

# Thoroughbred Motorsports, Motor Trike Keep Motorcycle Riding A Lifelong Adventure

By MELISSA CROWE  
Staff Writer

TROUP -- Thoroughbred Motorsports puts the fun back in the third wheel.

It and sister company, Motor Trike, Inc., make three-wheeled toys more grown up than "Big Wheel" could ever dream.



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Jeff and Diane Vey started their company after leaving jobs as a terminal manager and a librarian.

Jeff was working six-and-a-half days a week, worried how to pay college tuitions for his four children and decided there was no sense in working so much if it was not for his own company.

It was just a matter of time before he found the right opportunity.

A firm believer trike kits ruined the integrity of motorcycles, Jeff eased his opinions after his first test

drive in May 1994.

"I drove it out of town and it amazed me how well it handled, how well it rode," he said. "It was incredible. The harder I pushed it, the more things it did and it did them very, very well."



**BIG PROCESS:** The disassembled and painted outer skin of a "Stallion" three-wheel trike dries propped on a movable steel structure to prevent uneven application of color.

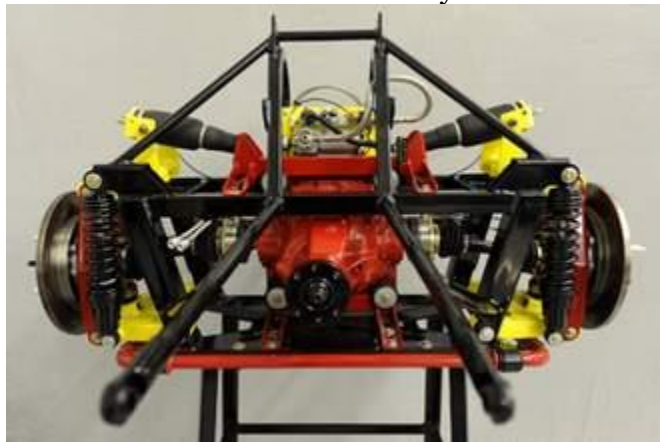
Motor Trike, started a few months after Jeff's 1994 test drive, builds trike conversion kits and Thoroughbred Motorsports, founded in 2008, manufactures the Stallion trike.

Aging bikers come to Motor Trike because "they don't want to quit riding," said Katie Vey, marketing director of the two companies.



J.D. Vey, engineer and production manager of Motor Trike and Thoroughbred Motorsports in Troup, helps produce kits to transform two-wheeled motorcycles into trikes and create the machine from the bottom up.

When arthritis, back pain and other ailments kick in, when wives are tired of riding behind their husbands, or beginners are ready for a new toy, Motor Trike steps in. For about \$7,000, the kits transform Honda or Harley Davidson two-wheeled motorcycles into three-wheeled road kings.



FINE-TUNED: Production Manager J.D. Vey refers to the rear assembly kit as the "McDonald's" exhibit.

"We're all in, so it's pretty fun," said J.D. Vey, production manager and an engineer at the two companies.

### **The Process**

The Stallion began as an idea Jeff jotted down on a napkin 10 years ago, J.D., who has worked with Joe Gibbs racing in NASCAR, said.

In the showroom, sultry lighting highlights the curves on a Stallion. The interior is comparable to a micro-convertible car -- cruise control buttons, stereo, air conditioning -- and the vroom of the 150 horsepower, 2.3-litre Ford engine commands attention.

The first prototype was produced in 2008 and used the same body process as the Motor Trike conversion kits: Each body piece was crafted by labor-intensive process of hand-laying fiberglass. This method, as opposed to chopper gunned bodies, one that squirts a mixture of fiberglass resin and strand of fiberglass, keeps weight to a minimum because the thickness is more controlled, J.D. said.

However, hand-laying seemed more effective in the trike conversion kits. They were only able to produce two Stallions per day. Laminating fiberglass and prepping for paint took more than 180 man hours and the waiting list grew to nearly eight months. After some re-evaluation, they decided to use plastic for the Stallion's body.

J.D. said the company subscribes to the "K.I.S.S. principle," Keep it simple. Plastic bodies allow for opportunities for more customization and a faster turnaround for each trike.

U.S. Paint, famous for engineering colors for Yamaha, Honda and Kawasaki, mixes eight paints for the Stallion and a special primer for Motor Trike. Just as Kawasaki is famous for its green, the Stallion is gaining notoriety for Black Cherry.

Before the trike is complete, it undergoes a 150-point inspection. Every bolt, weld and line is examined before shipping.

"It's a 'want' item," J.D. said. "As such, it has to be something with such impeccable quality that people want it."

### **The Economy**

Despite being a "want item," the company continues to grow.

Last year, Thoroughbred Motorsports launched three new trailer models and Motor Trike built and developed an independent rear suspension for the Honda Goldwing 1800 kit, one J.D. said is "by far the most popular unit in the trike site."

When the recession hit and spending on luxury items plummeted, the companies continued expanding, thanks to a 2006 tax abatement, without which, County Judge Becky Dempsey was quoted in the Tyler Courier-Times--Telegraph saying, "There's a good possibility (Thoroughbred Motorsports, Inc.) would not be here."

On staff are five full-time engineers and a crew of about 70 other employees, all working in an 80,000 square-foot facility. Within the next four months, Jeff plans to boost the staff to pre-recession numbers.

With the huge manufacturing space and 200 dealers worldwide, the two companies keep operations on a scale that holds up to change, innovation and precision.

"There is more money out there than anybody has a clue," Jeff said.

Setting artificial standards and barriers based on personal earnings cuts most innovators short of their potential, but if you make it, they will buy it, he said.

For a limited time, the Stallion costs about \$25,000, a price that could easily match a four-wheeled vehicle. However, with 45 miles per gallon capabilities on the highway and the breeze on your knees, this trike competes on a different level, Katie Vey said.

"People always want what's different; what other people don't have," she said. "That is why this trike succeeds."

### **Why Trikes**

Don Allen, 67, of Lindale, took interest in trikes about 20 years ago as part of his ministry, Bikers of Faith.

He built trikes out of Volkswagen motors and started giving them to "down and out people" to help involve them with a positive crowd. He said he enjoys building them more than riding and hopes someone will trade a two-wheeler for the trike he currently has for sale so he can build more.

Years ago, most bikers would laugh at the guy on the three-wheeler, but not anymore, Allen said.

"These bikers are getting old and they're realizing they need to ride something a little safer," he said.

Allen is in the same situation and does not deny the greater stability of a trike. They allow comfortable and safe long-distance rides. People born between 1946 and 1964 make up 43 percent of motorcycle owners, or 4.5 million out of 10.4 million, according to a 2008 survey by an Irvine, Calif.-based trade group.

"With my wife and everything, it's just simpler and easier to ride," he said.

President of Tyler's Christian Motorcycle Association, Jane Harrelson of Whitehouse took up her canary yellow trike in 2007 to gain her own independence.

"I was afraid of falling over," she said, a concern many feel when riding in the back seat of a two-wheeled motorcycle.

She and her husband, Dale, seemed to always be involved in motorcycles and when they were not riding, there were always intentions of getting back on, she said. Her trike allows not only independence, but a sense of confidence.

"The reason the triking industry is increasing is because our generation doesn't want to get out of motorcycles," she said. "If you want to stay in it, then get the trike and you can still be able to ride."

Stigmas about trikes are nonexistent these days.

"It's a wise rider who knows when they need to change," Harrelson said.