

Hog Heaven

by Danielle Machotka

I've been to Hog Heaven--it's a chrome-plated, leather-studded, time-to-hit-the-open-road kind of place. It's also a museum. Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson, in Santa Cruz, California, is a museum and dealership designed for hard-core Harley fanatics as well as those of us who usually travel on four wheels. The crowd is decidedly not Hell's Angels, the displays are both nostalgic and educational, and even the biggest skeptic will be drawn in by the slice of American culture represented in the bikes, clothes and Harley memorabilia.

Owner Mike James, who himself logs 8,000-10,000 miles a year on his Harleys, wanted to create a "destination dealership," one that would attract visitors from around the country. He spent three years collecting the advertisements, photos, shop signs, old parts, road maps and other articles from Harley-Davidson's 95-year history. Now displayed next to meticulously-restored vintage Hogs, these items take the viewer on a two-wheeled trip through 20th-century American recreation.

Each of the vintage bikes is accompanied by descriptions that will satisfy the technically-oriented while educating the novice. In addition, the related memorabilia sets the tone for life in the States at that time. A 1929 JDH "Two-Cam Twin" display includes a magazine ad for the motorcycle, spare parts, and goggles worn by riders at the time. The 1967 FLH sits in front of a photo of a "hip and fun-loving" couple, he in khakis and loafers, she in tapered pants and Keds, riding their Harley past a Mobil station and Holiday Inn.

Both vintage and new motorcycles are offered for sale. Putting together the perfect bike would be impossible for the indecisive. Fortunately there's help in the large collection of Hogs on display, creating a cornucopia of options for how the extensive accessories can be used and what sort of look might fit an individual's personality.

For the sport riding enthusiast, one corner of the shop is devoted to Buell bikes, with a Harley engine and sport bike body. A colorful motorcycle painted by Peter Max is the centerpiece here. Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson also customizes bikes and repairs both Harleys and Buells.

Even those who only want a small memento of Harley culture will find themselves lingering over the options. Leather jackets, jeans, skullcaps, gloves, boots and neckwarmers compete with pins, glasses, model Harleys, playing cards, key chains and a huge 95th-anniversary beer stein. The staff, divided into either bike sales or merchandising, is friendly and knowledgeable. With clothes and toys for babies and children, this might be the one museum that the whole family can truly enjoy.

"So much of what Harley-Davidson is about is lifestyle--riding with friends, seeing friends, hanging out," James says when describing the environment he is trying to foster. Judging by the Harley-Davidson fans that have come from as far away as North Carolina and even Germany already, Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson is providing a little slice of Harley heaven. The museum/dealership, located at 1148 Soquel Avenue, is open Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 10-6, Wednesday 10-8, Saturday 9-5 and Sunday 10-5. For more information, call (408) 421-9600.