

A chopper for a rail splitter

Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial motorcycle pays tribute to 16th President's circuit riding days

SPRINGFIELD – A man who once split rails for a living is being honored with a chopper of his own on his 200th birthday.

A Springfield businessman and the owner of a custom body shop have joined forces to create the “Circuit Rider,” a custom Harley-Davidson motorcycle that honors the 16th President from its copper-penny wheels to its split-rail tailpipes.

“I felt this was a unique way to honor America’s greatest president, a man who spent a lot of time in the saddle traversing the back roads of Illinois during the mid 1800s,” said Richard Levi, President and CEO of Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc., the man who owns the motorcycle with the “ABE 200” Illinois license plates.

The “Circuit Rider” will appear at various Bicentennial related venues during 2009, including parades, special events, and the Illinois State Fair. Visitors are encouraged to have their photographs taken with this unique, rolling work of art.

The “Circuit Rider” features one-of-a-kind, custom copper plated wheels with Lincoln penny designs and matching copper plating on numerous small metal parts. The gas tank, rear fender, and battery covers feature airbrushed Lincoln portraits and depictions of Lincoln sites. The air cleaner is shaped like Lincoln’s stove pipe hat; the exhaust pipes look like wooden rails of the type Lincoln used to split, with an axe forming the shifter; and the foot pegs are copies of mid-1800s shackles, representing the issue of slavery. Black chrome adorns the engine cases and bolts.

Kim Shirley, the man who owns Kim’s Auto Body Inc. of Springfield, designed and built the “Circuit Rider” and rode his creation into the plaza of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum today during its public unveiling.

During his days as a circuit rider, Abraham Lincoln would spend two to three months every fall and winter attending court in the central Illinois counties of Tazewell,
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Woodford, McLean, Logan, Dewitt, Piatt, Champaign, Vermilion, Edgar, Shelby, Moultrie, Macon, and Christian. Lincoln was one of the few attorneys who rode the entire circuit along with the presiding judge and the state's attorney. He traveled the circuit on horseback or by buggy taking as long as two days to arrive at the next county seat. While many fellow travelers complained of the poor roads, bad food, and inhospitable accommodations, Lincoln never complained and enjoyed the camaraderie with the legal fraternity. On the circuit, Lincoln honed his innate skills as an orator while encouraging dispute resolution in and out of the courtroom.

The "Circuit Rider" project is officially endorsed by the Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and a schedule of appearances for the motorcycle can be found on the organization's website, www.lincoln200.net

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