



- 10 Lean Angle**  
*Boehm's big mistake in the rain in Spain*
- 12 Megaphone**  
*Art Friedman on the bigger-is-better debate*
- 15 Backfires**  
*Readers respond to our KTM Duke 990 piece and the Ducati Multistrada vs. VFR800 vs. YZF-R6 feature*
- 68 Marketplace**
- 78 Gear Box**  
*Cool stuff for moto-folks on the go...*
- 95 Ad Index**

## up to speed

News and short takes from the two-wheeled world

- 18 Big Trouble: Clarkie Tuono**  
*Not for novices, the Clarkie Tuono comes straight from the Dark Side*
- 20 Euro Notes**  
*A discussion with Kenny Roberts about the 2003 MotoGP season*
- 21 Big Change: Triumph's New Daytona 955i**  
*A new look for Britain's open-class superbike*
- 21 Big Boo-Boo: Gold Wing Recall**  
*Frame-cracking problems plague Honda's big tourer*
- 22 Big-Legged Sport Tourer**  
*Riding Ducati's newly revised ST4s*
- 24 Big Oops and Big Grip**  
*2004 New Bike Guide corrections and new Metzeler Roadtec Z6*

## the real world

Tips, Tweaks, Fixes and Facts: A Complete Guide to the Motorcycle Ownership Experience

- 86 How It Works**  
*You won't go anywhere without the lowly, forgettable spark plug*
- 87 Smart Money**  
*BMW R1100GS/R1150GS 1995-2003*
- 88 Track Time**  
*Odds and ends: Sometimes it's the little things that help most*
- 90 Doin' Time**  
*Boxing Toward 1000 Miles: Carrithers's BMW R1000S Boxer Cup Replika*
- 92 How-To**  
*Going straight: wheel alignment, part two*
- 93 Street Savvy**  
*More wet-weather riding tips*
- 95 Answers**  
*Doing the model-year dance, and a highway aerodynamics lesson*
- 96 The List 2004**  
*Specs, prices and verdicts on every '04-spec streetbike sold in America*
- 98 Hard Numbers**  
*Performance information for road-tested streetbikes*



**40** Big Bikes and Big Laughs with Jay Leno

Motorcycles in this issue:	
Aprilia Tuono	p. 90
BMW Boxer Cup Replika	p. 90
BMW R1100GS/R1150GS	p. 87
Clarkie Tuono	p. 18
Ducati Desmosedici	p. 50
Ducati ST4s ABS	p. 22
Harley-Davidson V-Rod	p. 90
Honda CBR600RR	p. 90
Honda GL1800	p. 21
Honda RC211V	p. 50
Kawasaki Vulcan 2000	p. 28
Kawasaki ZX-RR	p. 50
Suzuki Hayabusa	p. 44
Triumph Daytona 955i	p. 21
Triumph Rocket III	p. 36
Yamaha YZF-M1	p. 50



**28** Road Test: Kawasaki Vulcan 2000



**88** Track Time



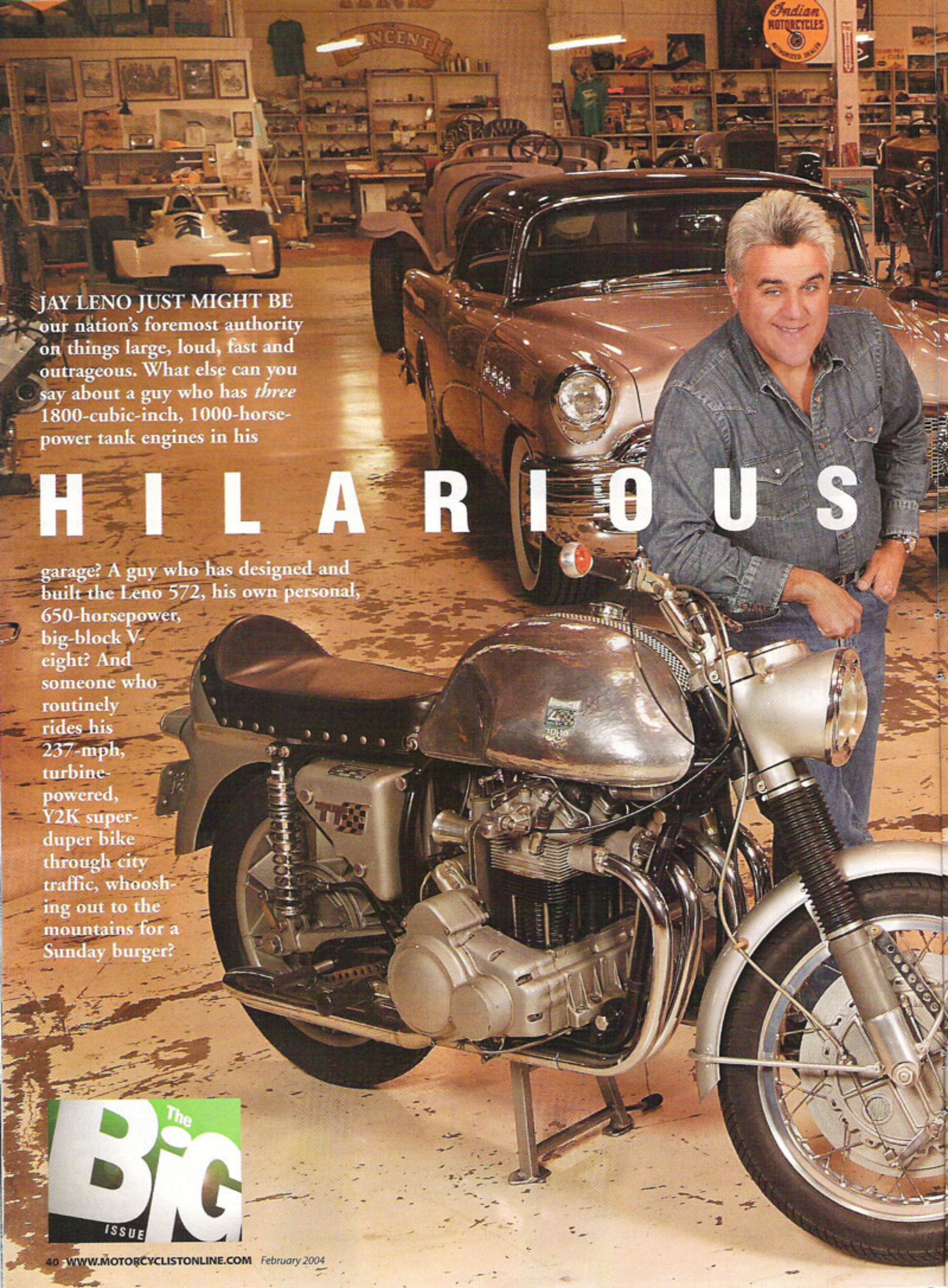
**92** How-To

## on the cover

Kevin Wing snapped *The Tonight Show's* Jay Leno hangin' with two of his favorite streetbikes for this month's "Big" issue. Big guy, big motorcyclist, big motorcycles.



**78** New Gear



JAY LENO JUST MIGHT BE our nation's foremost authority on things large, loud, fast and outrageous. What else can you say about a guy who has *three* 1800-cubic-inch, 1000-horsepower tank engines in his

# HILARIOUS

garage? A guy who has designed and built the Leno 572, his own personal, 650-horsepower, big-block V-eight? And someone who routinely rides his 237-mph, turbine-powered, Y2K super-duper bike through city traffic, whooshing out to the mountains for a Sunday burger?

The  
**Big**  
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By Dexter Ford  
Photos By Kevin Wing

**If you  
want to  
talk big,  
talk to  
Jay**



Jay Leno knows big, as his choice in cars, motorcycles and garages demonstrates. After a hard day interviewing Britney Spears or California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on *The Tonight Show*, he retreats to his own 160-vehicle shrine to internal—and even external—combustion.



Handcrafted by the obsessed Friedel Münch in 1966, the Münch Mammut may well have been the world's first 1000cc superbike. With a one-liter, air-cooled, NSU Prinz car motor, one-off cast Elektron bodywork, hand-hammered aluminum tank and autobahn-ready dual headlights, it predated the mighty Honda CB750 by three years.

The guy has money, no doubt. But that's just a minor facet of the wonder that is Jayness. At last count, Leno has about 160 classic, collectible and otherwise incredibly interesting cars and motorcycles, split pretty evenly between two wheels and four. And besides knowing nearly everything worth knowing about each machine's builders, designers, performance and historical significance, he could probably fieldstrip and reassemble each one. Blindfolded. The world is filled with rich guys who collect cool cars and bikes. But this guy—when he's not cutting politicians off at the knees or pulling the strings on the entertainment industry—lives, eats and breathes them.

#### RIDING A MAMMOTH

"When I was 16, this was it," Leno recalls, in front of his 1966 Münch Mammut. "It was on the cover of *Cycle*, with a story about Friedel Münch, the

guy who built them. It's hard to put it into perspective. Now, it doesn't look particularly big. But when I was a kid, there were no four-cylinder motorcycles around. You'd read about MV Agustas and such, but those were in Europe, they weren't here in the United States. This was a motorcycle with *four* cylinders, twin-leading-shoe brakes, cast Elektron wheels in the back instead of spokes; it was, like, amazing—an autobahn, road-burner-type bike. It would go 120 mph, all day long. There's almost no vibration, it's dead smooth. And even people who know nothing about motorcycles look at it and go, 'Is that German?' It has some kind of teutonic look to it, the sheer mass of it. It has an NSU Prinz car motor. It's only 1000cc, but with the car motor came the car dependability. It has an alternator, which was very rare on motorcycles then. It has twin headlights. Most motorcycles



had six-volt systems then; the motorcycle world was sort of in that dim-bulb headlight era. With this thing, you could turn on those brights and it would light up the road like a car.

"The impact this had at the time was amazing. Harleys were \$1250—and this was \$4000. It was a hand-built motorcycle—pretty cool. It was a huge deal.

"I always wanted one. You know, the more you get into

stuff like this, the further back you want to go. When I was a kid, I never wanted to go back further than my era, the '60s. I used to feel sorry for people who grew up in the '20s and '30s because I didn't think there was any cool stuff back then. But now, I'm driving machines from 1909, 1910—you just want to go back and back. And in the history of motorcycling, this [Münch] played a significant role. Because it sort of planted the seed of, 'Wow, a four-cylinder bike.' Even when the Honda 750 came out it was only a 750. This was a 1000. I think the [Honda] 750 was faster, and had a five-speed, but this was still pretty impressive. It has an odd look to it—I don't know if it's beautiful, but it has a functional [aspect to it]—there's a German word that means ugly/attractive, in the spirit of the time: *zeitgeist*.

"It looks heavy, but it's really not. The wheels and body parts

are all cast from Elektron magnesium alloy, which is about 25 percent lighter than aluminum. I paid \$11,000 for it in '88—crazy money at the time. Now they're going for \$30,000, \$40,000."

### TOO BIG, TODAY

Next to the Münch stood the Y2K turbine bike—the modern incarnation of the crazy-fast, big-speed, no-limits, custom-built superbike. Many people—me, for instance—would find a motorcycle powered by a helicopter engine more than a little intimidating. Leno uses it as a weekend fun bike.

"Actually, it's not too big," Leno said. "It's 460 pounds. The engine weighs just 133 pounds, makes 350 horsepower, and 450 foot-pounds of torque. With a test rider, somebody said they got it to 237 mph. I mean, it's a jet motor, so the faster you go, the faster it goes."

"That's the fun thing about it. It's sort of the opposite of a normal bike because you leave the line with like, 50 horsepower, then go 10 yards, you've got 70, then 100, then 150... that's the way the turbine goes as it spools up—the faster you go, the more power you make. When you whack it open at

100, geez, it really pulls—it really pulls. It's hilarious!

"It has a 71-inch wheelbase, about a foot longer than a normal literbike because we have that big two-speed transmission in there. The Y2K guys made the transmission, but we tore it down and made the gears a little bigger, a little tougher. It wasn't any problem, we just wanted to be on the safe side."

"I take this thing out to the Rock Store (a local gathering place for motorcyclists in the Santa Monica Mountains). You know, it's fun—it shuts the Harley guys right up. When you pull in on a Hayabusa, they go, 'Hey, what is that, Japanese or something?' You pull in on this, they go, 'Oh, all right,' and they don't know what to say."

"Other than that," I asked, "what possessed you to buy such a patently outrageous motorcycle?"

"It's the 'More Money Than Brains' club. It's stupid, really. You know, I'm in show business. You show off, and it's fun. It's a conversation piece, people get a kick out of it."

Inevitably, Leno wound up astride the Y2K, showing us just how unlike a typical motorcycle this beast really is.

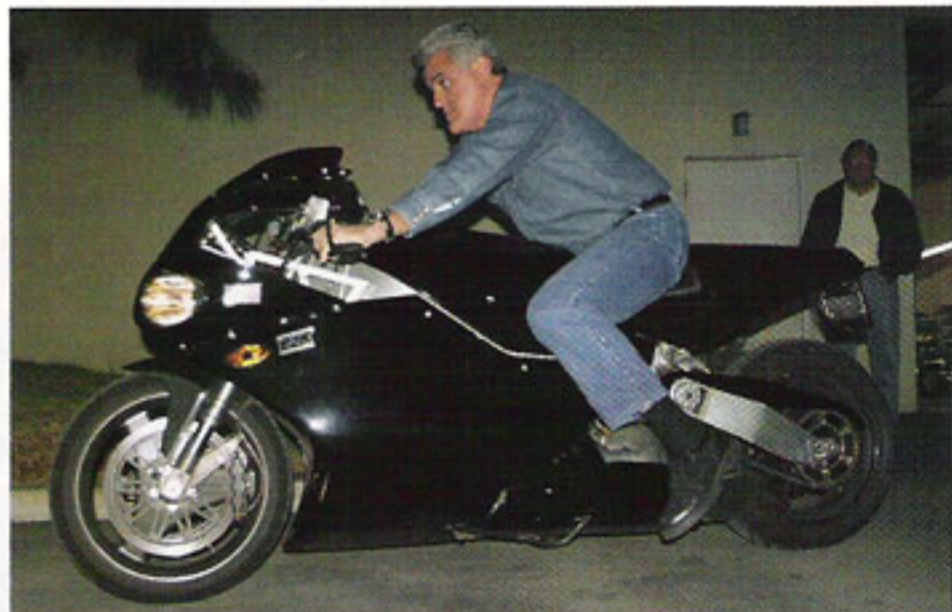
"After you shut off the throttle, the engine still gives you one and a half to two seconds of power—it's just the nature of the turbine. So to slow down, you hit this red button here (on the right grip) and air pressure pulls the clutch plates apart. And if that fails, you have a back-up system (the conventional-looking clutch lever), which pulls them apart."

"As you go into a corner, you just hit that button. Then coming out, you whack the throttle open, and then count 'step, one-two,' and whoosh, it picks the power back up about halfway through. It's really different—you just have to think ahead. It can get ahead of you—so you have to be ready."

It can get pretty panicky if you just shut off the throttle because those two extra seconds of power can feel like a long, long time. Well, you see what it does...."

Leno pointed to the rear sprocket, which had more than a few distorted teeth, even though the rest of the bike was immaculate. "Even driving normally, it has so much torque it bends the teeth over. I mean, it's [got] 450 foot-pounds of torque. It bends the teeth, and it stretches the chain. But, to be fair, I've got almost 5000 miles on it, so it's not doing too bad."

"Once you're up to speed, the thing is dead smooth, though. It just whooshes along, like being in a plane. When



TOOD WESTOVER



If you want to go fast—big-time fast—start with a jet. With a

350-horsepower, 450 foot-pound turbine engine liberated from a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter, the Y2K has run over 237 mph—and that's in second gear! If you come up behind Leno on this thing at a light, keep your distance—unless you want to melt your fairing, that is.

you look in the rearview mirror, you see that everything is wavy behind you from the heat coming off. I mean, you're looking at 1200 degrees.

"One time I was at a light, and this guy in an Infiniti is just easing up behind me. I'm trying to ease up to the line, and he's sitting there right behind me. And I look in the rearview video screen on the dashboard, and I see that his bumper is starting to do this," Jay puckers his face like a Cabbage Patch doll. "His whole bumper was deforming, melting, and I just took off."

If you want to talk big, consider the Y2K's fuel mileage. "It burns eight and a half gallons of jet fuel an hour, whether you're running it at speed or not," Leno says. "Your mileage depends on how you use your hour. If you're on an empty road in the desert, you'll get maybe 15, 20 miles a gallon. Around town—it's four." **MC**