



DAVID-1 GOLIATH-0

Press day at any of the big shows can be a stressful ordeal. While the exhibitors are rushing in their latest models with the paint still drying, journalists are dashing from one scheduled press launch to the next in an area the size of a major airfield. Here, they squeeze among their peers to glimpse the sheets being removed with a flourish from bike after bike – in most cases, following a dull and extremely lengthy speech from the company's president. Of course, many of these models have been carefully “leaked” several weeks before, so it's like hearing

someone labour a joke for which you already know the punch line.

The turning point in this ritual was seeing a photographer balancing precariously on one of the bikes on show to photograph a newly unveiled model over the heads of his colleagues. Nobody had spotted that the bike he was standing on was identical to the one he was trying to photograph, at



"Imme 1200" concept bike from ISD students Nicolas Dubar & Yves Dufeutrelle



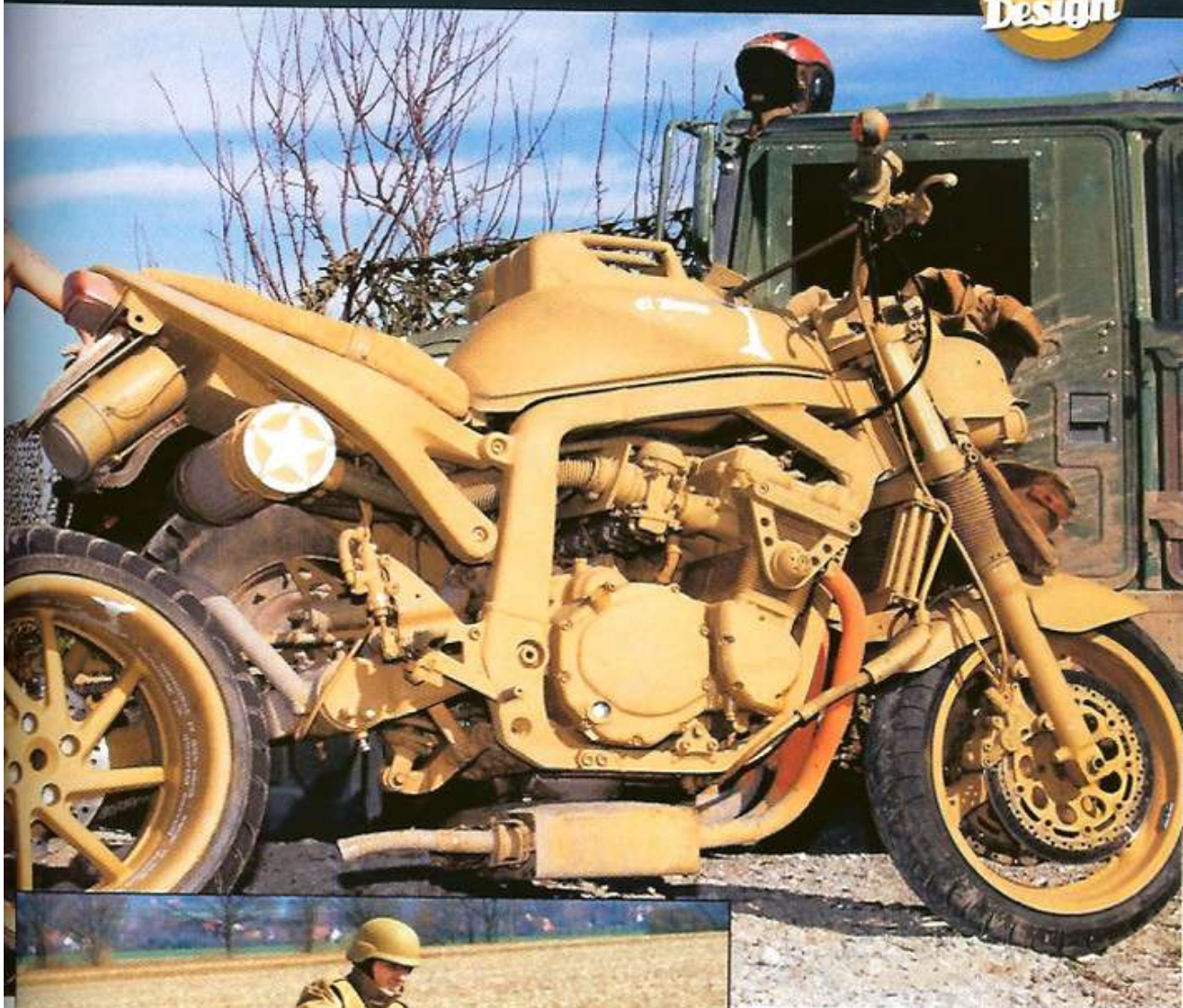
Peraves "MonoTracer" was a neat update of the Ecomobile



Hilarious "El Alamein" – the most inspired design at this year's Internot?

which point, the folly of the entire charade suddenly became evident. After that, I learned to always turn up an hour late. This way, I can photograph the bikes in quiet solitude while everyone else is at the next press launch on another stand. Okay, this requires foregoing the free champagne, but at least you get decent photos of the bikes, and the full attention of young models in short skirts. It's just a question of priorities.

At the Köln Internot this year, journalists were grumbling about the



staggered conference times, which saw some models released long after the press were already tapping out their reports on the plane home. As a result, a few late announcements, like the trio of new Benellis, got little coverage. At one of Köln's famous beer halls a mile or so away from the show, a rowdy bunch of inebriated designers were in a similar predicament, debating which bike deserved to be elected the "Best of Show" while some were still being announced.

A little insider knowledge helped fill

Bike Design



Cute little 125 Blata was well executed



Fussy detailing spoils the purity of Honda's revamped 125 Varadero



Hmmm – interesting mirror stalks



Showing promise – “White’n’Pink” scooter from 17-year-old Desiree Schwan

in the gaps, but even so, the possibilities seemed rather underwhelming. Many of the new releases were just rehased versions of old stuff, with good strong original designs being polluted by over-complex styling for styling's sake. The face-lifted Honda 125 Varadero and Kawasaki's reworked Z1000 are just two examples. The latest race-reps, in the guise of Suzuki's GSX-R and Yamaha's R1, were all very predictable, as were the customs, while the real newcomers were most notable for what they didn't do. The Kawasaki 1400 GTR managed, fortunately, to avoid being quite as bizarre as its sporting stablemate, the ZZR, although the Versys loses it again completely, especially around that headlight. And BMW's G-series proves a point I've been making for years – namely that if the Bavarians just toned down the weird stuff a bit, they might achieve wider acceptance, and sell a few more units to boot. The new G's are tight and trendy, even if they do look more like 125s than 650s.

None of these offerings managed to raise a single vote at the Designers' Night though, perhaps because I've ruled that nobody is allowed to vote for their own product. So while our Japanese guests sat on their hands and bit their tongues, not one new bike was proposed as being outstanding. Which is exactly how it should be – we're voting for a great bike design, not the least-worst. But as my colleague Roland Brown observed, standards are now set so high, it's getting harder and harder for manufacturers to impress us with their latest temptations.

Although the Internet passed without a clear winner, there were a few real gems hidden away in the smaller stands if you opened your perspective a little. If the big boys failed to deliver this year, smaller enterprises, and even a few individual builders, showed that their innovative spirit was far from lacking, and some of the results deserve to be acknowledged in their own right.

First, on the Peraves stand, it was refreshing to see a serious design solution coming from a low-volume producer in the guise of the “MonoTracer”. More aircraft than motorcycle, the new styling maintains a clear link to the original Ecomobile, while elevating it through a clean and fresh image. Surprisingly, the bike's designer, Tobias Wuelser, only joined

the company as a student last year.

On the subject of colleges, Nicolas Dubar and Yves Dufeutrelle from the ISD in Valenciennes, France, ought to be congratulated for the “Imme 1200” concept bike, which was drawing a fair amount of attention at the IVM's design competition exhibition. Producing a full-size model is no mean feat for a couple of students, even if the complexity of certain aspects of their design is arguably at odds with the essential simplicity of the archetypal Imme.

Likewise, the “White'n'Pink” MBK, built by 17-year-old Desiree Schwan, caught the attention of some professional designers. The scooter was part of “Customising”, an exhibition of custom and modified bikes organised by Sabine Welte of PIX&WORDS, which contained some amazing examples of two-wheeled art. I lost count of the time I spent drooling over the Egli Vincent, but further on, there was one bike that really stopped me in my tracks – the “El Alamein”.

Designed and built by Mike Schween from MS Bikes of Unna, Germany, the “El Alamein” is a hilarious mixture of a Suzuki GSX-R, a Buell and a Sherman tank. Apart from the obvious comic value, the bike actually looks pretty aggressive too – enough to win the Street-fighter category of the European Custom Bikes Championship last autumn. A lot of work had clearly gone into that machine, along with some truly inspired thinking – the jerry can welded into the gas tank was pure genius! So Mike gets my personal vote for “Best of Show”, and for firmly dispelling the myth that Germans don't have a sense of humour. ■