

Art you can ride

Roman Blum and his motorcycle shop, RB Customs, 9779 Mills Road, are being featured in a reality show connected with the *American Bikers Series*.

"This show is going to be what goes into building a bike," Blum said. "I am going to buy the parts, put it together. It will involve machinists, electronics and welders."

Blum said there will be 13 episodes, and the show should start airing in September.



THOMAS NGUYEN PHOTOS

THE SHOP: Charles Hoskins, shop manager, left, and Roman Blum, founder of RB Customs, run the 6,000-square-foot facility in Willowbrook.

STORY ON PAGE 3



PERFECTIONIST: Roman Blum knows about heavy metal. He builds his own frames and wheels.



EYE CANDY: The showroom features the shop's colorful bikes.



READY TO RIDE: The bikes are all one-of-a-kind creations.

Television show to spotlight talents of motorcycle builder

■ Roman Blum's Willowbrook shop will be featured in 13 episodes

By TODD HVEEM

CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Roman Blum is living proof that dreams really do come true.

The 35-year-old Blum, who grew up with a love of skateboards, cars and motorcycles, decided to open his own motorcycle shop — RB Customs — about four years ago.

Now, Blum and the motorcycle shop are about to hit the big time.

Blum has just started taping a reality television program for the *American Bikers Series*.

"I am very pumped up about this," Blum said. "The show is going to be about what goes into building a bike."

Sandi Newmark, director of public relations for Platinum Television Group, said the media company is excited about creating the half-hour reality program.

"We at PTGTV are very excited about this show," she said. "We are hoping it will be similar to the *Choppers* show, but we are going to put our own twist on that."

"We do educational TV," she said. "This is an offspring of that. It certainly is going to promote RB Customs. But we are going to be very informative, as if you were in the shop watching the show. It is our version of reality TV."

Blum said there will be 13 episodes, which will be filmed at RB Customs, 9779 Mills Road, and PTGTV, located in Deerfield Beach, Fla. He said the show should go into syndication in the second episode and start airing on television in September.

"What the show is going to be is a mythbuster to what you see on TV now," Blum said. "On TV now, these guys build bikes that cost \$200,000, then go out



THOMAS NGUYEN: FOR THE CHRONICLE

ROMAN'S EMPIRE: Roman Blum's shop in the Willowbrook area is a 6,000-square-foot facility that features "a cool show room with a lot of eye candy."

"I am going to take 30 days to build a bike — that normally takes four months to complete — for different private groups and Fortune 500 companies. It is not a theme bike. I like short, simple and to the point."

"It is all about dependability and rideability. You really can't just get on the bike and ride them. This shows what is involved in building a bike. I am going to buy the parts, put it together. It will involve machinists, electronics and welders. A

will be displayed in PTGTV's lobby to promote its educational TV shows. It also will be featured at major sporting events in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Newmark said.

"As we narrowed down our search for the right builder, it was apparent that Roman Blum and RB Customs were a perfect fit for this project," said PTGTV president and CEO Doug Scott.

Besides the bike, viewers will see day-to-day details as well as one-on-one interviews

ROMAN BLUM

■ Age: 35

■ What: Owner of RB Customs

■ Where: 9779 Mills Road, near Texas 249 and FM 1960

■ Of note: Blum, who grew up skateboarding and riding cars and motorcycles, started his own business about four years ago. He has landed a spot on Platinum Television Group's *American Bikers Series*.

through the eyes of a custom builder.

RB Customs, which is located near the intersection of Texas 249 and FM 1960, is a 6,000-square-foot facility.

"I build my own sheet metal, my own wheels and my own frames," Blum said. "We don't do any production bikes. We have a big facility and a cool show room with a lot of eye candy."

Blum was a manager of Four Wheel Parts Wholesalers and ASC Car Stereo before deciding to open his own business.

"I have been around a lot of perfectionists in different businesses," Blum said. "I picked up on people's traits. I am a well-rounded, do-it-yourself kind of guy."

"I guess my creativity is kind of what breaks me apart from everybody else. I come up with cool, innovative stuff that is not overly expensive and it works. Plus, I build cool bikes. They don't all look alike."

Blum, who likes to shoot pool in his spare time, also does custom paint jobs and wide-tire conversions.

"A lot of people have pulled together to make this happen," Blum said.

"The persona of choppers is really cool. There is a lot of diversity. It is not your typical bike. And this won't be your typical show."

For more information, check



Rob Barrera photo

Roman Blum uses a grinder to prepare a gas tank on a motorcycle he is building.

Motorcycle builder cruises to success with 'choppers'

By **KIM HUGHES**
Chronicle correspondent

Ron Blum's 6,000-square-foot workshop in the Willowbrook area has airbrushed murals along the walls, a bright red floor, furniture he's made out of steel and Medieval-era decor.

His workshop for custom-built choppers, a type of motorcycle that became popular in the 1970s, has seen a resurgence thanks in part to Discovery Channel's *Motorcycle Mania* program.

"The old 1970s choppers were really long and skinny," Blum said. "Our generation of builders makes them different. We use the same concepts, but they don't look so 1970s."

Long and lean frames, low seats and high handlebars were the trademark look.

Blum, from the Champions area in Spring, described choppers as motorbikes that have been modified.

"I like to say it's a nostalgic

ride with today's technology," he said.

The neck is chopped off and welded on at a different angle and it's stripped of unnecessary components such as blinkers, windshields, fenders, big headlights, crash bars and big seats — making the bike lighter.

"They're chopped right down to the bare minimum," Blum said.

Blum's abilities in building the choppers has been the fruits of efforts that began more than five years ago in a garage.

"I built a motorcycle, and as soon as I put an ad in the paper, it was sold," Blum said. "This guy came and saw it, then paid cash for it. I made almost 50 percent profit on that bike."

The chopper industry in general has seen a 60 percent sales increase during the past two years, Blum said.

With at least 10 projects going at any given time, Blum will build just about anything a customer can dream up.

"The customer comes in with an idea or a concept," he said, "and basically, I'll achieve it."

As the owner of RB Customs in the Willowbrook area, Blum regularly meets clients' requests for bikes.

It takes Blum an average of three months to build a hand-crafted chopper from scratch. A base model starts around \$25,000.

Chris Gangi, one of Blum's customers, is in the process of building a \$60,000 dream chopper.

"I took my design and my ideas to him," Gangi said, "and I wanted him to fine-tune those ideas and turn them into something really radical and extreme."

Blum is no doubt enjoying the chopper's triumphant return to society, and also works on trucks and cars.

"I enjoy taking something that's beat up and old, and turn it into an eye-catching, fast, loud, obnoxious toy," Blum said.