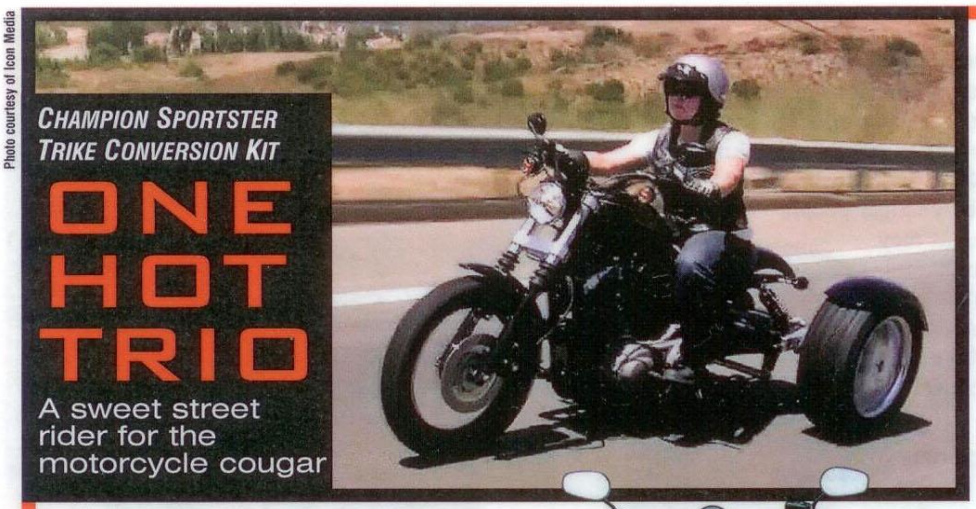
Photo courtesy of Icon Media



CHAMPION SPORTSTER TRIKE CONVERSION KIT

ONE HOT TRIO

A sweet street rider for the motorcycle cougar

by Molly "Triker Chick" Kight

GARDEN GROVE, CALIF.—When I got the chance to test ride the new Champion Sportster XL1200 Trike, I felt a moment of sweet nostalgia. My first Harley was a 2000 Sportster XL883, way before my triking days. New bikers often purchase the Sporty model because of the price, the racy look and because it is a smaller bike. Balancing a Sportster can become an issue for some people due to the heavy weight in the front. With the Champion trike kit, instead of being discouraged, one could opt to convert the bike and still ride in style, keeping in the spirit of Champion's motto, "We keep your dreams alive!" I jumped at the chance to ride the Champion Sportster to revisit the feel of a Sporty with the additional comfort of three wheels.

Rear view, showing the solid axle of the conversion kit

At Champion Trikes, I was greeted by Jim Pinto, the general manager and vice president. Jim led me over to the converted Sportster, which was in Nightster dress, black and bobbed. He explained the features Champion had installed to make this trike a one-of-a-kind motorcycle. The primary element, of course, is the Champion-designed "Easy Install" rear end that turns one rear wheel into two. The suspension allows the solid axle 3" of wheel travel. Completing the transformation were wide, high performance aluminum rear rims and tires with disc braking system, powder coated structural components, OEM tail and signal lights that preserve the classic Sportster styling and fiberglass fenders. The optional EZ-Steer, which adjusts the rake of the front end, was also installed.

When it's all put together, the trike has an overall width of 55", a length of 91", a wheel base (with EZ-Steer) of 67" (approximately 7" longer than stock) and 16" chrome wheels. The Sportster conversion kit is available for 2004-and-newer 883 and 1200 models. While many current trikes offer some kind of reverse gear, this one was agile and light enough to move manually, just pushing with my feet to back it out.

I am 5 feet tall, which is one of the reasons I am a fan of trikes. I was able to put both of my feet flat on the ground. Though unnecessary, it was an agreeable attribute. There is no trunk or passenger seat on the bike I tested, giving it a more bare-bones "bad biker" look from the rear with its wide tires and sweet fiberglass fenders. There were no fancy-shmancy whistles and bells on the test trike; it was sleek and simple.

The converted XL 1200N Nightster

Champion listens to its customers' ideas and suggestions, leading to new and exciting innovations in trike building. I spoke to Craig Franz of Westminster Harley-Davidson, the first dealer authorized to receive these kits, about the potential popularity of the Sporty trike. Franz felt the main demographic will be younger people who are not as much into touring as they are into street riding. At 40, I don't think of myself as being old, but I can't help but think of myself as kind of a motorcycle "cougar." This bike was athletic, youthful and edgy; just the way I like 'em.

The rear suspension allows 3 inches of wheel travel

I started her up, goose bumps running up and down my arms as I revved the motor and felt the anticipation of the ride to the biker-famous Cook's Corner. A third wheel? Fughettaboutit. If it looks like a Sportster, sounds like a Sportster and feels like a Sportster; then darn it, it is a Sportster!

I rode the trike around the Champion parking lot a few times to get used to the feel. It felt light on its wheels and handled smoothly, even over various speed bumps and drainage ditches. Acclimated to the trike, I putted over to Westminster Harley-Davidson to meet up with a few other trikes and hit the road.

Photo courtesy of Icon Media

The author, at 5 feet tall, can comfortably place her feet on the ground from the trike's saddle

As we pulled onto the street, it was as if I was about to take off on the Iditarod, 50 dogs in front of me anxiously straining to move forward. It was immediately responsive when I put on the throttle and downshifted nicely, with a throaty rumble. Every sip of gas gave way to a roar, then a purr, reminding me why it was so difficult to part with my Sporty years ago.

The group headed out to Santiago Canyon Road, a glorious sunny and breezy day. As we took the sweeping roads up the canyon, I almost forgot I was on a trike, comically trying to lean into a few of the turns. There were many "Looky-Loos" along the way; people pulling up alongside of me giving the thumbs-up or nodding approvingly.

At Cook's Corner, there were only a handful of bikers enjoying lunch in the shade. As we dined and consumed cold drinks, curious bikers circled the trikes, trying to figure out if they were indeed cool or just "different." Impressed, a few guys pulled out cameras and snapped some pictures of my wicked machine.

The ride home was just as refreshing. On the freeway for the last leg of the trip back to Westminster Harley-Davidson she handled well, but I missed the protection of a windshield, which is a purchase option, of course.

The overall feel is one of rebellious fun. This trike is a testimony to the latest advancements in trike design—easy to handle, aesthet- ically pleasing and affordable. Champion has made this trike for the person who wants to cruise "lookin' good," but also seeks comfort and stability. You can find more information about the Champion Sportster trike kit and their other creations at www.championsidecars.com or give them a call at 800.875.0949.