
T-Bird shop in Paris, where bikers buy their Christmas gifts

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Those on the Parisian biker scene go to one place for authentic leather jackets, boots and helmets: Stéphane Saladin's T-Bird shop on Rue Mayet. Classic Driver paid a visit...





When you arrive at T-Bird's, owner Stéphane will scan you from head to toe. Don't mind him... they're just some old reflexes carried over from a previous career. He might appear a bit bear-like at first but, once you're in, he'll happily listen to what you want, explain the philosophy of his shop, and talk about his passion for 40s and 50s bikes and the associated attire.

When did your passion for motorcycles start?

When I was a teenager, at about 14 years old. I wanted to have a moped, so I asked my parents for one, but my father didn't want me to have something common like a Peugeot 103 SP. He wanted to see his son riding something that already looked like a real motorcycle. So, my first ride was a Suzuki ER21, with gears. That's the first ever thing I tuned, especially the carb and exhaust.

So then you bought your first 'real' motorcycle?

Yes, a Yamaha 250 TDR. A very efficient ride, actually.

What were you doing with your life at this time?

I was studying electromechanics. That really got me into the culture of mechanical improvement and modification.

So, did your first job have a link to these studies?

Yes. A friend of my parents was a police officer and, to combine work and pleasure, I wanted to become a motorcycle cop. But it wasn't possible as a first job, so I was recruited as an electromechanic. But after a few days, they proposed teaching me traditional mechanics, and I accepted. I completed my traineeship at BMW, and worked then as a mechanic at the main motorcycle division in Paris, on the Ile de la Cité, a few metres away from Notre-Dame.



But you wanted to become a motorcycle cop?

Yes! That was my aim, so I took the exam and passed it.

And you were on the road until you left the police?

No, after a few years I took another exam and I became responsible for a garage. Well, I had only one mechanic, but he had 20 years of experience. I rapidly realised this guy would change many things for me; he was my mentor. In my opinion, he had the right vision: to overstep what has already been done, to improve everything. He was very picky.

And how did this relationship with him influence your vision?

From this time onwards, I started to build my own motorcycles (chopper, custom Triumph, etc.), so that I could really live my passion.

And what brought you to the idea of your shop?

Well, by the end, I had been a police officer for 20 years. I needed to achieve something else, for myself. And I've always had a passion for the uniform, and the perfection of the outfit. The first motorcyclists' clothes were adapted from aircraft pilots' clothes and, during WWII, the first technical motorcyclists' clothes were developed. I love this stuff, and I love precious material, like leather, metal and wood. In fact, this shop was just the logical evolution of my life, with all the experiences I had.

So how did you create it?

I had a very precise idea of what I wanted. During the 3 months after I had retired from the police, I thought about my project, looked for some unusual furniture, built everything that I knew I couldn't find and created a patina on some objects, so that the shop represented me. In the shop, every object has its own history. I meant this shop as a homage to the people I met during the past years: my mentor, my friends in the police, the people I met during missions, etc. And today, I'm combining work and passion, once again.





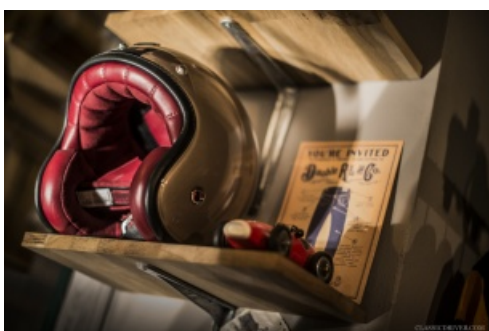
What is the most important piece of a rider's outfit?

Definitely the leather jacket. It's the identity of the guy. The breast is very visible. And I love the leather: this material is alive!

In the shop, you have a special jacket, right?

Yes, the T-Bird 68 Bonneville leather jacket. When I was young, I wore Vanson Leather trousers on my bikes. And one day they called me, to propose a partnership, as they were looking for exclusive shops to do some limited edition pieces. I told them what I had in mind, they sent me pictures of every step of the project and of the production, and six months after their call I received the first jackets, completely hand-made. Around 50% of the limited edition was sold in the very first days.

I also do my own sweaters, directly inspired by the Racing Club sweaters worn for land-speed records in the 40s and 50s, with a high attention to detail so that's it's really period correct and very comfortable to wear on a motorcycle.



Why T-Bird 68?

68 is easy: it's the year of my birth.

Then, I wanted to find a common denominator between cars, motorcycles and planes. It took a long time to find the right name, but it became obvious: the Triumph Thunderbird, the Ford T-Bird, and the Lockheed T33 Thunderbird.



Which motorcycles do you have now ?

I have a modern Triumph Bonneville, a 1956 Triumph Speed Twin, a Kawasaki W650 that I customised and which is parked inside my flat, the Terrot which is in the shop and, more recently, I bought a real beast: a 1942 Harley-Davidson 750 Flathead, modified in period for the flat track. That's a crazy machine and that's why I bought it.

And what is your dream motorcycle?

A Vincent, what else...

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