

Scale model motorcycles amazing in realism

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

For an alternative to custom motorcycles with kicked out front ends, acres of chrome and murals of skulls with snakes crawling out of the eye sockets, think inside the box.

The box containing plastic scale model motorcycles, that is. Like full-size customs, they can consume hundreds of hours of labour, the paintwork and attention to detail is incredible, and the builders are artists of the highest order.

Evan Jones from Guelph is one of the true craftsmen of the genre. Some of the model cars and motorcycles he's built have won awards both here in the Frozen North and in the United States.

Like many of us, Jones started building models in his teens until life got in the way and he didn't build another for almost 20 years. "I was really into cars when I was younger," he says. "But I couldn't afford a real one, so I started building models."

Most popular off-the-shelf motorcycle kits are in 1:12 scale – the completed model is 1/12 the size of the original and, depending on the manufacturer, start at around \$40 and go up from there.

For example, the just-released Tamiya Honda RC166 250cc six-cylinder GP racer from 1966 retails for around \$90 but, for the complete experience, you can spend up to \$150 on special detail supplements including alloy rims complete with wire spokes, working front forks, a dry clutch and a drive chain that's assembled link by tiny link, and roller by infinitesimal roller.

Jones says today's kits are so well engineered that the parts go together easily and there are no special skills involved. Follow the instructions, take your time and you can put together a pretty good representation of the original bike.

In my teens, I thought I was adding amazing detail when I'd pull black sewing thread through wax to stiffen it and use it as spark plug wires. Now you can buy bolts (with the appropriate nuts) that measure less than half a millimeter, 1/12 scale rivets and replica plug wires and hoses for just about any model car engine.

Evan recently completed a model with significant history – a replica of Canadian legend Yvon DuHamel's Kawasaki H1R.

The tank was built from pieces of styrene, glued together in a rough block, then filed and sanded into the proper shape. Some of Evan's replica race bikes even have 1/12 scale lockwire and zip ties. Jones figures he's got well over 200 hours into the H1R.

Getting started doesn't require a huge commitment but you'll need sprue cutters (small sidecutters) for removing parts from the tree, sanding sticks, various grades of fine sandpapers, tweezers, and for those of us (ahem) not in our 20s, a magnifying glass helps with those tiny parts. Jones recommends brush glue rather than the tube because it flows into tiny crevices and imperfections better.

Jones has a lot of information plus many of the kits he's completed on his website – eajonesgue.com/scalemodels/index.html, but he says to see some of the real hard-core modelers' art, go to modelergp.com.

Most of these amazing projects are completely scratch built, and 100 per cent accurate to the original motorcycle.

A far cry from my early efforts with blobs of glue on the joints, no paint and smudgy fingerprints everywhere.

Finally, please note that I don't play with toys. I'm a hobbyist.