

# Twin Track Snowmobile Offers Smooth Ride

John Kweens' twin track snowmobiles were built for comfort and fun.

"I remember riding the first one, which I built in 1980. It rode like a car," says Kweens. "Regular snowmobiles at the time didn't ride well. With the 2 tracks, I was sitting in between the suspensions."

A few years later, Kweens got into racing and building sleds. Over the years he built or modified around 80 snowmobiles for racing on ice, snow and grass ovals. Along the way, he picked up the nickname Johnie Fast.

"I love the building part," he says. "I'm always building something, and then I sell it. I have snowmobiles all over North America with a number of them in museums."

He thought about building a second twin tracker, but while he had drawings of the original machine (which was parted out years ago), there were no measurements. He did have lots of vintage Ski Doo parts, in particular from Ski Doo Blizzard and Blizzard Plus models.

About 15 years ago he started the project by building a drive system. He used two 1981 Blizzard Plus machined drive axle shafts with flanged bearings. The right-hand side axle shaft has a hydraulic caliper rotor brake disk. The drive system has two 13-tooth drive sprockets and a modified chain case.

In order to center the 2 drive axle shafts in

the bulkhead, Kweens cut an output bearing holder off a salvaged chain case and welded it to the twin track's chain case.

The drive axle shafts were torque-arm bolted on the end of a shortened cross drive shaft with a 21-tooth top gear and triple roller chain, tightened with a stringed lever. Kweens used an Alpine 38-tooth bottom gear, Polaris primary and secondary clutches, an 1108 Dayco clutch belt and a 1/8-in. thick clutch guard.

His latest twin tracker weighs in at only 500 lbs., thanks to judicious use of aluminum. He started with a welded frame made from 1/8-in. thick, 1/2 by 1/2-in. aluminum angle iron.

The chassis has a welded bulkhead of 1/8-in. aluminum plates. Motor and chain case support plates are 1/2 in. thick. The roll bar is 1 1/2-in. (OD) aluminum pipe, and the steering support bracket is 1/2-in. (OD) pipe.

Kweens pop-riveted a 77 SS Blizzard chromoly front spindle axle onto the bulkhead. For cooling, he made two 8 3/4-in. tunnel heat exchangers by cutting a 17 1/2-in. dia. tunnel from an 81 Blizzard Plus in half. He pop-riveted them to the side of the bulkhead with 1/8-in. thick, 1/2 by 1/2-in. aluminum angle iron for supports. The hood and engine cover are made from 14-gauge aluminum plate pop-riveted onto the frame.

The twin tracks started out as a 16 1/2-in.



John Kweens built his first twin track snowmobile in 1980 for comfort and fun. He built a second model, shown above, about 15 years ago.

wide track from a 1983 9700 Blizzard. "I cut a 1 1/8-in. strip out of the middle of the track to center the drive windows and create the 2 separate tracks," explains Kweens.

He powered it with a Rotax L/C 440cc rotary engine, also from an 81 9500 Blizzard Plus. He rebuilt it with new pistons, ignition, carbs and fuel pump, but went with vintage 1978 Gagne race pipes and a thrust exhaust muffler. At 9,700 rpm's, it produced 85 hp.

Kweens finished the twin tracker off with a racing go-cart seat, a 7-gal. fuel cell, new skis, steering parts, master brake, brake caliper and steering tie rods.

"If someone needs information on a vintage snowmobile, they can call me. I have a list of 600 people across North America who are interested in vintage snowmobiles. If I don't know the answer, I can pass the question on to them."

To see some of the 80 snowmobiles Kweens has built, go to his Pinterest page, johniefast productions.

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# He Buys, Sells Vintage Military Vehicles

If you're looking for a military vehicle, John Ferrie may have what you are looking for. If not, he can probably find it. Ferrie has bought and sold more than 600 vehicles over the past 35 years. He finds them in barns, backyards, and even while traveling in other countries. Equipment has gone to buyers around the world and ranges from a 1941 Indian motorcycle to an M47 tank.

"I started this business 35 years ago after finding a WC Command Car behind a barn," says Ferrie. "I told a friend about it, and he bought it for \$1,000 and resold it for \$3,500. That was real money back then. I thought a person could earn a living doing this. It's been a dream job ever since."

When he finds a vehicle that needs work, his goal is bringing it back to good cosmetic and running condition. He removes non-original modifications and replaces missing parts from his extensive parts collection.

"We do motor pool restorations, not factory floor condition," says Ferrie. "It isn't profitable for us to do a complete restoration. Also, then the buyer expects an 80-year-old

vehicle to run like new. And even when they were new, they were not that reliable."

Most parts he needs can be found in his junkyard of old vehicles. Sometimes the parts he needs show up when he needs them.

"I found a rare M3A1 Scout car for \$75 on a ranch in Brazil," says Ferrie. "It was missing much of its armor. A few weeks later, I found another one with all the armor, but no axles."

Most of the vehicles he buys are found in the U.S. Bringing military vehicles back from other countries can be a problem. In the case of Brazil and three M8 Armored Cars he had found, he had to convince the Brazilian Army to let him export them.

"They were not sympathetic until I shared that I was a former U.S. Army captain and a Vietnam veteran," says Ferrie. "From then on, I was 'in the club.'"

Ferrie originally found his vehicles one at a time while driving down alleys in small towns. He also found them by the barn full.

"It is not uncommon to find 30 to 40 vehicles in a barn," he says. "However, more



John Ferrie has bought and sold more than 600 vintage military vehicles over the last 35 years, including this armored car and 1942 Harley Davidson WLA motorcycle.



common is the barnyard find. Now I get most of my vehicles when people contact me to sell collections from an estate."

Occasionally, he does consignment sales. He once sold a tank for a billionaire. Another billionaire bought it.

"He sent his bodyguards to close the deal," says Ferrie. "It was for \$250,000, and they never even started it or test drove it."

He notes that wealthy collectors tend to want armored vehicles. However, most of his sales are to ordinary people, usually older people who want a Jeep, can afford to buy it, and are handy with vehicles. Not many are

sold to younger people due to their expense. "The days of finding a \$500 Jeep that runs are over," says Ferrie.

In fact, in one of his posts to the Vintage Military Vehicles Facebook page, he lists a fully restored, mint condition Willys M38 Jeep for \$28,500. He says that prices vary considerably due to the many variables involved.

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# These Ladies Love Steam Engines

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Jen Roth and Nicole Wallace don't fit the stereotype steam engine enthusiasts. But through Ladies of Steam they teach and inspire other women and children to understand and appreciate an important part of U.S. history.

"We teach the basic anatomy of steam engines: from fuel sources, to how that energy gets converted to rotating components on the steam engine. We also have a hands-on demonstration, providing everyone who attends our event an opportunity to start and stop the engine," says Wallace. She attended her first steam engine event at 11 months old with her grandparents. As a teen, she worked with the Hill family in charge of Miniature Land at the same event - the Western Minnesota Steam Threshers Reunion (WMSTR) in Rollag, Minn.

It's where she met Jen Roth, who started

attending thresher shows as a teen with her family. Both of them attended Rollag's steam school and earned hobby boiler licenses. Roth and her family own and operate a 1916 28 hp. Minneapolis engine that kept them busy working on the governor and throttle last year. Wallace replaced the boiler on her 16 hp. Minneapolis engine.

The friends started Ladies of Steam in 2015 and usually host 3 or 4 "Women Teaching Women" events at steam shows each year.

"It's rewarding to be able to step back and appreciate the accomplishments and determination on women's and kids' faces. You can see them get bit by the steam bug," Roth says.

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Jen Roth and Nicole Wallace started Ladies of Steam to inspire other women and children to appreciate an important part of U.S. history.