



THE BLUE EYES FLASHING inside the nondescript lull face Shoei could belong to almost anyone. Except they belong to "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno.

But Leno's eyes don't have your attention at the moment. Rather, your focus is on the big black beast between his legs, the Motorsport Turbine Technologies Y2K a carbon-fiber-bodied, turbine engined monstrosity geared to go 266 mph.

Leno owns the first "production" example-serial number 002-of this unique species. The long, slab-sided machine is the handiwork of Louisiana entrepreneur Ted McIntyre. In simple terms, McIntyre slots an ex-Bell Jet Ranger helicopter Allison Rolls Royce gas turbine into a home-built aluminum chassis, adds controls and a seat pad, then sends you on your way. Price? \$150,000.

The very concept of a turbine-powered motorcycle defies logic, which is what attracted Leno. "I have steam cars, electric cars and I've always been fascinated by turbines," Leno says. "The thing I like about this, it's built from the ground up to do this. It's not one of these deals where you've got a Chevy V-eight, a Harley front end and all kinds of things holding it together. Everything is purpose-built"

Just starting the Y2K is an event, which also appeals to Leno. The procedure is similar to that of any modern electric-start motorcycle, except you continue to press the handlebar-mounted button long after noise-es-scary jet noises-begin to emanate from deep within the bowels of the machine.

Unlike in the whirlybird application, fuel is introduced automatically no dials to adjust or switches to flip. Ignition occurs at 15 percent of the compressor's max rotational speed, which is indicated by a bar graph on the

Marine Turbine Technologies, LLC

right side of the dash. Idle is set at 50 percent. "Imagine a Harley idling at 2500 rpm-all the time," Leno yells over the deafening roar. "That's what it's like."

Despite McIntyre's claims of 320-plus horsepower and 425 foot-pounds of torque, the Y2K is remarkably docile at slower speeds. "At idle, it's making 10 horsepower," Leno explains. "Once you're rolling, though, it's like the hand of God pushing you in the back. It's fright-ening. You have an engine that's meant to lift a 10,000-pound helicopter pushing a 460-pound bike, so your power-to-weight ratio is goof'."

With chopper-esque steering geometry and a 71-inch wheelbase, the Y2K corners on par with an NHRA Pro Stock drag-bike. "It's a bit like square-dancing with a fat lady," Leno jokes. "The fact that it does it at all is pretty good. You don't wonder how well it does it."

Stopping, too, requires a bit of know-how. "You've got a lot of lag, both on and off throttle," Leno explains. "If you shut off at 80mph, you're still going 80 mph. And you have no compression braking at all, so you learn to brake a half-second earlier than you normally would. Whenever I want to stop, I hit the neutral button, then get on the brakes."

The 8.5-gallon fuel tank is huge, even by touring-bike standards. But with mileage ranging from 4 to 7 mpg, max trip length is fewer than 60 miles. "You ride from gas station to gas station," Leno says, "and just hope you don't run out in between."

Another drawback (besides the noise) is the enormous heat that billows from the outward-facing slash-cut pipes. "I was sitting at a traffic light," Leno says in slightly hushed tones. "I looked in my rear-view mirror and saw this Infinity car bumper kind of fold in on itself. I thought, 'Oh jeez, let's just pull away from here...'"

Leno's had his Y2K for about six months now. As with all of his bikes and cars, he rides it often. "I don't know how practical it is," he admits, "but I love it. I'm so glad I bought it."

-Matthew Miles

Rear-facing video camera mounted in tailsection transmits images to an in-dash monitor. "The camera is right behind you," Leno says, "so you really see what's there. It's cool."



PHOTOS BY JAY MCNALLY



Former rally racer Christian Traver built the first Y2K, and has ridden it to 200-plus mph. MTT also makes turbine-powered boats and pickup trucks. Company founder Ted McIntyre hopes to eventually introduce an oval-track series called the Turbine Racing League.