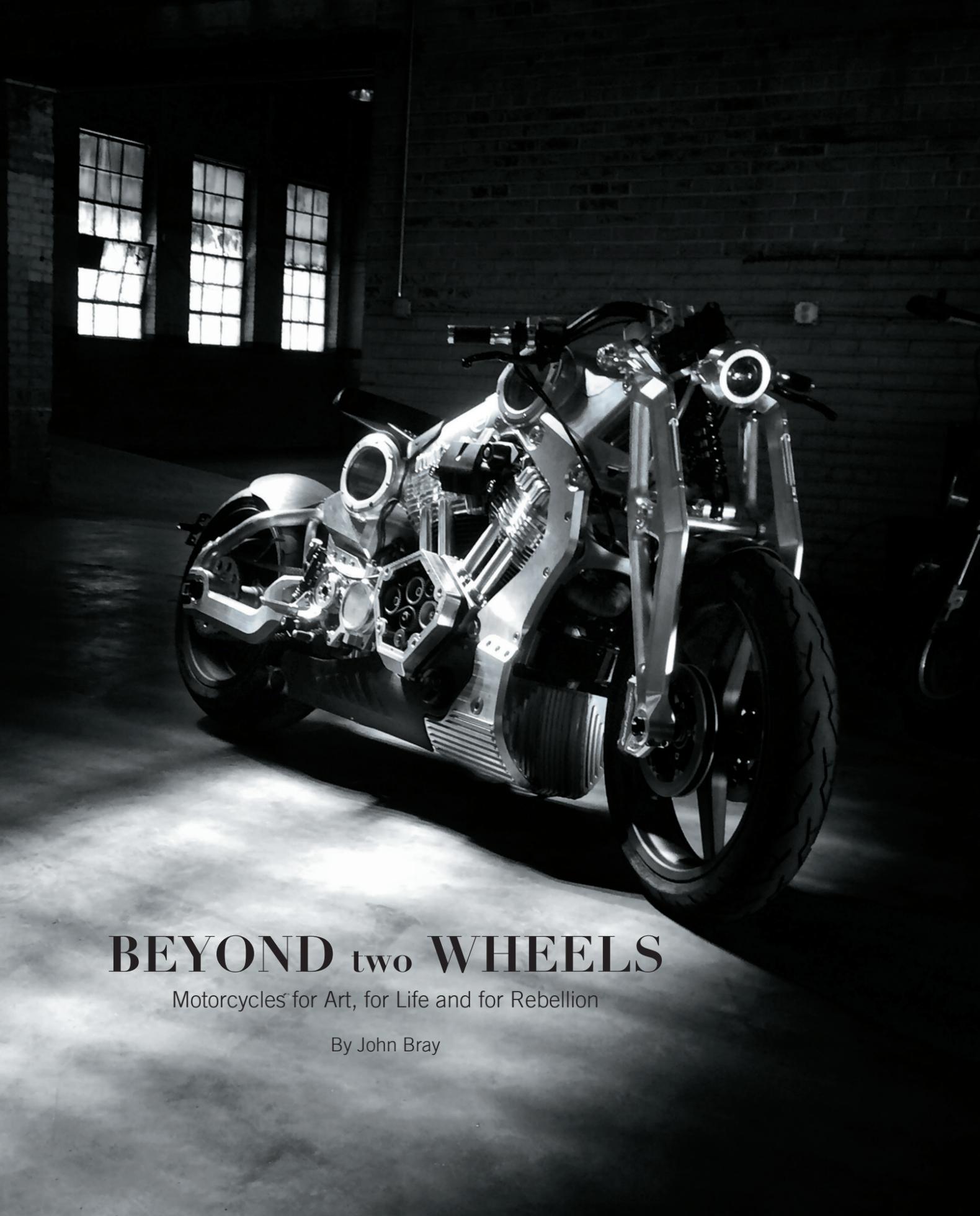


# LIFE REFINED

living life well

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# BEYOND two WHEELS

Motorcycles for Art, for Life and for Rebellion

By John Bray



“Four wheels move the body. Two wheels move the soul.”

## PERFECTION WITH A SINGULAR FOCUS

Although mass-market bike brands might churn out multiple models to appeal to a broad audience, companies targeting a more discerning eye and demanding rider often narrow their focus. For Confederate Motors, Inc. in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, that means focusing on one model at a time in search of something beyond a motorcycle.

“In a way, I’m trying to build a time machine, trying to get back to that moment,” says Matt Chambers, founder and CEO of Confederate Motorcycles, remembering the first time his friend tossed him a set of keys for a Honda CL 160 Scrambler. Today, on his quest to recreate the feeling of that ride, it’s Chambers’ turn to hand over the keys to Confederate customers around the world who’ve plopped down \$125,000 (or more) for the company’s third bike, the P51 Fighter. “Every piece of the motorcycle is

carved from a solid, nonporous block of aircraft-grade aluminum,” says Chambers, noting that, with the exception of a few items such as the carbon fiber components, nothing on the bike is cast. This unique approach gives the Fighter an incredibly durable frame and an aggressive yet surprisingly approachable appearance.

The Fighter firmly embodies the rebel ethos that is at the center of every decision and product at Confederate; it’s a philosophy that’s central to the founding of the company itself. Inspired by the likes of Hunter S. Thompson and, more specifically, Albert Camus’ “The Rebel” (originally published in France as “L’Homme révolté”), Chambers is driven by the rebel culture. “Leaderless, anti-scale, rough and free craftsmanship,” he says, describing both the bikes and the Confederate mantra he strived to create and works diligently to maintain. “All of these things were informing all the Confederates, and they’ve all been really emotive, powerful, raw, primal machines. Fun as hell to ride.”

Half a world away in Angers, France is Midual, another company that releases just one model at a time. Founder Olivier Midy’s quest is to construct bikes with his unique signature, bikes that embody more than a mode of transportation. According to Charles Jacob, sales manager at Midual, the company’s signature engine—which, Jacob says, is a patent-protected “25-degree sloping flat-twin with transversal crankshaft” of the sort that hasn’t been used in decades—is the central focus, but the chassis is a close second.

“It is a single piece of aluminum, sand-cast in a French aeronautical foundry” and runs from the steering column to beneath the seat, says Jacob of Midual’s first-of-its-kind monocoque chassis, a design that relies on the outer shell or structure for support. “Its outer layer...is perfected by hand and serves as the body of the motorcycle, while its double wall acts

as its fuel tank,” he says. This design is complicated and incredibly labor-intensive, but one of the most impressive design elements here is the fact that the team at Midual ensures it doesn’t look that way: “The purity of its final design obscures its extreme complexity, illustrating the brand’s expertise and its vision of French luxury mechanics,” says Jacob of every finished Type 1, the company’s current model.

According to Jacob, “Olivier Midy and his brother François...always have in mind design when drawing each component of the Type 1.” This design-forward mentality is apparent in its use of rare leathers, instruments with needle gauges, and the brothers’ mindful approach to how all materials complement one another, down to the last engraved detail and screw. When presented at the 2014 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance in California as the first motorcycle to ever present at the show, the Type 1 earned very favorable reviews. A similar response was earned by the motorcycle’s only predecessor, the Midual 900, at the 1999 Salon du Deux-Roues motorcycle fair in Paris, but by 2014 the company was firmly established and the Type 1 became the first Midual to enter production. With a starting price of around \$143,000 for the Type 1 and the first run limited to a series of 35 motorcycles for delivery in late 2017, the company expects a yearly production of 50 to 100 thereafter.

Focusing on one model at a time is clearly working well for both Confederate and Midual, whose bikes command respect and admiration both on and off the road, but production isn’t a one-size-fits-all situation. Auto Fabrica is proof that focusing on multiple models can also produce stunning results.

#### CRAFTSMANSHIP IN EVERY MODEL

Auto Fabrica, which was co-founded by brothers Bujar and Gazmend Muharremi in Southend (Essex, England), started with a minimalistic quest to strip motorcycles down to the essentials. But the brothers



Photo: Luigi Di Donna, Midual



were also focused on the craft itself: “Bringing back old-fashioned techniques of making components by hand with a modern design language” is, according to Bujar, critical to what the company does. However, rather than working on only one model at a time, Auto Fabrica has several models available for purchase (though that availability is always changing). Additionally, although every design starts with an existing bike—anything from a BMW to a Yamaha—the designs are completely original. Of course, if you don’t see something in stock that catches your eye, Auto Fabrica can also work with you to create something that more closely aligns with your idea of the perfect motorcycle. Though prices start closer to \$30,000, most motorcycles from Auto Fabrica average around \$58,000. “Average,” however, is not a word that would be used to describe the finished product.

“We spend a lot of time [going] back and forth with our clients, [and] this essentially enables us to offer something unique,” says Bujar of the design process. “The more we hand-make, the slicker the bike looks.” Fortunately, most of the design and build process is very hands-on because the brothers are largely influenced by old coach builders—that is, companies that built car bodies, such as Pininfarina, Fontana and Betrone—that did everything by hand, producing a truly unique product. When a design is completed, the existing motorcycle is stripped down so the engine can be properly rebuilt to the brothers’ standards, stock components can be modified (if any will be used) and plenty of custom pieces can be manufactured by hand to create a finished product that is nothing but a memory of its former self in the best possible way.

At the end of the day, it’s less about transportation than it is about making a statement. Chambers, having spent much of his life focused on two wheels in one way or another, boils it all down to the energy—not of the engine, but of the bike itself: “One of the big issues is does the machine itself reflect its creative birth? Does the passion that goes into the machine affect the energy that the machine resonates?” It would be easy for Chambers to shrug off these questions but, like most high-end motorcycle builders in the world, he’s not looking to take the easy road. He’s looking to create something that is an extension of the self and an expression of who you are. Or, rather, who you want to be and how you want to live. “I do feel there is kind of a karmic energy around these machines,” says Chambers. In fact, after spending a bit of time with the Fighter, you’ll probably turn to Chambers and say, exactly as he did, “It’s quite emotional.” 

