



ROCKETBIKE

Design Team

In the shop, Jim and TK find that Nail is already fabricating chassis parts, and Nitro has been working on a cooling system for the rocket engine. These things are only designed to run for a quick short burst.

The tail pipe gets extremely hot, very quickly, and will melt if it's not allowed to cool down, but the ultimate plan for the vehicle they are building requires this rocket to run for longer periods of time.

Jim looks at the cooling system, and is amazed. It's ingenious, and it should work. Nobody has ever come up with anything like this before. Nitro is quick to tell him that TK had a large part in designing it, and came up with a way to tie the cooling system in with the H²O-S system on the rocket.

TK says, "I just put Nitro's ideas in the computer to see what would come out." Jim realizes that Nitro and TK are one very strong design team.

Nerissa, Betty and Celeste decide to run into the small town that's nearby. There's a couple of antique shops and Betty loves to rummage around in those places. Nerissa needs to go to town anyway. They have a warehouse there, and among other things they keep t-shirts in it, and she needs to pick up another load of unprinted shirts for the silk screening shop. They came back from San Francisco with several large orders for shirts, and the silkscreening shop is going to have to run overtime to fill them.

Stuff

At the warehouse, Celeste is amazed by what she sees. Besides t-shirts, there are bits and pieces of Terry's and Nitro's projects over the years. There are race cars, motorcycles, race boats, pieces of airplanes, all kinds of engines, and who knows what else. What an unbelievable pile of stuff!

Celeste is drawn to one thing in particular, perhaps because it's the largest thing there and is hard to miss. In the back of the building is a huge unlimited hydroplane. It's so big that it's on a trailer

that tilts it up on its side, so it can be legally moved on the roads.

As she works her way back to it, Celeste sees that it has what appears to be some sort of jet engine in it. It's definitely one very wild looking boat. Nerissa notices Celeste's interest in the jet hydroplane and walks up.

"Terry's always wanted to set a world speed record on water," she explains, "and this is one of the designs they've been experimenting with. There's several others here, but this is the latest one."

Celeste's mind is already working overtime. There's a promotion that she's been thinking about that this would fit into just perfectly. Tilted up on its trailer, the Jet Boat is over eleven feet high and thirty feet long. It's like a giant mobile billboard.

Just then, Betty walks in with a lamp she bought next door at the antique shop. She looks around at all the stuff in the warehouse and just shakes her head. "Jim would go crazy here. There's enough stuff to keep him tinkering forever."

They all laugh, get the cases of T-shirts loaded in the pickup, and head back. Arriving back at the farm, they go to the shop to unload the T-shirts, and find the guys going full speed. Nail and Terry are building chassis pieces while Jim, Nitro, and TK work on the operating and cooling systems for the Rocket Engine. It's all moving along quite nicely and they feel they should be ready for the first test of the rocket engine with the cooling system on it in the next few days.

Seattle

They've decided to take a day off and go to Seattle. Everyone gets a bonus out of the proceeds of the race with Bo, and there's shopping to do. Also planned is a visit to the Boeing Museum of Flight. Early in the morning they all pile in the van and take I-5 south towards Seattle.

First thing on the agenda is the museum at Boeing Field in south Seattle. There's something for everyone here. Jim and Nitro are attracted to the aircraft from the 1940's and 50's, especially the high powered fighters. They both give the beautifully restored Corsair an A-plus. TK and Nail think the SR71 Blackbird is the ultimate, while Terry is drawn to the sea planes and flying boats. He has always liked the idea of boats that fly! The twins love it all and can't get enough.

Nerissa and Betty seem to be most drawn to the very early planes. To Nerissa the spidery designs of the first flying machines seem very close to nature, and Betty feels that with their beautiful woodwork and finish they are much like other fine antiques. Celeste likes the space vehicles and displays. She's always been very interested in outer space.

Starfighter

But out of all the aircraft on display the one that draws them all to it is the F-104 Starfighter. They stand in awe of it. Nitro is the first one to say, "That's the look."

"Just like a rocket ship," adds TK.

"Ballistic," Nail sums it up for everyone.

The first stop after the museum is an auto dealer, where they pick up a new Tracker, a car small enough that it can fit in the Bikester trailer without taking up much space. They can take it along to the races with them. The twins immediately fall in love with the little car. TK looks at it and questions, "Hand controls?" Nitro just smiles, which TK decides means yes.

"Outstanding," thinks TK.

Nerissa, Betty and the twins will take the Tracker and do some shopping, while everyone else takes the van to pick up various materials they need, plus stop at the machine shop to drop off the blueprints for parts to be built. Then it's to the computer store for a major shopping spree. TK has spent hours putting together his wish list.

After all the shopping and errands are done, they all meet for dinner at a well known restaurant on the Seattle waterfront. Everyone orders seafood, which is the specialty here, except (of course) for TK, who orders (you guessed it) a Swiss cheese burger with Miracle Whip, and the twins, who have the same.

“Oh no,” thinks Celeste, “It’s a cult!”

Luckily they don’t have Tater Tots here, so TK and his followers settle for French fries, and, trying to get in the spirit of a seafood restaurant, they have them with tarter sauce.

“Not bad,” thinks TK, “but next time I must remember to ask them if they can make the tarter sauce with Miracle Whip.” After dinner, they take the van and the new Tracker, and head back up the freeway for home.

Just Like Christmas

TK is down in the shop before the sun comes up, putting his new computer system together. This is the ultimate!

An ultra fast CPU with super-fast processor, mega-memory, and the latest, trickiest software! This is a dream come true for TK. Everybody gathers together for a big breakfast.

This kind of ‘family get together’ thing at meals is all very new to Nail, who has been on his own almost as long as he can remember, but he’s starting to enjoy the talk and togetherness.

Parking Lot Show

After breakfast, Celeste outlines her ideas for a major promotion using the jet hydroplane: a mobile show, consisting of the boat and one or two race bikes.

The boat tilted up on it’s trailer would be visible from a long distance and draw people to the display which would be set up on the parking lots of supermarkets and shopping centers. This would be a charity promotion, mostly involved in collecting for the local food banks – trading Bikester items (posters, etc.) for donations.

Celeste knows that there shouldn’t be a need for Food Banks – but there is - - there are way too many people who are hungry. This promotion will not only collect food and money for the food banks but will also stimulate people to think more about giving in the future.

Everybody is enthused about this project, especially Nerissa and Betty, who are going to be Celeste’s partners in putting this one together. It’s definitely a ‘Go’!

Rocket Fishin’

For the next three weeks everyone is very busy. Celeste, Nerissa, and Betty are quite involved with putting together the food bank show, getting T-shirt production up to the point where it can fill the new orders, and taking Betty up to Canada a couple of times to cruise the antique shops.

The guys are totally buried in the rocket project and are working on it day and night. The tests of the rocket engine with the cooling system go flawlessly, and now they are concentrating on the vehicle itself.

Jim and TK take some time off to run down to Seattle to the University of Washington, where TK speaks to the engineering department professors, something Ben has set up, and they pick up several extremely advanced programs from the Engineering School’s computer department. TK is invited back to give a full series of lectures. Jim also gets in some fishing, after all this is a vacation: “Got to do the retired thing you know.”

Nail and Celeste even get a chance to go down to Seattle and check out the music scene. Seattle

is where it's happening for Punk and Grunge music, and Nail is a "Grunger", so Grunge music is where it's at.

Bad Dude

The day comes when Nitro and Nail fit the last body panel in place and they all stand back to look at their creation.

"Wow! that's mega cool," says TK.

"It's more than cool," says Nitro, "It's positively glacial."

They all look at each other and laugh. Sometimes it seems like Nitro is playing on a totally different field than everybody else.

However, they all agree on one thing. This dude is mean looking. It has the snarly look of the F-104 Starfighter they saw at the museum, but Terry will ride it like a bike.

"This is going to be one wild ride!" thinks Terry.

The bottom and lower edges of RocketBike are very aerodynamically shaped. It's the result of many hours of calculations and design by TK and Jim, as well as lots of consultation with Ben. The new computer system has definitely proven its worth; it's been running constantly on this project.

"I think maybe we're ready to test this baby," says Nitro. Everyone agrees.

China Lake International Airport

The strange little group of happy campers in the middle of nowhere has grown since last time. Beside the Bikester truck and trailer, Nail's rig is parked by the side of the abandoned runway. A dust cloud on the road announces the arrival of Jim's bus. Jim has swung by Ben Carter's place in Lancaster, where he dropped off Betty to visit with Lupé and picked up Ben. Now everyone is here, including the complete engineering department.

RocketBike is already unloaded, sitting along side the trailer being readied for it's first test. Nitro, Nail and Terry are checking out the systems and fittings to make sure everything works and nothing is loose, while TK adjusts the small transmitter on the bike that will send data back to his computer and give them voice contact with Terry during a run. Celeste is putting together the video equipment they have brought along to record the test.

Jim parks the bus and Jim and Ben are almost immediately huddled over RocketBike with everybody else getting it ready, checking systems over and over to make sure there will be no problems.

The Test

The time comes to try it out. Terry makes a couple of slow passes up and down the runway. Then they check everything again to make sure all systems are A-OK and ready for a fast pass.

Nail and Celeste take off on their dirt bikes for their monitoring positions. Each has a video camera and a walkie-talkie that is in contact with both TK at the trailer and Terry.

Nitro gives Terry last minute instructions on the profile of this test run and Terry just nods his head. Nitro knows that once Terry is out there feeling all that power, he will do what ever he can get away with. But Nitro also knows that Terry won't do anything stupid, and whatever he tries will be something he's already thought out, and knows will work.

Nitro shakes Terry's hand, and walks over by the trailer. TK is in front of the monitor with Jim and Ben watching the data start to flow, cascading across the screen while Terry starts turning on systems on the bike.

Nail and Celeste call to report that they are in position. TK looks over at Nitro and gives him the signal to let him know that all the readings say “Go” and Nitro gives Terry the thumbs up sign.

Light the Candle

Terry hits the ignition button and disappears in an explosive cloud of dust and steamy exhaust with a loud roar! Nitro and TK turn anxiously to the monitor as Terry is accelerating so fast down the runway that he’s already nearly out of sight.

Terry struggles against the tremendous G-force and pushes forward to control the bike as it accelerates even harder than SuperBike at its best. TK, Nitro, Jim and Ben watch the data flashing across the screen recording the astounding acceleration. With growing confidence, Terry leans forward on the bike and gives it more power.

At the first check point, Celeste watches through her viewfinder as RocketBike appear’s and disappear’s almost instantly. At the monitor Nitro and TK look at each other. Both are quite worried by the speed Terry is reaching. This is much faster than was planned for the run.

Terry grins and relaxes, ready to go for it, no matter what Nitro says, he wants to find out now. Terry looks down and presses the blue button on the handlebars. With a noticeable jolt, short delta wings extend instantly from side compartments on the bike, giving it another two feet of width and a massive increase in lifting surface.

The turbulence from all the extra lift immediately rocks the bike and Terry has to hang on to the controls as it stutters and skims across the flat.

Wild Blue

TK, Nitro, Jim and Ben are all watching intently as the position mark diverges from the baseline on the screen and new data starts to appear indicating altitude.

Nitro looks over at Terry’s parachute sitting just inside the door of the trailer, shakes his head, and says “Terry’s going for it.” The other three huddled around the monitor look at him, all very concerned. “Terry knows what he’s doing,” says Nitro, trying to calm their fears, and then adds under his breath, “Usually knows what he’s doing.”

Nail, at the final checkpoint, scans back down the runway with his video camera. Terry’s nowhere in sight.

Suddenly the sound of RocketBike hits him like a ton of bricks, almost knocking him over! He looks up to see RocketBike disappear overhead with a roar.

Terry watches the ground sink below him as he eases the throttle forward. “Flying at last!” Terry is realizing a life long dream. As he grows more comfortable with the controls, he flies the bike in gentle arcs above the flat desert. Flying on a bike, what more could there be!

Air Traffic “Control”

On the ground, several miles away, the Chief Controller at the nearby airbase is alerted as Terry penetrates restricted military airspace. He immediately scrambles a fighter to intercept and make visual contact.

Unaware, Terry is really getting into this flying deal, swooping down low over the trailer and then pulling up fast to blow everybody’s mind down there. He has no idea that each swoop and dive is mystifying a room full of very serious air traffic controllers.

Before long, he hears Nitro on the radio telling him he’s been up there long enough, and it’s time to land, but he shouts back “No way.” He *has* to stay up a little longer. This is not just as good as it

gets, this is much better than it gets!

Just as Terry is getting to the point in confidence that he feels he can do anything with RocketBike and fly it anywhere, there is a sudden burst of turbulence. Terry looks to his left as a jet fighter drops from the sky and pulls slowly parallel with him traveling at the same speed.

An unbelieving Pilot stares across the narrow gap between jet and bike as he radios his confirmation. "It looks like a guy on a - er, like a guy on some kind of jet motorcycle!"

Terry and the pilot lock eyes. Terry sees that same look in the pilot's eyes that he saw in Bo's eyes when Bo saw him sliding sideways across the finish line at Sonoma.

The pilot's radio crackles, "You'd better come back now." "Yes, I think maybe you're right," replies the pilot.

He shakes his head and rolls off to the side, heading back for his base. Terry throttles down and sinks gently toward the runway below.

Meanwhile, at the Farm

Nerissa and the girls sit saying nothing as the silver eagle they had been watching soar above the bluffs settles gracefully on the beach. They know that Terry is safe.

Innocent Until Proven Airborne

Back at China Lake, they see the jet interceptor come in low, and they know that Terry probably strayed into military airspace. But when the interceptor leaves, rather than forcing Terry down or escorting him back to its base, Nitro figures: "Maybe we can fake our way out of this."

As Terry touches down on the runway and coasts towards the trailer, Nitro notices a dust cloud off in the distance heading toward them. He radios Terry, "Park the bike on the other side of the trailer! We've got visitors!" As RocketBike disappears behind the trailer the approaching vehicle is close enough that Nitro can see it's a military jeep. The gang go into their 'look innocent' mode. TK throws a jacket over the computer gear, while Nitro pours lots of charcoal starter on the barbecue and tosses a match on it.

By the time the jeep containing four military types pulls up, Nitro is wearing a "Kiss the Cook" apron and turning burgers on the grill. It looks a little strange that the barbecue has flames two feet high, but Nitro thinks, "Maybe they won't notice."

Off to the side, TK bats shuttlecocks at Jim over the badminton net that Celeste and Nail put up earlier. Ben has become an 'old guy', and is reclining in a lounge chair with a book, seemingly half asleep.

Caught?

A grim faced Captain and three MP's walk up and survey the scene. "Burger?" offers Nitro.

"Uh, no thank you," replies the Captain, caught somewhat off-guard as he looks at the leaping flames. "You guys haven't seen anything unusual out here, have you?" he asks, as Nitro smiles innocently over the unruly grill. The officer looks to the side and notices a small black kid in a wheelchair playing badminton with an older guy. As the shuttlecock whiffles outside TK's reach, the Captain just shakes his head.

"Nah, just brought the kid out for a little camping," says Nitro, motioning over his shoulder at TK.

At that moment Terry comes walking around from the other side of the trailer still wearing his silver fire suit. The Captain looks at Terry and rolls his eyes, thinking: "This is getting weirder by

the minute.”

He asks Terry, “What kind of outfit is that?”

“UV protection, ozone layer is going away you know,” Terry answers, pointing up at the sky. “Can’t be too careful.”

The Captain just stares at Terry, thinking: “New Agers!”

Just then one of the MP’s says “I know who these guys are, they’re the ‘Bikesters’. I’ve seen them race on television.”

Another MP adds, “Yeah, and they were out here involved in that drug bust a couple of months ago.”

“I know that!” snaps the Captain, obviously not liking the idea that enlisted men might know anything he wasn’t aware of. “In fact, you guys always seem to be out here when anything strange is going on.”

Nitro just shrugs his shoulders. “Hey, we’ve been coming out here for years to camp; usually nobody else is ever around.”

The Captain looks around and suddenly realizes that his MP’s aren’t standing behind him anymore, they are all over getting autographs from Terry. “Hey, you guys are on duty!” he barks, “Let’s check this area out.”

Just as the Captain starts to walk over to look on the other side of the trailer, Ben puts down his book and stands up. The Captain recognizes him immediately, and snaps to attention. “Dr. Carter! I didn’t realize you were here sir,” stammers the Captain.

“Yes, and these are my friends,” says Ben, waving a hand towards the odd little group, which has now been joined by Celeste and Nail.

“Then I assume there are no problems here,” the Captain concludes.

“Correct,” replies Ben, looking over at the flaming barbecue and thinking, “Except for some very well done burgers.”

After the Captain and his MP’s have left, the coals in the barbecue are allowed to burn down, and Nitro sets about cooking some real burgers. Standing around the barbecue, Terry recounts how exceptional it is to fly on a bike, especially a very fast one. Over by the computer TK, Jim and Ben are already pouring over the data generated by the test. RocketBike is a not only a reality, it’s a smashing success!

Chapter 8

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