

Roll One for the Pit Boss

Lehman Trikes partners with Victory to produce the first OEM-backed three-wheeler

“Now that’s a cool trike.” This was the first reaction many people had to the prototype three-wheelers unveiled almost three years ago by Lehman Trikes and Victory Motorcycles. The crowds at Polaris’ 50th anniversary celebration and later at Sturgis soundly approved of the unique expression of three-dom.

What once was a what-if design exercise is now a fact. The pioneering trike company and the makers of the “new American motorcycle” have unleashed the Pit Boss. The Lehman-designed and Victory-powered trike hit dealership showrooms this spring at an MSRP of \$27,995.

The Pit Boss is the result of an agreement unique to the trike industry and a milestone for Lehman because it results in a three-wheeler that was jointly developed and is fully warranted by both a trike builder and an OEM.

It’s basically the first trike on the market that you can roll into a franchised OEM dealership and get warranty-supported service, says Ken Hines, Lehman’s VP of business development and customer support.

Up to now, Lehman has supplied kits that allow its dealers to convert bikes into trikes. The Pit Boss is a fully assembled machine that will go from the factory to the showroom to the consumer.

The Pit Boss offers a dramatic twist on the typical trike, both in terms of curb appeal and performance. It’s possible that the Pit Boss could change the traditional trike demographic, claims the company.

“We view this thing as a vehicle that’s going to appeal across the spectrum of motorcycle riders. The experienced rider, the entry rider, someone looking for fun and excitement,” Hines says. “We think this might be a redefinition of the trike market because it’s so cotton pickin’ cool.”

The Pit Boss will be available at about 25 Lehman dealers selected for

the launch. The company expects to add dealers as demand grows. Financing for consumers will be available through GE Money.

Lehman is not saying how many units will be produced annually but says that initial production will be limited.

Two-Year Effort

The Pit Boss is built on Victory’s Kingpin platform, using the motorcycle’s 100 cu. in. Freedom engine and six-speed True Overdrive transmission. Lehman designers incorporated the bike’s distinct lines into the trike’s boat-tail rear end, which the company says resembles a 1930s Auburn Speedster.

The two companies spent more than two years and a half-million simulated miles testing the Pit Boss, making it the most thoroughly researched and developed trike in Lehman’s history. Most of the testing was conducted at Polaris’ research and test facilities.

Lehman will assemble the trikes at its Spearfish, S.D., factory.

The Victory deal has no impact on Lehman’s agreement with Harley-Davidson that was announced in late 2006. That \$1 million deal has Lehman providing its expertise in developing a Harley-Davidson-branded trike built around one of The Motor Co.’s motorcycles.

“The difference between the two is we are a supplier supporting Harley-Davidson’s branded trike, and ... the Pit Boss is Lehman-branded and supported by Victory,” Hines says. Between the Pit Boss and the Harley-Davidson deal, Hines says the company plans to triple its production capacity within the next 12 months.

Lehman and Victory first came

together when the former produced two prototype trikes that appeared at the Polaris party. These were based on the Vegas and the Kingpin, and the relationship between the two companies evolved into the manufacturing partnership behind the Pit Boss.

Victory liked that Lehman was the market share leader with about 50 percent of the market and had a good reputation for quality, says Mark Blackwell, VP of Victory Motorcycles and International Operations for Polaris Industries. “One of the issues of a trike is high-speed stability, and they have this. That was very important to us,” notes Blackwell, who says that Victory eventually became comfortable with a design that met with its demands for quality and safety.

The trike is designed using Lehman’s “no-lean” design that minimizes flex in the swing arm and rear-end components to maximize stability and improve handling. The idea is to keep the center of gravity from being prone to roll and lean in corners.

Blackwell says that the Pit Boss will allow Victory to venture into the small-but-growing trike market, a product category made all the more tempting by the aging of the cruiser crowd. Many of these customers want to keep riding but want stability and more hauling capacity. It’s much like the growing touring market, he says.

The Pit Boss will also allow both companies to attract younger buyers into the trike market.

“As a result of that, we’ve agreed to begin providing Victory’s motorcycles to be turned into Lehman trikes powered by Victory,” Blackwell says.

— Dennis Johnson



Big Dog Puts Tornado Rally on Ice

Citing concerns from neighboring businesses, a smaller event space and a drain on internal resources, Big Dog Motorcycles has canceled its popular two-year-old Tornado Rally.

The custom OEM’s president, Nick Messer, says that while the June rally has been a financial loss since its inception, the company always has known that going in and budgeted for it. Instead it was the above confluence of factors that killed this year’s rally.

“There were several problems that led to canceling the event. One was the time and personnel it took to put it on,” Messer says. “We would spend a great deal of time getting the factory set up for all of the tours that came through that three-day weekend, which, of course, hurt our production numbers that week.”

There was also an issue about the impact the rally was having on neighboring business in downtown Wichita. About a dozen small businesses complained to the city that the event was

putting a hurt on them. Because of the complaints, the city scaled back Big Dog’s plans by agreeing to close off one city block — instead of two — but business owners were still upset. Messer says the company did not want to create problems for the businesses.

One of the major problems, Messer says, is that the rally went from 5,000 people the first year to 30,000 attendees last year. Given the smaller space allotted this year by the city, there was no room for growth, he notes.

The company had considered mov-

ing the rally to a satellite location but its factory always has been a large draw. Moving it off-site would have required shuttle buses to ferry rally-goers back and forth for tours.

For next year, Big Dog plans to hold a smaller-scale customer-appreciation party at its factory, where it can offer tours, barbecue, beer and bands. “What we will leave out are the vendors, monster trucks, food courts and other items that require a great deal of space,” Messer says.

— Dennis Johnson