a German Rewaco chassis. But as it comes closer, there is a distinctive Harley-esque rumble that you don't expect. As it passes by, its rear end surprises you with a prominent V-twin, not the usual 1200cc or 1600cc Vee-Dub flat four.

You have just witnessed a very rare sighting indeed; the only Bon-Trike HS6 in Australia powered by an S&S V-twin engine, according to its owner, Reiner Gudd of outer Brisbane.

He says only two Harley B-powered HS6 trikes were imported into Australia in 1999 in pieces and without the Harley B engines. Reiner also says that Bon-Trike general manager, Karsten Bonitz, bought two S&S engines in Sydney and fitted one to one of the two trikes to use at motor shows as a showpiece.

"It did run but vibrated badly so he never tried to sell them to the public," the Santa Claus lookalike says in his soft and lilting German accent from his native Duisburg near the Dutch border.





"When Bon-Trikes shut its doors in 2002, one of the two trikes was sold to somebody in NSW. That trike was converted to a VW trike because they couldn't sort out the vibration problems," adds Reiner, who bought the other trike as "a basket case", along with one of the twin-cam S&S 107 engines.

"Back in those days, everyone wanted to put a Harley motor in them but with the engine running east-west, it vibrated like hell and they never got it to work properly.

"Every time you accelerated, it tried to tip the bike over. The problem was it was mounted at the top and bottom like in a Harley frame, so most of the vibration came through the chassis."

He says the inspiration that sparked a revolution in handling and vibration came from the Harley-powered Morgan three-wheeler, which mounts the engine from the centre of the crank.

"Over 12 months, I put it together and with the help of some smart people, we sorted out the vibration problem and made it work. Now there is no torque effect, but it does have a lot of torque pulling through the gears. It still has some limited vibrations but nothing to worry too much about."

On VW-powered HS3 Bon-Trikes, the engine hangs off the chassis-mounted gearbox like an outboard motor. But on the HS6 trike, the short four-inch drive shaft from the 107-cubic-inch V-twin goes through an adaptor plate to the Beetle gearbox. The

adaptor is mounted to the frame, so the engine vibrates around the crank, reducing shudder through the chassis.

"I spent a lot of money on this to get it right," says Reiner. "I bought it when the company closed in 2002 and 12 years later, it's still running well."

The Bon-Trike is driven through a Beetle gearbox with four speeds and reverse. Instead of a gearshift in the middle of the tank where it looms ominously on most Bon-Trikes, the stubby shifter is located innocently down by the left leg.

It's an H-pattern transmission that you depress and move toward second to select a true-gear reverse, not an electronic alternative.

The American S&S engine comes as a surprise for a native German whose garage is stocked with mainly air-cooled German vehicles. There's a 1968 Beetle, a 1983 square-shaped Kombi T3, a 1989 BMW 525, a current BMW F 800GS and a 1982 BMW R 100.

"I always liked the S&S motor and I like the way [the Bon-Trike] looks and handles, plus I like riding something a bit unusual," explains Reiner who got into trikes "by accident" in 1995.

At the time, the Yamaha TT rider was a contractor for Australia Motorcycle Adventures selling dirtbike tours. He remembers first seeing the Bon-Trikes at the Big Boys Toy Show in Brisbane





and started talking to Karsten, a fellow German immigrant.

"I thought it was a shopping trolley," he says. "Karsten was a bit offended and suggested I try one. He left one here for me to ride and I couldn't believe how it handled; just like a go-kart. I became the Queensland distributor for Bon until it finished in 2002."

Reiner then goes into a long and emotional tale about the demise of the company and the legal wrangle over the Rewaco name that he says nearly killed the trike industry.

He went back to his camper trailer business but has kept the trike, which he takes out for occasional rides into the Gold Coast hinterland or wherever there are plenty of corners. "I like lots of corners," he says. "They don't lift a wheel, they squat on the opposite wheel."

They go like a go-kart. Push them too hard in a corner and they drift. You can easily do donuts."

He says he took his trike to Morgan Park Raceway in Warwick but the officials wouldn't let him on with the motorcycles. So he talked them into letting him on the track during the lunch break. "People were going away to have their lunch but they quickly came back to watch me doing opposite-lock power slides. We go through the corners much faster than the bikes. It was such a spectacle, the officials asked us to come back."

On a short trot through the southern suburbs of the Brisvegas metropolis, the trike behaves with impeccable manners. Even using the boundless torque at low revs, it doesn't shudder and shake, but pulls with a grainy rumble.

In the corners, it sits flat and rather than picking up the inside wheel, it just squats a little on the independent coil-over rear suspension. From the pillion perch, there is only a slight lurch and it doesn't feel like it wants to catapult me into the bushes.

"If you push it too hard, it does understeer," he says. The 17-inch front wheel is fitted with a fat-section rear motorcycle tyre. It has a high 70 per cent profile so as you turn, it provides a bit of camber on the road surface for improved lateral cornering grip.

He says he runs a low 18psi in the front to improve traction, and similar pressures in the rear unless he wants to get it to drift. Then he pumps up those wide rubber hoops for some sideways fun.

Reiner explains that most trikes have an 80 per cent rear brake bias. This one is fitted with two drum brakes in the rear, which are effective in impeding progress on the 480kg beast. The front has a disc brake but a little WD40 keeps the brake bias in check.

He confesses that he is ready to sell the trike he's had for the past dozen years, but says he warned off one potential buyer who wanted to ride it around Australia. "You don't buy a trike like this unless you are prepared to spin the spanners."

Almost prophetically, the trike then breaks down on the photo shoot. Reiner explains that the carby is gravity fed and can have some fuelling problems because this trike has a fuel pump. After cooling down and a bit off carby tickling, the S&S fires back into life, attracting the attention of passers-by. Reiner slips it into gear and eases back out into the traffic, all eyes on his oddly shaped rear end ... the trike's, not his! **C&T**