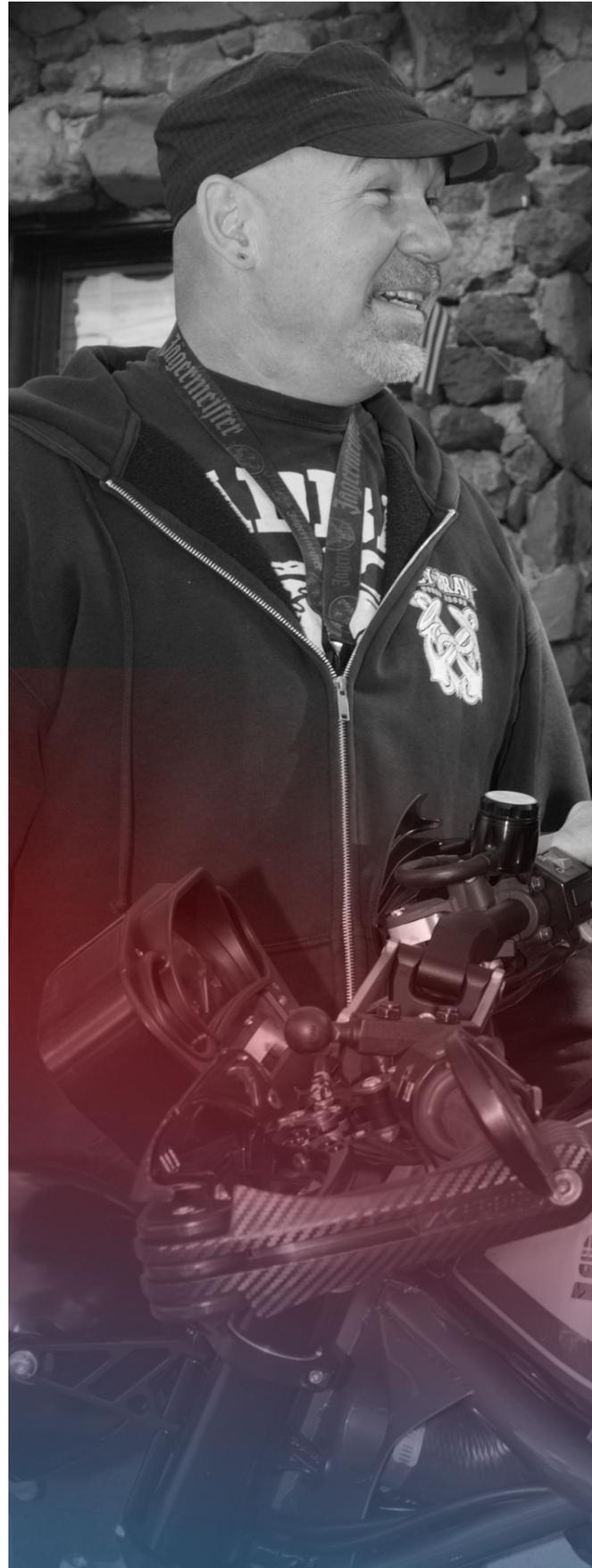


A rider wearing a helmet and leather gear is leaning into a turn on a Samco V-1 Warbird motorcycle. The motorcycle is silver and black with 'SAMCO' branding on the fuel tank. The background is a blurred racetrack with a blue and red surface. A large white maple leaf graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

ALL-AMERICAN, BY WAY OF CANADA SAMCO V-1 WARBIRD

BY JONATHAN HANDLER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY DON WILLIAMS



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aurice Brisebois, with a little help from his friends, has built an all-American, V-twin powered sportbike—the SAMCO V-1 Warbird, and captured a unique place in the hierarchy of motorcycles. The Warbird is a prototype machine built on a custom race-style frame and is powered by a Buell Ulysses XB12 motor—a genuine high-performance bike with commensurate acceleration, handling, and braking.

Brisebois, a Canadian native and current resident of Winnipeg, has not only financed and orchestrated the creation of this marque, but he has made the commitment to build the brand solely from American-made components. Given that motorcycle components are created all over the world, and even Harley-Davidson, the penultimate American brand, incorporates a high percentage of foreign parts, this is not an easy task. As of this writing, Brisebois estimates 95-percent US-manufactured content for the Warbird.

When asked, why would a Canadian be consumed with this endeavor, Brisebois replies that he is “a Canadian looking in, and I’m a very proud Canadian, at that, because I have a lot of freedoms in my country in how I live that are directly related to being your neighbor. I just want to be involved in something where I can touch anything on this motorcycle and be able to go to these people (suppliers) and shake their hand and say, ‘How are you doing?’ I think it’s really important to be a manufacturing country, because unless you’re manufacturing things you’re just a sitting loaf, consuming.”

Brisebois is trying to create a symbol that Made in America and American manufacturing can be great again. “Not only can it be done, but it can be done pretty darn well,” he says. “I’m pretty confident that, for a prototype, we’ve got a really good starting position—ready to bring a customer into the door.”

With this motivation he set out to create the Warbird. SAMCO is an acronym for Spirit American Motorcycle Company, and Brisebois wanted SAMCO to be American-made



because Sam (as in “Uncle”) means America to him. “Uncle Sam is supposed to be the people of America,” he says.

Brisebois’ first steps were visits with frame manufacturers. The meetings were not successful, as most builders were not willing to allow him to retain ownership of the design, even though he paid for it. This was only the beginning of countless challenges he faced in the creation of this extraordinary machine, but let me describe the outcome before telling the remainder of the story.

I arrived at the test site on famed Mulholland Highway in California’s Santa Monica Mountains on an Aprilia Tuono V4 1100, one of the world’s fastest and most sophisticated upright sport bikes. Changing seats was a bit of culture shock, yet the similarities with regard to size, feel, and balance were all there.

I’m your average six-footer and fit perfectly in the cockpit. The bike was comfortable and the setup was just right for my 190 pounds. I found that the Warbird is a remarkably agile and refined motorcycle, especially for a first-generation build.

Once acclimated, I hit the starter and the Harley-Davidson built V-twin sprang to life immediately. The difference between the Italian DOHC V-4 and the American pushrod V-twin was confirmed.

The feeling, unique to the engine architecture, did not at first, equate with the look and feel of the rest of the machine. I was

staring at a compact bike yet feeling the low-resonant Harley-like vibration. Once underway that disparity evaporated, and a smile emerged quickly on my face.

With a claimed dry weight of 450 pounds, and 84 ft/lbs of torque on tap, the Warbird moves out smartly from a standstill with little need to spin up the motor or feather the clutch. After dicing through the first few curves, I had to reconcile the two previously discordant attributes.

Here I was, riding a sportbike that was simply eating up the curves, but the beat and signature of the motor were all American, and not at all like the higher-revving V-twins from Ducati, KTM, or any other manufacturer. Those motors come on at 6000 rpm, and the 1203cc Buell is relatively done at 7000 rpm. Still, the trip to 5000 on the V-1 is glorious, with a lot of punchiness from the muscular twin.

One can feast on torque and ride fast, and never venture outside the 2500-to-4000 rev range. Simply short-shift each gear on the five-speed transmission and the Warbird will test your grip as you roll on, all the while imparting its strong and unique vibration throughout your body. This is not a bad thing. The motor delivers maximum torque at 6000 rpm, but not knowing the redline, I chose not to flog this one-off by running far past that—well, not too often.



RIDING STYLE
 HELMET / SCHUBERTH S2
 JACKET / VANSON CHALLENGER
 GLOVES / JOE ROCKET CLASSIC
 JEANS / LEVI'S 501
 BOOTS / CHIPPEWA RALLY

Almost immediately, the bike was telling me that it wanted to go faster, then faster still. I reminded myself not to crash Brisebois' prototype dream bike, as though that were an option. Still, the Warbird attacked curvy Mulholland Highway, including the infamously serpentine Snake section, as well as many highly evolved sportbikes I've ridden.

The seating position is almost upright and the Flexx handlebars offer a comfortable perch from which to apply power. The combination of chassis, swingarm and forks works well.

Framecrafters built the chassis, sub-frame, handmade aluminum fuel tank, tailpiece, and seat. Race Tech in Corona, Calif. provided the fully adjustable rear shock and inverted forks. Credit must go to Illinois' Framecrafters, for its excellent engineering and a precision-looking bimetal build that is reminiscent of both Ducati trellis and Benelli lug designs. It was taut, and the bike steered where pointed.

The more I rode the V-1 Warbird, the more I liked it. It would shed speed quickly, with little front-end dive, and then transition

effortlessly to the edge of the Dunlop Sportmax Roadsmart III tires on 17-inch wheels made by Performance Machine in La Palma, Calif. The Warbird finishes turns cleanly and neutrally, with no understeer.

With only a little throttle input at the apex the Warbird simply thunders out of the turn. I did not push the front end to its limit, but can report that it is happy to ride at a very fast canyon pace, feels very stable, and has more than enough cornering clearance. I didn't experience any unwanted inputs from the bike, even at full lean, and riding as fast as I dared over the sometimes-uneven surfaces.

Braking is courtesy of 320mm discs from Lake Elsinore's Brake Tech, with radially mounted Performance Machine calipers. One of the biggest hurdles for Brisebois is that he can't find American-made radial master cylinders to suit his needs. This accounts for some of the five-percent non-US content, and he is not averse to having a domestic manufacturer custom make them.



In use, the front braking is flawless, with excellent feel and almost too much power. The rear has a wooden feeling, but has since been replaced and I haven't tried it; the V-1 Warbird is a work in progress for SAMCO.

The fit and finish is excellent, with perfect welds and a nail-polish glossy blue, black and aluminum paint scheme with red accents. Instrumentation is all-electronic from Dakota Digital in Sioux Falls, with a combination of two digital screens and four analog gauges—nice looking, and informative.

Other details include the custom LED tail light from New Jersey, headlight from J.W. Speaker in Wisconsin, plus controls and mirrors from CRG, made near Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.

Interestingly, it was only after several go-rounds with frame builders, that Brisebois contacted Framecrafters. They turned him away a few times, thinking he was a tire-kicker. This was about two years ago, and he continued to visit with them over a period of two months. Eventually, he had a phone call during which owner Randy Illg at Framecrafters asked pertinent questions about wheels, powerplant, and the general plan.

SAMCO and Framecrafters agreed upon a few details but when Brisebois suggested the Sportster engine for his project, Illg said that has been done before and if he wanted to go with an American engine it should be a Buell XB12, so that is what was fitted.

Once they were in agreement, Framecrafters told Brisebois to come down from Toronto to Union, Ill. with a 2007ish Buell Ulysses, and a retainer. He was at their office in 10 days with the bike, a check, and everything ready to go.

“So, we started getting to work on this. They told me in the beginning of the build that you could get 60- or 70- percent (US-made components); other than that, you're not going to find good enough American components to make this happen,” Brisebois recalls.

“We estimate now that we are around 95-percent American-made at this point in time. Things that are challenges are the radial master cylinder for the front brake and the rear master cylinder,” Brisebois explains. “We think Hayes out of Wisconsin can do this for us now.”

“US-made is the whole premise and idea of the motorcycle,” Brisebois emphasizes. “This is a prototype. We want to build a bespoke motorcycle. We will weigh and measure our customer, and dial that all in the suspension.”

“Pricewise, we are in the custom class which ranges from \$70k to \$250k. I can't see that we are going to be anywhere near the high end of it,” Brisebois says with a chuckle. “It's not about selling many. It's about selling some.”

“When you get involved with us, you are getting more than just a motorcycle,” Brisebois says. “So, we will have jackets and I'm trying to find an American-made helmet. Simpson is the closest thing, but their helmets are not made here. At this point, I can't find a source for a US-made helmet.”

He tells of talks with Vanson Leathers about supplying their American-made clothing. He has gone to TS Design T-Shirts out of North Carolina—their t-shirts are made from Carolina-

grown cotton, that is milled, cut, sewn, and printed in the Tar Heel state.

“I went to LC King in Bristol, Tenn., and they are talking about their US-made jeans to match the brand,” Brisebois says. “When you buy this bike, you will receive a luggage rack with a Wolfman bag on it, TS Design T-shirts, Red Wing or Chippewa or Danner shoes. I'm even trying to source a straight razor in the US, which isn't easy. I want everything associated with the brand to be made in America. All the DNA that permeates this has to say what it is.”

Brisebois' background is not in the motorcycle business—it is in construction and drilling equipment. Later on, he became a competitive bodybuilder and came to train in California, where he discovered some nutritional products that he took back to Canada. He made them commercially and successfully for 21 years. Four years ago he got out of that business, and looked for a new avenue to pursue.

Coincidentally, while riding his 1990 Harley-Davidson Fat Boy, the tripmeter failed. When he removed the unit he saw it was labeled Made in Japan. In his naivety, he claims he had no idea they used foreign parts in a Harley, especially back in the early 1990s.

“This is kind of bugging me, man,” he said. It seemed like smoke and mirrors to him. “I think H-D is an awesome lifestyle brand, but I want to be pure. That's the difference. I really do. I want to be proud of what I'm doing.”

From a financial standpoint, Brisebois says he is not actively looking for investors and he would only want one with a true interest in what he is doing—someone who would provide guidance and contacts, and not just money. “I don't need someone looking only for a return,” he states.

“We are also working on different ideas regarding the evolution in the look and development of the SAMCO,” Brisebois expands. “One of our goals is to develop a ‘face’ for the motorcycle—something that would define the look to be specific to SAMCO, similar to seeing an AC Cobra, Mustang, or Camaro from certain angles. You know what they are from a distance without reading the insignia.”

“I'm excited about the motorcycle but, more importantly, what the motorcycle represents—building something great on this side of the world,” Brisebois says. “Yes, Japan, Germany, and Italy build great motorcycles, as well as many other goods. I think America has forgotten its roots as the industrial powerhouse of the world, as it has been slowly and methodically chipped away, which has eroded American's confidence and self-worth on every level of society.”

“This project is a statement of what was once the norm but at the same time what it can again be,” Brisebois states. “Unless America becomes that once again, its morale and identity will continue to become unraveled until the weave is only a thread and un-united. I do love your country and what its original intentions are, or were, at the very least.”

The SAMCO V-1 Warbird is Maurice Brisebois' love letter to America. 

