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Building Boots and Building Stuff: The World of Ryder Gauteraux

BY JAYNE SKEFF

Yes, Ryder Gauteraux is an artist and a boot maker. “Yes, I design and build boots, but that’s just what I do, it doesn’t really reflect who I am.” Who he is, is an artist and master craftsman whose wild imagination has earned him



3,000 hours of tooling, 30 sides of leather and 50 gallons of dye later, the most spectacular symbol of Western American design — The Western Star Lowmax — is ready to roll to the Mid-America Truck Show. The #1 stagecoach on the road today.

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the reputation for “taking on the extraordinary projects that no one else would even consider doing.” Extraordinary is the key word here – both in his tenacious personality and the work he creates. And it was one of those extraordinary projects he was commissioned to create two years ago that put him on the radar for what would become the most challenging yet rewarding project in his 15 year career. It was the hand-tooled leather California



King bed that stood six feet high and was accented with pounded antique copper that found Mickey Larson and Chris Jory, the lead team on the Lowmax Truck project, at Ryder’s shop in Redmond, Oregon. They stopped by to see if he was the right guy for what would become known as “Building the Western Star Lowmax Truck.”

When The Daimler Corporation sets out to create something, they assemble the best in the world to do it. The goal of

the project was to create the most spectacular semi-truck to be on display at the granddaddy of all truck shows, The Mid-America Truck Show held in Louisville (KY) every March. The competition is world-class and the best and the biggest in the trucking industry pull out all the stops to compete. For Daimler, this meant creating a truck that would be a symbol of true American craftsmanship and design. One that would incorporate the rich influence and heritage of the great American West. So, they found that boot maker in Redmond, Oregon known for his extraordinary ability to take on extraordinary challenges.

The truck chosen was the classic Western Star. The goal was to completely encase the truck in tooled leather and sterling. “When I went to Portland and saw the truck as it rolled off the production line, it blew my mind how large it was. I remember thinking ‘what did I get myself into?’ But, I knew right then, I



was going to do it.” The gas tanks, the storage boxes, everything, had to be completely covered in tooled leather. “I went back to Redmond and ordered 30 sides of tooling leather and 50 gallons of dye. The gas tanks alone are larger than a cow, so several sides would be needed just to cover those.” With only five months to complete the project, it had to start now.

“Ryder is one of those rare individuals that can envision the finished project before it even starts and he works toward that vision,” said Mickey Larson. Ryder’s vision for this project was one of simplicity; not overly intricate tooling, which he thought would be too busy. Simple tooled lines and dots accented with tooled and sterling straps would be the perfect look. And indeed it was.

“I don’t ever want to count the square feet of leather I tooled,” said Bryan Barker, Ryder’s right-hand assistant and long time friend who worked at his side for five months straight. Sometimes it took both of them, and often a third person, just to hold all the leather in order to feed it through the 1930s Singer Sewing Machine which was used to sew this massive leather project together. Bryan worked on the flat tank and box covers while Ryder hand tooled the enormous straps, working in

collaboration with the Vogt Silver Company who created all the sterling buckles and accents for the project. Over 2500 hours later, Ryder recalls, “This was the most extraordinary experience of my life. Working with a company like Daimler that had all the resources to accomplish this incredible project combined with their willingness to step outside their traditional comfort zone, to listen to my ideas and think outside the box, was an experience of a lifetime.”



Ryder Gauteraux works on design in his studio in Redmond, Oregon

Five months later, 3,000 hours from concept to delivery and right on schedule, the #1 Western Stagecoach on the road today was ready to roll and head to the Mid-America Truck Show. Not before, however, the top team from Daimler’s headquarters in Germany flew over to take a look. “They were completely blown-away,” recalls Ryder. According to Mickey Larson, head of the design team for Daimler, the truck is now on its way to Germany where Daimler will proudly enter their “American Stagecoach — The Western Star Lowmax” in the European competition.

So, what’s next Ryder? “I don’t know what my next project will be, but it will be bigger and more extraordinary than this one.” Mickey Larson has his own opinion on what Ryder’s next project will be. “I know there’s an owner of a Leer Jet out there who needs the entire interior of their plane covered in hand-tooled leather and sterling. Ryder’s the man for the job. He’s amazing.” www.gauteraux.com

Watch the video of the build on You Tube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnnkbC-9hdQ&feature=channel_video_title



Ryder is a boot maker at heart as evidenced here in this extraordinary pair of leather tooled and burned pictorial boots inspired by Charlie Russell.