

# Ragin' Cajun

Like a bayou 'gator waiting patiently for its next meal to wander too close to the water's edge, the F124 Hellcat lurks lazily yet powerfully in a corner of Confederate's cavernous factory situated in New Orleans' hip warehouse district. I roll my eyes over it and every 10 seconds or so spot *another* trick component, one more clever piece of design innovation.

Note the fat, snake-like exhaust pipes, internally ceramic-coated and externally heat-wrapped, both leading to a 3-inch Inconel (used for exhausts in Formula One and Champ Car) collector that feeds into—get this—the tubular steel swingarm whose twin arms slant down toward the pavement and

act as barely muffled outlets for the hulking engine's exhaust.

Or the long-stroke powerplant itself, all 2031cc—124 cubic inches in Confederate-speak—delivering a mighty 135 horsepower at 5200 rpm to the rear wheel, with an astounding 140 pound-feet of torque on tap at 4500 revs (Confederate's numbers). This mammoth V-twin mounts rigidly to the steel spine frame, with the 3-inch-diameter backbone doubling as the dry-sump motor's oil tank. A 2-inch front downtube and duplex engine cradle lock everything in place to achieve the stiffness

Confederate captain Matt Chambers

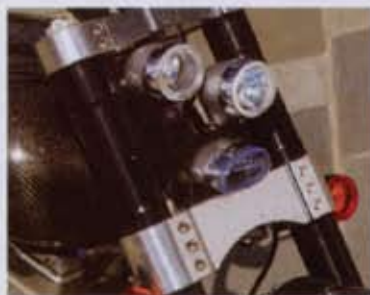
says was one of his key objectives for the Hellcat.

Or the five-speed close-ratio transmission with belt primary drive and vertically stacked shafts housed in a special S&S-built gearcase. It's a layout Yamaha adopted to great acclaim on its first-generation YZF-R1 exactly four years *after* Confederate incorporated it in '94 for exactly the same reason: to significantly reduce wheelbase, in this case to a tight—by power-cruiser standards—61 inches.

Or the patented way the chain final-drive has been moved to the bike's right side via an outrigger bearing mounted in a plate bolted to the swingarm pivot and gearcase. Chambers says this adds immeasurably to overall chassis stiffness while also shortening wheelbase, extending chain life (due to reduced lash) and permitting a significantly wider rear tire, on the Hellcat a massive, 240/40VR18 Metzeler ME880 on an 8-inch Lightcon cast wheel. A 4-inch hoop up front carries

130-plus horsepower, exotic materials and high-end build quality make Confederate's F124 Hellcat the Bimota of the bayous





130/60VR18 rubber.

Or the fat Marzocchi inverted fork, the same 50mm unit used by MV Agusta's Massimo Tamburini for his F4 1000, located by a mega-stiff Traxxion Dynamics triple-clamp, each clamp milled from a solid 30-pound chunk of 6061 aluminum. Or the six-piston Swedish-made ISR radially mounted calipers. Or the exquisitely shaped 4.75-gallon carbon-fiber fuel tank made by Fiber Dynamics to J.T. Nesbitt's voluptuous design. Or the equally curvaceous—and surprisingly comfortable—carbon-fiber seat mounted atop a bicycle-type post that delivers a low, 27-inch seat height. Or the twin Penske shocks mounted side by side in a conscious reference to the Vincent Black Shadow's layout. Or the minimalist twin taillights nestled beneath the seat that double as turn signals.

Get the picture?

The Hellcat is a sophisticated back-alley hybrid, a finely detailed high-octane blend of power cruiser and superbike, something unique

in today's market. At a claimed 500 pounds (dry) it's a touch porky. But when you consider those pounds are motivated by the aforementioned 135 rear-wheel horsepower and that most of its two-wheel competition is less powerful and/or significantly heavier, you see the brilliance of what Chambers and Confederate design chief Nesbitt have concocted. In many ways the Hellcat is the Bimota of the bayous; not just for the uncannily similar financial roller-coaster ride each company has experienced, but also for the exquisite engineering and manufacturing both marques embody.

Wheeling the Hellcat out into the Louisiana sunshine, all that carbon-fiber weave takes your breath away. It seems inap-

propriate to actually sit on a piece of it, but once settled aboard the seat you find it's unexpectedly comfortable thanks to its, er, dynamic shaping. (One wonders if Confederate offers a personal butt-molding service.) The low-set footpegs don't position your feet quite as far forward as most cruisers, and they're rearward enough to let you lever yourself off the seat to avoid the worst of the Big Easy's paving imperfections. They even offer a reasonable amount of cornering clearance.

The bobtailed Hellcat is low, lean and meaty, but paradoxically quite refined—Sylvester Stallone in a Savile Row suit. But it is definitely a cruiser, even if the lovely

sweep of the carbon tank extending in front of you is surmounted by a Monza filler cap more Ace Café than Boot Hill Saloon. Thumb the starter and the big engine pulses to life with a blast of thunder from the twin swingarm-exhausts, telling everyone within a quarter-mile that something menacing has woken up.

Pull in the high-effort clutch lever and select first gear with an unavoidable clunk. Crack the throttle just a quarter-inch and the bike launches forward like a freshly fired Scud missile, the



Stripped to its bare engine, frame and carbon-fiber seat, the Confederate looks part Space Age, part Massey Ferguson. Torquey V-twin provides Hellcat—on-wheels acceleration.