

## ***Steve Stillwell***

Working for Tom McMullen as an editor of Street Chopper magazine was one of the highlights of my journalism career. Imagine if you will, a young man with a love of motorcycles getting the opportunity to leave the frozen roads of New Jersey for the chance to live in California and get paid to ride and write about choppers? I have previously written about how this came about by me visiting AEE Choppers and asking a small man about what happened to my subscription to Street Chopper. My visit ended with Tom offering me a job if I could prove I could write. I surprised him by showing up the next morning with a typed article about handlebars, of all things.

In life, timing is everything and Tom had ventured from fast hot rods to the thrill of motorcycles. A serious motorcycle wreck had left him in a body cast, and he used his one free arm to braze sissy bars together. Tom ran an ad in Cycle Guide for his bars, and he quickly discovered the appetite chopper builders not only had for chopper parts, but for \$1 catalogs as well, with his being a couple of pieces of paper stapled together. Tom could fall face first into a pile of s&!# and come out with money in his pockets.

I had heard of Daytona Bike Week when I lived on the East Coast, but I never imagined I would have to move to California to get the opportunity to attend my first Daytona. I was told I would be driving with the editorial boss, Jim Clark, in the company [van](#). Tom insisted all photography be done with medium format cameras; 2-1/4 x 2-1/4 film switching from color to black and white. I only had one borrowed, twin lens, top view, Yashika D to get the job done, but I quickly learned to use it well.

I packed underwear, a pair of jeans, socks, and half a dozen T-shirts along with bologna, cheese, and bread - for a cross-country trip! Tom and a few friends would be riding Harley choppers with metal flake paint, wing tanks, buckhorn bars on narrow, long Springers, which were combination AEE R&D bikes and Street Chopper cover scooters. So I remember leaning out the van window at freeway speeds capturing this chopper ride to Daytona, but we were heading north, and the last time I checked, Daytona was east. I've also stood out in the sun in the middle of a two-lane road in Bakersfield, on top of the van in Fresno, and even shot low angles lying on my stomach as Tom cruised by.

I kept looking at Jim, who was quickly becoming a lifelong best friend, and I would ask about this trip to Daytona. He left me in suspense. We headed back to Southern California, just miles from my wife and apartment when we stopped and loaded the bikes into the back of the van. Jim looked at me and said, "Now are you ready to go to Bike Week?" Jim drove 23 hours without stopping and I took over for an hour staring straight into the morning sun, with a gas tank on empty. I would take this drive 14 more times as well as once aboard a Harley Lowrider. Bob Clark and Robert K. Smith were my usual companions, which made us friends for life.