

# OLD 'N FAST

## A 1976 BMW R75/6 with an Attitude

Story and photos by Neale Bayly

**W**hat motorcycle seeds do we plant with our actions? What dreams do we inspire with our deeds? And how long might they lie dormant before growing from an idea into a reality?

Sometimes these actions are obvious, but sometimes they're not. In the case of Bill Kniegge, it took the chance finding of an old family photo lost decades earlier to realize why he built "Old 'N Fast," his BMW R75/6.

### Never a dull moment

It's always an adventure with Bill, and as I chase him along the roads that connect our homes, today is no exception. A veteran of the motorcycle industry with stints at Husqvarna, Bell and ATK, he's also the man behind Blue Strada Tours ([www.bluestradatours.com](http://www.bluestradatours.com)) in North Carolina.

Bill is riding my Triumph Streetfighter, a modified 1997 T595 that looks like it's breaking the law standing still. I'm in the saddle of his highly modified 1976 BMW R75/6. Twisting the somewhat heavy throttle to keep him in sight, I'm impressed and surprised in equal doses how well the old Beemer handles the twisting road — and the confidence it inspires.

Tipping into the turns with consummate ease, the BMW holds its line with aplomb and is perfectly behaved as I put the power down on the exit. The Boxer twin puts out some serious grunt as I work to keep up with Bill, and I quickly realize there's a lot more to this old BMW than meets the eye. Sitting down over coffee later in the afternoon, I feel as though I'm part detective, part audience, as Bill tells me one of the most fascinating motorcycle tales I've heard in a long while.

### Way back when

The year is 1956, and 11-year-old Bill Kniegge is living in Davenport, Iowa, when Uncle Wolfgang Kniegge comes to visit from Bremen, Germany. Having loaded up his early 1950s BMW and shipped it to New York, Uncle Wolfgang is en route to California when he stops by the Kniegge family home. Only planning to stay for a day, a technical problem forces him to extend his visit for a week, and young Kniegge ends up taking his first motorcycle ride. Later, he sits astride the black BMW with the flat bars and small leather panniers, posing for a photograph, but it will be 50 years before he realizes the significance of Uncle Wolfgang's visit.

Fast forward to 1999. Bill walks into Irv Seaver's BMW in Anaheim, Calif., sees a hot rod BMW proj-

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ect bike under construction, then decides on the spot he has to have it. Following years of blasting to Laguna on a tricked-out Norton, he finds the idea of a fast Bavarian corner carver is very appealing. Money changes hands, and the bike comes home. Back in the workshop contemplating his next move, Bill recalls seeing an old black BMW police gas tank and an assortment of black chrome parts for a BMW /5 back in the 1970s. He remembers them sitting in a case at his local dealer for at

least 10 years, and though it's a long shot, he decides to see if they're still around. At this time he has no idea why he wants to paint the bike black.

A couple of phone calls later, he discovers to his surprise the parts are still stored away at the dealership, collecting dust. A deal is struck and the tank heads off to an old friend of Bill's, Dan Gurney, to be painted and pinstriped. The black chrome parts head into the workshop. The stock BMW rims

## ESSENTIALS 1976 BMW R75/6 Custom

**Engine:** 980cc OHV air-cooled horizontally opposed twin, 94mm x 70.6mm bore and stroke, 9:1 compression ratio, 70hp @ 7,250rpm (est.)

**Top Speed:** 125mph (est.)

**Carburetion:** Two 32mm Bing CV

**Transmission:** 5-speed, shaft final drive

**Electrics:** 12v, coil and breaker points

**Frame/wheelbase:** Steel tube duplex cradle/57.7in (1,465mm)

**Suspension:** R90S Telescopic forks shortened 1.5in front, twin Works Performance shock absorbers with adjustable preload rear

**Brakes:** Twin 7.9in (200mm) discs front, 7.9in (200mm) single-leading-shoe drum rear

**Tires:** 3.25 x 19in front, 4 x 18in rear

**Weight (wet):** 462lb (210kg) (stock)

**Seat height:** 32in (810mm) (stock)

**Fuel capacity/MPG:** 4gal (18ltr) stock/50mpg (est.)



are powder coated black to match the tank and laced with stainless spokes. After a trip to the powder coater, Bill is soon bolting on a black swing arm, both triple clamps and the handlebar mounts. The fenders, headlight and side panels are painted with black lacquer, and the headlight rim and gas cap get treated with black chrome.

### More power

The bike's previous owner was a BMW factory mechanic, so I was eager to hear what had been done to the engine. Blessed with a smooth, linear flow of power giving usable oomph down low but with a strong mid-range rush up to the top end, it's obvious a lot of thought went into the build.

Nikasil cylinders and pistons from a mid-1980s 980cc BMW R100 give a significant boost in capacity. Compression ratio is stock for reliability, and the original 750cc heads are retained, but with new, hardened valve seats to handle unleaded gas. A high-performance camshaft holds the stock valves open a little

longer to allow more fuel and air in and the burned gases out, fed by two 32mm Bing carburetors. These particular carbs were chosen to create more low-speed swirl and to further boost the bike's mid-range torque.

In an interesting move, a taller rear end is used to lower engine rpm at highway speeds. The bike currently wears a 2.92:1 final drive (compared to the stock 3.11:1), giving the bike a top speed around 125mph. "Running triple-digit speeds around modern bikes is always fun," Bill tells me, "especially when you are on a distinctly vintage looking motorcycle." At a recent BMW rally he had people pulling over to find out what on earth he was riding.

### Well-suspended

To keep the extra horsepower under control, modified R90S forks control the front end. Shortened 1.5 inches to sharpen the steering and lower the ride height, the stronger forks complement the aftermarket Works Performance shocks in the



Gentleman's express: Bill Kniegge's revamped Boxer is a serious cruiser. Cylinders and pistons from an R100 boost the original R75's displacement from 745cc to 980cc, while modified R90S front forks with dual disc brakes maintain control.



Bill Kniegge, then 11, on his uncle's BMW in 1956. Although he wouldn't realize it until much later, that one brief impression inspired Bill to build Old 'N Fast.



rear to give the bike its excellent handling manners. Looking at the bike, the rear shocks appear as if they might be a tad longer than the originals, and Bill confirms my suspicions. They are certainly sprung better, and this definitely contributes to how quickly Old 'N Fast can turn into corners. The good news is, this doesn't make the front end feel vague or twitchy.

It only takes a small bit of mental re-programming to lighten up the pressure on the bars when working to keep things on the perfect line. Drilled discs from an R90S are also used, and they give excellent stopping power, aided nicely by the rear drum brake.

#### Fit and finish

Blasting along our local roads, the bike is extremely comfortable and easy to ride. A BMW original-equipment police solo saddle finished in leather is one reason, and the slightly more upright BMW K75-sourced black chrome bars are the other. The combination of the slightly taller seat and wider bars make it fit just right. Turn signals and switchgear are more "modern" Eighties vintage, and the mirrors are from an early 1990s K75S.

One of the neatest parts of Bill's BMW are the slim black panniers. They were custom made by Moto Sport Panniers to replicate the style and size of the leather units used by the German police bikes of the mid-1970s, but Bill had absolutely no idea why he wanted them to be so slim. In fact, he still didn't make the connection years later in 2006, when a photo of him on Uncle Wolfgang's bike showed up, and it was

Like his uncle with his BMW, Bill built his Beemer to ride — and ride it he does.

## Resources

[www.ibmwr.org](http://www.ibmwr.org)  
[www.irvseaverbmw.com](http://www.irvseaverbmw.com)

PARTS  
[www.boxerworks.com](http://www.boxerworks.com)

actually his sister who realized the similarity of the bikes. Here was a nearly identical copy of the 1950s BMW Bill had taken his first ride on, and he didn't build it until more than 40 years later.

#### Built to ride

With more than 30,000 miles since the build, Old 'N Fast gets used regularly. Rallies, rides into the mountains and day trips tearing around with his crazy buddies are all good excuses to get the BMW on the road.

It's one of the classiest, most understated, well-thought-out classic bikes I've ever had the pleasure of riding. Not to mention the fact that it's owned by the perfect gentleman.

Stopping to chat before we say goodbye, there is one more story I need to know before we part: "What's the deal with the license plate?" This elicits a big laugh from Bill as he proceeds to tell me the story.

Before there were personalized license plates in California, having a "black plate" car designated which era a particular vehicle came from.

With this in mind, Bill made his own black plate for Old 'N Fast. Starting with blue letters on a white background, he painted the whole plate gloss black and a pinstriper in Santa Ana added the special yellow used on California plates. It's not an easy job, apparently, but the finished product looks factory, and to this day Bill has never been questioned about it by the law.

With the speeds this bike is capable of reaching, I'm sure the good officers are usually discussing something else when they have occasion to stop and chat. **MC**

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