



Kalamazoo Choppers
**Local custom shop
 gains in popularity**

BY SCOTT JUNGMAN

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

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SHIRING CLEARLY/SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Kalamazoo Choppers founder Andy Boersma puts the final touches on his latest custom bike, which he estimates will have a price tag of around \$50,000. Boersma plans to have his latest work of art ready for display at Sunday's motorcycle swap meet in Wings Stadium.

KALAMAZOO CHOPPER

Custom motorcycle shop a local take on popular cable reality show

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The often hilarious exploits of Paul Teutul Sr., his son, Paul Jr., and the rest of the Orange County Choppers crew have made the Discovery Channel's reality show "American Chopper" a cable TV cult success.

At Kalamazoo Choppers, the custom work on motorcycles is just as impressive, but without all the drama that draws a wide audience to the popular TV series.

"Don't ask me when I'm going to have my own show," said Andy Boersma, who opened up Kalamazoo Choppers a year ago at 6740 Lovers Lane in Portage. "But that show definitely helps the business."

Boersma's local shop customizes Harley Davidsons with the same trick handle bars, chrome fenders and exhausts as the OCC shop, which is based in Rock Tavern, N.Y.

But reality also hits during the summer months at Kalamazoo Choppers with sim-

ple, tedious engine repairs.

"We get younger and older riders," Boersma said. "I think the younger are a little more interested in the bike-building aspect of what we do. The older group is more or less looking to just have their own bike worked on."

"We do a little bit of everything for everybody."

For those who want more out of their motorcycle than the basic design that comes out of the factory, Kalamazoo Choppers is one of only a few local shops in the area to get it done. Most customers come in looking for a bike design that best fits their personality.

"People just see stuff on TV and in magazines and get an idea," Boersma said.

That's when Boersma's expertise kicks in. It takes about a month to build a bike with the help of his lone assistant. They use lathes, cutoffs, bandsaws, grinders and sanders. But most of the key tools come right from the standard toolbox.



In addition to creating and customizing motorcycles, Kalamazoo Choppers also serves its customers with a fair share of simple engine repairs and service.

Kalamazoo Chopper

After the body is complete, about another two months is spent waiting for painters, chromers and porcelain coaters, who give the motorcycle that final touch.

"Waiting on other people is the hardest part of the job," Boersma said.

Boersma's latest work, an all-silver chopper the shop created from scratch, is nearing completion. It was one of a pair of bikes that Kalamazoo Choppers has built to take up the winter months, when the motorcycle repair business slows down.

"We've got to do something in the winter-time," said Boersma, who personally funded the construction of both bikes. "Hopefully

by next winter, we'll keep letting people see what we can do and they'll be more interested to have something built."

His newest bike, a low-rider with bright chrome exhausts and a sleek, silver paint job, took around three months to complete.

"This is more of a show bike," Boersma said of the shop's newest work of art. "But it will definitely go. It'll haul a--. We put nitrous on it and everything, but it's not really a daily rider."

Boersma hopes to have the latest bike completed to display at Sunday's first motorcycle swap meet at Wings Stadium. Another swap meet is also coming up April 4 at the DeltaPlex in Grand Rapids.

"There's usually just a handful of bike-makers that will be there," Boersma said. "It's a good platform for us to show our stuff and get the word out a little better. There's still people out there that don't know we're here."