

Motoring ahead with Harley innovation

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The Harley-Davidson brand is iconic. Not only do fans get a thrill from riding their bikes, they customise them too; and then they buy the branded jacket and t-shirt to boot.



Juan Mouton (centre)

Harley-Davidson Africa recently partnered up with epic action sports festival Ultimate X happening in Cape Town later this month, at which the latest Dark Custom models will be on show. The partnership follows the South African launch of the Harley-Davidson Dark Custom Street 750 motorcycle at Ultimate X in 2015. The 2016 line-up of the popular Dark Custom range includes the Iron 883 and Forty-Eight motorcycles, said to be hard-nosed machines that offer an authentic, affordable experience to a new generation of urban riders.

Harley-Davidson styling director Brad Richards had this to say about the range: "It's about the beauty of the nuts and bolts, the steel and rubber and the heart of the machine ... Dark Custom reaches back to our styling roots, but also invites the rider to move forward, to make the Dark Custom motorcycle his or her own with accessories, ingenuity or riding experiences."

We got in touch with Harley-Davidson Africa's marketing manager Juan Mouton to discuss Dark Custom, design philosophy and the customer-led innovation that keeps the brand's name on bikes, lips and t-shirts more than 100 years since the first Harley was manufactured.

■ *Tell us about the Dark Custom range. What makes it unique?*

Juan Mouton: Start with a dark canvas. Add horsepower and soul. Then make it your own. The Harley-Davidson Dark Custom movement strips a motorcycle to its mechanical essence and the motorcycling experience to its rebellious core – the quest for freedom and self-expression.

■ *Would you say Harley-Davidson bikes stick to a certain design aesthetic?*

Mouton: At Harley-Davidson, our design philosophy is this: Form follows function, but both report to emotion. The emotion that heritage invokes is important to our riders and it's a huge part of what attracts new customers to the brand. We are an icon and we believe in staying true to who we are, and the iconic look, sound and feel of a Harley-Davidson is what makes it so authentic.

■ *How does Harley-Davidson stay ahead of the innovation race?*

Mouton: We work extremely hard at being customer-led and innovating with them. Our Rushmore product in the Touring range is a great example of innovation led by consumers. From touch screen infotainment systems to 90 degree air inflow valves on the tyres, every bit of Rushmore was created to keep our riders riding and discovering more of the world.



▣ **What trends do you predict in motorcycle manufacturing and design going forward?**

Mouton: Long term electric vehicles are gathering momentum and the commercial and environmental need to shift to alternative fuel sources will continue to drive this. The Project LiveWire experience, showcases our first electric motorcycle (the LiveWire) through a customer led, grass roots approach to product innovation.

Short term, however, the increase in urbanisation is a leading factor in manufacturing and design decisions across all brands. 50% of the world population is below 30 and live in cities. This crafts a demand for smaller, agile urban motorcycles that are not only good commuters through the traffic, but something cool that doesn't look out of place parked outside your Café Caprice's. The Street750 was developed for this exact purpose and it has sold at an incredible rate since we launched it in February 2015.

▣ **What can we expect from Harley-Davidson Africa in 2016?**

Mouton: Fuel increases, exchange rates, interest rates, traffic, e-tolls...all of these things add a burden to one's life, so we are re-enforcing our mission to sell time back into the grid. We want to get more people on our motorcycles to save them not only money but that ever dwindling asset...time. Right now you can get a Harley-Davidson Iron 883 for as little as R883 a month (T&Cs of course) with one years free insurance, two year service plan, on the road fees and 24 tanks of fuel to burn on us. There's never been a better time to own a Harley and join us in saying "screw traffic, lets ride!"

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