

A Day with Erik Buell

By Dennis Martin

When we found out Erik Buell was visiting Cycle Connection Harley-Davidson in Joplin, Missouri, I knew I wanted to be there. I would like to thank Nancy and Scott Hutson, for allowing me some time to interview Erik during their all day "Escape" event. Erik was there to meet with new Buell owners and share the company's vision. Another name of the event could have been simply "Buell Days". The day was filled with demo rides on all the Buell models, a helmet seminar, two stunt shows in the parking lot by "ILL CONDUCT", and a fashion show featuring Buell and Icon products.

During the exclusive VIP "Meet-and-Greet", I could tell right away that Erik is just a regular guy like any of us. He is the most humble, non-egotistical person you would ever meet. Erik shared his design vision of "Double Duty Parts," which is a result of Buell motorcycles having 50% fewer parts than other bikes. The Buell Corporation in

East Troy, Wisconsin, employs about 200 passionate people that hand build each bike. When Erik told the group that half of the bikes they build are exported overseas, he received a huge applause. Before Erik left, Scott Hutson had a surprise for Erik. Scott hired a local artist, AJ Wood, to create a painting of Erik remembering his racing days. Erik actually had a tear in his eye.

Before Erik founded the Buell Motorcycle Company, he raced nationwide within AMA Pro Racing and was also a chassis engineer for the Harley-Davidson Corporation. His past only fueled his passion for motorcycles and he set out to create his own AMA Formula One motorcycle. After that, his passion led him to build his first sport bike. In 1994, Harley-Davidson invested in the Buell Motorcycle Company and the rest is history, or is it?

Erik is still a hands-on guy and is constantly looking to design and build unique bikes.

The 2009 Buell 1125CR is one of his most innovative bikes to date. The power plant is an 1125cc liquid-cooled V-Twin with 146 hp @ 9800 rpm and 82 ft. lbs. of torque @ 8000 rpm. The Ram Air scoops on each side are designed to pressurize the air box and increase performance at speeds over 80 mph. To efficiently get the horsepower to the rear wheel, Buell uses a system known as "Immediate Throttle Response Belt Drive". There is constant tension on the belt to eliminate any slack in the system while shifting up or down. For more information on this model and others, visit Buell.com.



The Interview

Erik Buell: The Person

Dennis: Are you married?

Erik: Yes, Tish.

D: Children?

E: Six, the youngest 16 and oldest 25.

D: Are they getting into the business?

E: Don't know yet. The oldest daughter is going to college for Micro-Biology but hates working in the lab. She loves solving problems with DNA splicing but she can't stand being in a white room. When she is at the (Buell) plant she says she is thinking about becoming a design engineer... maybe.

D: How did your parents feel about you getting into the motorcycle business?

E: They weren't into motorcycles but they were never opposed to me doing it. My mom and dad never came to a race, they let me do it but they were never engaged in it.

Erik Buell: On Riding

D: What are your favorite riding locations and/or destinations?

E: It is impossible to pick one specific location; there are just too many great rides. The best rides I ever find are the ones where there is a section of twisty roads and no one there. It doesn't matter if it is in North Carolina, Southern California, or even Spain. When I find a location it is just wonderful. My least favorite is the interstate.

D: What Buell is your favorite bike?

E: I really don't have a favorite. I ride the Ulysses the most just because it has bags and it is more practical for me.

D: Any other motorcycle?

E: Well since we didn't come out with a dirt bike, my favorite all time street bike was my Velocette. It was a goofy bike and a pain in the butt to keep running, but it was a wonderful bike to ride.

D: Do you have any riding tips for our readers?

E: Ride often and do the "track days" to let it out of your system. Ride often so that you always have 20% spare change. Don't ride over your head.

Erik Buell: The Business

D: When did you realize you changed the motorcycle industry?

E: Well, I'm still working on it. I don't know that I have. Maybe when the street fighter thing took off that we really launched with the gold S-1. We won an award for best standard with Cycle World. There was no street fighter category and they didn't know what it was.

D: What sets the Buell Corporation above the competition?

E: I don't know that we are above, we are just different. We are unique in such that the Buell is truly the only American sport bike. We do things differently in what I consider a very American way. Lots of invention and new ways of looking at things. Pioneering ways to do things which is what I think is the American spirit and it shows in our engineering. Our biggest accomplishment is having a little team of people building a bike that is at a very affordable price over what mass produced bikes are. Everyone does an amazing job.

D: Are there any projects that you are working on that you can share with us?

E: (a very quick) No. (then silence)

D: How did you come up with the idea that people would really dig your machines so much and why did you think they would?

E: Well you're never really sure what will happen. We did some radical style design work. When the S-1 first came out they were considered insane... crazy... weird. Why is the seat so tiny? Why is this fender back here? People just couldn't take their eyes off it. We knew it was going to be a "love-hate" thing but that's OK. We would rather do that than do what everyone else was doing. (In reference to the 1125 CR) I wanted an in your face hot rod look, but on a street bike. Everything has a fairing so we styled ours around a scorpion with the claws, small head and a pointy tail. It is functional art. It is a combination of a scorpion and a Harrier Jet with the scoops.

D: What award do you cherish the most?

E: Well as of now, the painting that the dealership had created for me. That is unbelievably special to me.

D: Some people have you and John Britten in the same circles of conversation. How do you feel about that?

E: It's an honor. I talked with him a number of times on the phone about working together before he started getting sick. He was a fun and innovative guy coming from a different perspective. We were both very different from what the industry is doing and yet we were different from each another. We both wanted to build the best one-off bikes. We both had a lot of admiration for the way we were challenging the way things were normally done but in different ways.

