



DR SPROCKET'S COLUMN

KNUCKLEHEAD

After my 1965 Pan and '67 Shovel, my first Knucklehead showed up in the form of a rough basketcase for the princely sum of \$500. I had some ducats put away and decided to let Tom Burke and his crew at B&O Cycles on Alameda and Alamitos in Long Beach have a go at it.

Tom's shop was a large brick building with huge glass windows in front. It had a small loft in the rear where we could usually be found sampling the newest local herbal remedies.

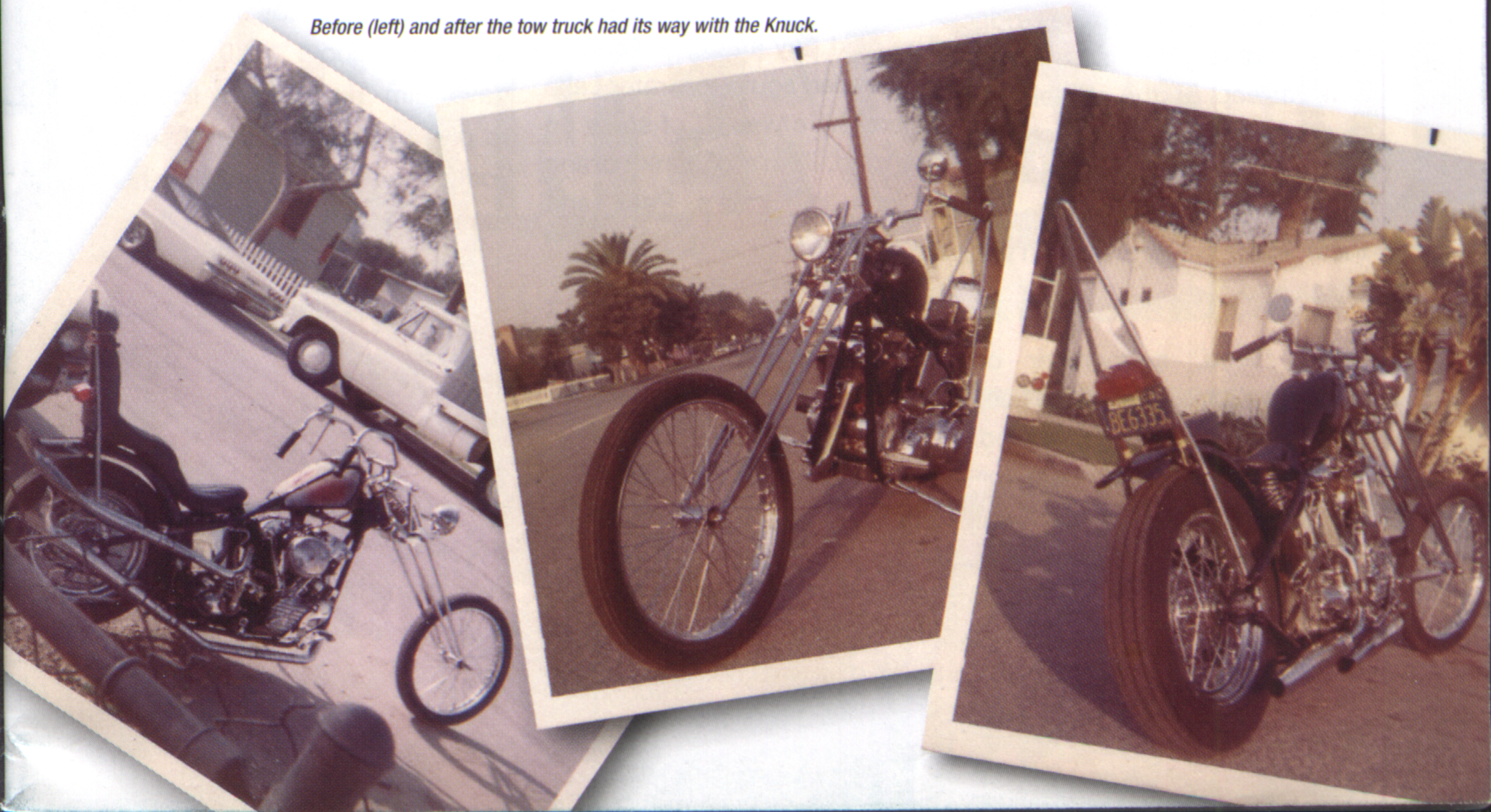
The "working" girls in the neighborhood would stick their heads in the door and check us out several times a day. Tom was good friends with Dick Allen and sold his spoke wheels, 2 into 1 exhaust, and springer forks. He also sold Wayne girders.

Tom had a motor man – besides Pat Leahy – who would build motors for him for a couple of months to get enough money to get back home to the east coast then save enough back there to come back west again. He built me a good motor and Tom had

his painter do the frame and tinware. It was the only machine I ever had built for me.

One night just after it was finished I left home in Hawaiian Gardens headed to Long Beach and a drunk tow truck driver swung a lefty right in front of me and left my Knuckle on his hook. When I bounced off the ground and reached him through his window he tried to put me into a car. I bailed and they found him two days later. The insurance paid like a slot machine and after I gave it a new mold and paint

Before (left) and after the tow truck had its way with the Knuck.



job it was back up and running. I liked it better the second time around and rode it many many miles before selling it to relocate in NorCal.

Tom and his crew used to have some great rides start from his shop. There's a couple that come to mind after all these years. A group of about twenty riders left B&O to ride through Ortega Canyon on Hwy 74 to Lake Elsinore to watch the Grand Prix with racers Bud Ekins and Steve McQueen competing.

Before we left most had a chew off my hash ball I always carried for medicinal purposes. Tom was riding Von Dutch's Volkswagen-powered C-cab trike. Some stopped at the Lookout Cafe from which you could look down on the town of Lake Elsinore. Some never made it that far. They ran the race right through the middle of town. Things got fuzzy after that but I do remember getting back home that evening. I wondered what happened to Tom so I rode back to the shop and found him "asleep at the wheel" so to speak with the trike wedged up against his back door in the alley. He had no idea how he got there. "Just a pinch between the cheek and gum."

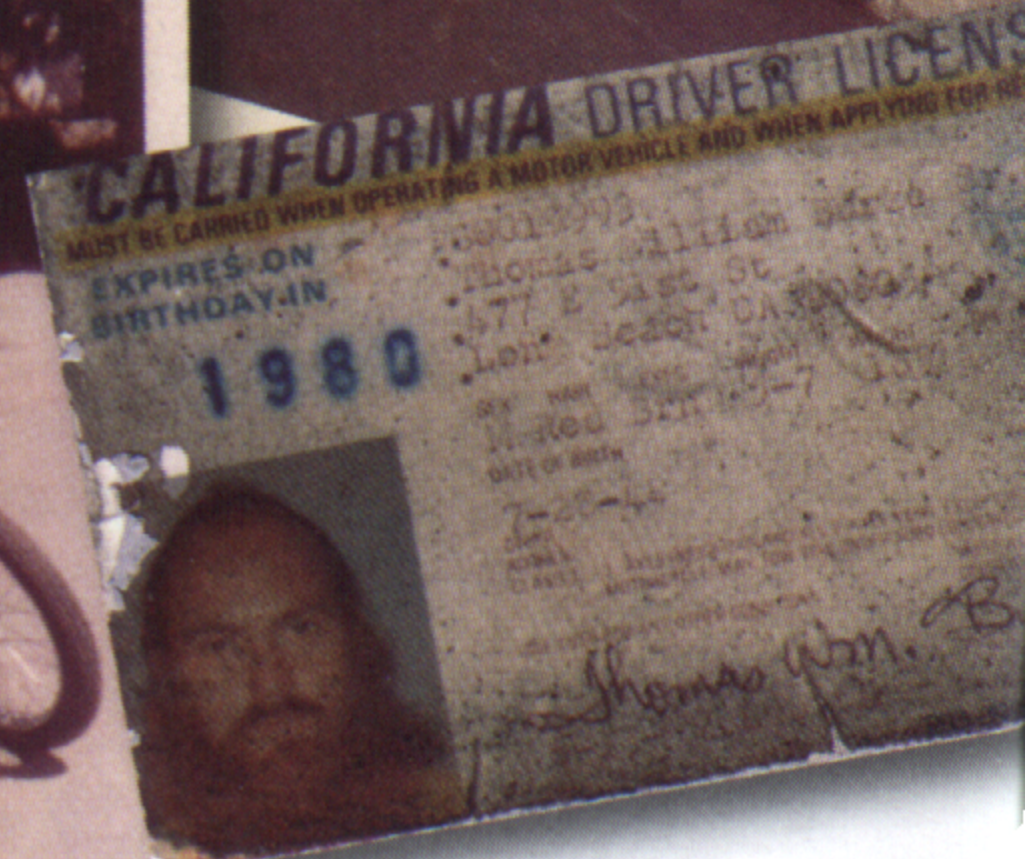
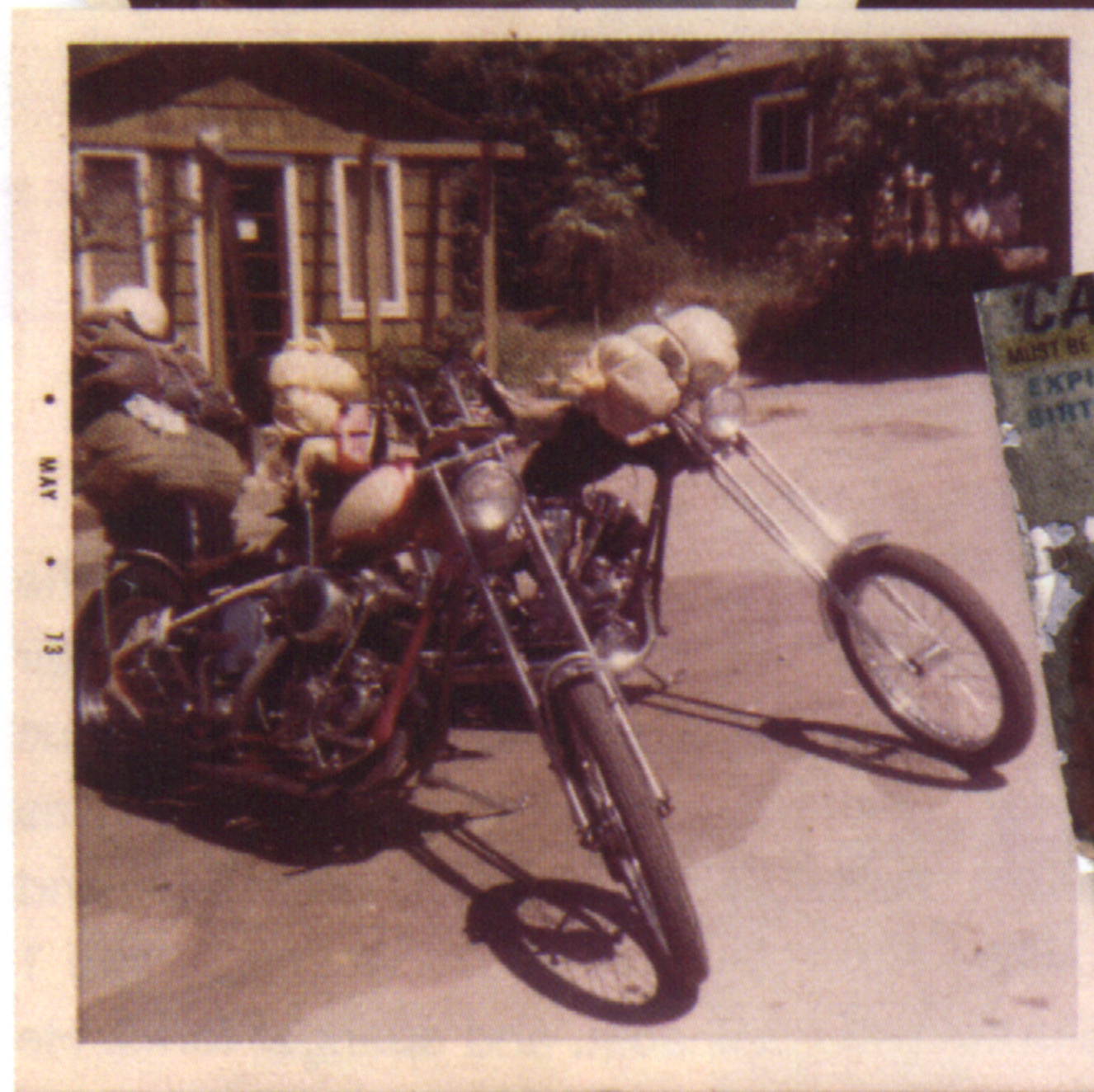
Tom's friend, a member of "Brother Speed" in Florence, Oregon was getting married and wanted us to ride up for the occasion. Tom, Quida, another employee, myself and a youngster I'll call "Junior" hit the road north. Junior and I lost everyone just north of L.A.

at a gas stop and didn't see them again till we hit Florence. We were both riding Knuckles with 18" over girders, Wassell peanuts, and tall sissy bars... Long Beach style. There must have been at least 100 long bikes down by the river in front of a large saloon.

The next day after the wedding we headed south to Crater Lake where there was 6" of snow on the road. Tom's oil tank sprang a leak in Grant's Pass and we repaired it at a small H-D dealer's shop which was in his backyard garage. Junior spaced out at another gas stop and we watched him fly by us heading south. We found him a few miles down the road with a dropped valve. We pushed it into a chicken coop and he rode on my P-pad for the next 600 miles to Long Beach. We stopped in Solidad so Tom could visit C.J.

Junior never went back for his Knuckle. He sold it and hitchhiked to Alaska. He stumbled out on to the highway after being in the backcountry for close to a year and the first car took him straight back to Long Beach. You can't make this stuff up! P.S. My friend Greg seen Tom about 1980 and he gave him his driver's license to give to me. Last time I seen Tom was 1975, a year after his terrible accident, and I was headed north to live.

What a surprise it was after 37 years to see him and Quida show up on 'American Pickers' with the Von Dutch custom BMW-powered XA. I about fell out of my chair. To know that they were together and well made me smile so wide my ears hurt.



The wedding procession in Oregon (top), at Big Sur headed north (left) and Tom Burke's license.