

Donnie Smith Custom Cycles

A motorcycle legend has just moved into town – Donnie Smith and his crew have set up shop in the Springbrook business park.

The film “Easy Rider” from 1969 may have started a custom bike epidemic across the country, and it may have also launched decades of adventures and business for Donnie Smith. Smith is known as a legend in the industry, but he never would have guessed he would earn that title if you had asked him about his future in the 1970’s. Back then, he worked on cars with his friends, a fun pass time he never dreamed would turn in to more.

“My uncle asked us to customize his bike. We were shocked, ‘You want us to cut up a brand new bike?’” Smith says. “We cut his brand new bike up and got it to work.” Surprised with how great this first project turned out, a lengthened front-end bike ended up catching a lot of attention. Smith and his buddies decided to customize their own bikes shortly after. Soon, word spread around town and his uncle’s club members were waiting in line for their bikes to have custom lengthened front ends. In 1975, they customized 275 motorcycle frames.

Riding motorcycles brought joy to many veterans returning home from Vietnam, including Smith. “Guys just wanted to get out and have some fun. Watching them see their bike for the first time, they’re ecstatic and it makes me feel good to share my art.” After working on bikes for two years, Smith had an article written in a national magazine and the same year, a trip rolling through Sturgis officially put him on the map, nationwide. The business exploded. He teamed up with Arlen Ness and Dave Perewitz, and together the three of them earned the nickname, “Three Kings of Customs.” Along the way, the three also coined themselves “The Hamsters” as an inside joke, which led to a shirt design with a cartoon hamster. Everyone at a bike rally in Sturgis wanted to be a hamster after seeing the shirts, and now the group has 365 members around the world.

Along with building and customizing bikes for 18 years, Smith and his partner, Neil Ryan host an annual event called the Donnie Smith Bike Show – over 20,000 people attend to see 160+ bikes and meet with vendors to “talk shop.”

Smith has dedicated four decades of his life building bikes that match the character of the customer. The current team at Donnie Smith’s Custom Cycles work on motorcycles from the inside out, from engines to handlebars, gas tanks to small details like knobs... all the pieces of a puzzle come together in one bike. The average big custom job will cost \$45,000-\$120,000 and will take approximately six months from start to finish.

With 40 years of building bikes behind him, Smith says with all the new ideas in his head, he has yet to complete his favorite project. Loyal fans will have to stay tuned and follow Smith’s journey to see what’s next.

Quick Facts:

- » Address: 420 93rd Ave. NW
- » Smith works alongside three staff members. He is proud of his team for doing amazing work – they are meticulous with each task, start to finish.
- » People say Donny is known for having really nice hair.

