

The Fabulous Biker Boys

The Teutul brothers love to squeeze golf into a typical workweek at Orange County Choppers — much to the chagrin of the boss

BY BILL GIERING

Sons always remember moments like this. Maybe you're about 12 years old playing on the front yard and you realize you can run faster than your Dad. Or maybe the two of you are playing a ping pong match or a round of golf in your teens and you finally beat him. Finally you are almost an adult when the biggest moment comes, usually in a heated argument when you are both wrong but he holds the final card — it's his way or the highway.

You look at your Dad, your heart pounding, and the moment comes, the thought flashes: I wonder if I can kick his butt?



Teutul brothers Paul Jr. (far right) and Mike (left) are golfers, unlike their dad.



Davis Love III received a Chopper as a birthday present prior to the 2004 Buick Classic at Westchester Country Club.

That's the moment that Paul Teutul Jr. walks away from his dad and his work at Orange County Choppers (OCC) and goes to play golf just up the street at Scotts Corners Golf Course in Montgomery, N.Y. Paulie, as he is known, is addicted to golf but is not your typical golfer. Neither is his younger brother, Mike (Mikey). But spend a few minutes talking to them, and you realize this wonderful aspect of golf: The people who play, the reasons they play and the stories they tell are all part of the magnetism we have for this game. And it doesn't matter if the players wear Dockers or Doc Maartens when they hit the links.

The Teutul family owns and operates Orange County Choppers out of a smallish shop building in Montgomery (Orange County), New York, about an hour north of Manhattan. They are moving to larger quarters in Newburgh this spring, but you can bet that the entrepreneurial spirit that permeates the place will remain no matter how big they get. Paul Sr. had an ironworks business in town and, when things got slow about 10 years ago, he and

Paul Jr. started making motorcycles in the cellar of the family home. Their first few bikes got positive reactions at important motorcycle shows all across the country. One bike led to another, and today they have 70 employees who produce a new bike every two days (about 150 a year).

It's a true family-run business, with Paul Sr. and his sons in charge. Even so, it has grown into a global enterprise. OCC has two retail stores, including one at the Palisades Mall in West Nyack, N.Y., books, and a multi-million-dollar bike fashion and accessories business. They do promotional work and ads for companies like Intel and HP; they even have slot machines with their faces on them at Las Vegas casinos, and have built a custom bike for the Vatican!

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The bike for Davis Love III, presented to him prior to the 2004 Buick Classic at Westchester Country Club, was a 40th birthday gift from his wife and resulted in a surge in business for the company.

Oh, and they also have the hottest reality-TV show on cable TV. "American Choppers" airs on Tuesday nights on The Learning Channel (TLC), and the show, now in its fifth year, has turned the Teutul family into overnight international celebrities and put Orange County on the map as Chopper Central. The show is chock full of testosterone, pressure and tension, with a heavy helping of father-son conflict mixed in. The family team at OCC yell, curse, and slam tools in their passion to create art, art that comes in the form of contemporary custom motorcycles: Choppers.

OCC delights in building Choppers for celebrities and high-end charity events, often

centered around themes. Take the bike they built after September 11, to raise money for First Responders and affected families: It resembled a bright-red FDNY truck and was partially constructed with debris from the World Trade Center site. They also built a sleek pinstriped Chopper for New York Yankees catcher Jorge Posada, which was auctioned off and brought in considerable money for his foundation.

But when did the biggest, baddest bikes and black muscle tank tops become part of the traditionally genteel game of golf? Many golf viewers started watching "American Choppers" when OCC was building a bike for Davis Love III, which it presented to him prior to the 2004 Buick Classic at Westchester Country Club. The bike was a 40th birthday gift from Davis's wife, Robin, and the image of the quiet, conservative Love on an OCC Chopper resulted in a surge in business for the company.

Another soft-spoken Southerner, Scott Verplank, has a customized Chopper of his own. And just last year, OCC built two bikes in tribute to Byron Nelson for the 2007 EDS Byron Nelson Classic. One can only imagine the look on Nelson's face as he gazes down from heaven, watching the winner of his namesake tournament drive off on a custom-made Chopper, with 11 spokes in the wheels to represent

Despite their recent fame, Mike (below, right) and his brother Paul most enjoy crafting bikes in the shop.



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Lord Byron's 11 straight victories. Pure joy!

Last year in Orlando, in the center of the biggest golf show in the world — the PGA Merchandise Show — there was another OCC Chopper, this time part of a customer promotion for AHEAD Golf Apparel. What's this Chopper madness all about?

Jim Keenan, Director of Marketing at AHEAD, had an interesting reply: "We are always trying to do something innovative, and when I thought about Orange County Choppers we recognized the symmetries. Both our companies take something relatively straightforward and in turn become wizards at customization. It didn't hurt that our President, Ken Swartz, loved bikes also. The reaction at the show was tremendous."

So now you see how a relatively obscure outfit in the Hudson Valley foothills can get itself intertwined with golf on a variety of levels. And that's just fine with Mikey and Paulie, though perhaps less so with the bombastic boss, Paul Teutul Sr., who, suffice to say, does not share his sons' addiction to the game.

On TV the dad and sons all keep their emotions pretty close to their thin skin.

If you could imagine Woody Austin attempting to paint a delicate watercolor after missing five short putts in a row, then you can get the dynamics of this show. You are magnetized by it, but you don't know why.

Paulie is like a straight-away par four: what you see is what you get. He is a tough kid, a good jock and a bright guy who recognizes that the business started taking off way faster than anyone imagined. He is a somewhat reluctant TV star who would rather be playing golf, something we can all relate to. In fact, there have been some tapings of show segments that were delayed due to Paulie not being back yet from the course.

They say you can't judge a rider from his helmet, and you might expect Paulie to be exactly what millions of viewers see on the TV show. You'd be wrong. He's a warm, thoughtful, and engaging guy with a self-deprecating sense of humor, constantly reminding his pals not to take themselves too seriously, especially on the golf course.

He says he would really like



Bill Murray met with the Teutuls to pick out a custom-designed frame for his Chopper.

to improve his game. But that's not what they all say at Scotts Corners, where he and his brothers play every Wednesday night and on weekends. When asked about Paulie's short game, John DiMartino, who owns and runs Scotts Corners, says "Well, I'm not sure how he makes such creative and intricate bikes; his silky smooth touch doesn't always show up around the greens.

You need that kind of thick skin to be a regular at Scotts Corners, which makes it ideally suited for the Teutul brothers. Here's another example, courtesy of DiMartino, who shares that Paulie was a good football player at Valley Central High School in Montgomery: "Now he plays golf like he played football. He attacks it, he crushes it. Paulie gets his money's worth on every shot, he goes after it. Paulie has a little Happy Gilmore in him. He is like a lot of guys here; they think that length is everything, so he is pretty long, but mostly wrong. But he loves the game and sure has a good time playing."

That stands to reason. Practice is not what Paulie is all about, and even if it were, he would have trouble finding the time. "Work can really become a zoo some days," he says. "The business has grown so fast, and none of us were prepared for the attention, the stress and the work loads we have today. For me, golf is all about trying to find some balance in my life. It's all about the fun and hanging out with my friends and meeting interesting people."

His celebrity has allowed him to hang out with some *very* interesting people indeed. "I'm a huge New York Giants fan and I had the privilege to play with one of my all time

favorites, Michael Strahan, at the Murray Brothers Caddyshack Charity Golf Tournament a couple years ago. That was a thrill." Speaking of Bill Murray, he also received a customized Chopper from OCC.

Paulie has been using great tools at work all his life, so it's natural to wonder what tools he uses on the course. "I'm starting to change my bag around. I'm in the market for a new three wood so I can try and hit more fairways... the game is a lot easier from the fairways and I don't really lose that much distance. I also just switched my irons from the Titleist blades that I got from Davis Love to the Ping Rapture irons. I find them a lot more forgiving and easier to hit."

Could it be that Paulie is maturing, and his golf game evolving along with it? Perish the thought!

Mikey is the more laid-back of the Teutul brothers, and not as avid a golfer as his brother. With long curly hair and a quick wit, he provides instant comic relief at almost any moment, and asking him questions about golf yields some information that he perhaps should keep to himself if he ever tries to join a fancy country club.

"Oh, I have a great set of clubs. Most of them I got when my Granddad passed away. I have a couple eight irons with hickory shafts... I hit one of them pretty good, but I keep forgetting which one. I have a 'real' wood with a persimmon clubhead. And I also have a great pitching wedge I found on the course and didn't turn in. I still feel a little guilty about that. I should return it."

The stream of consciousness continues: "I always carry about 50 golf balls in my bag

because if I hit a really bad shot I just drop another one in the fairway near the longest drive in my group. That happens a lot."

It's incredible stuff, and it's clear that, just as no two Choppers are alike, neither are two Teutuls. Says Mike: "Sure I love the game, but I have different goals than Paulie. When I play I'm only looking for that one great shot in a round, when I not only hit it well but it goes where I want it to. I think that's true with everybody, most golfers just won't admit it."

We stress again that Paul Sr. isn't into golf. He is all business, 24/7.

Plus, he is more of a muscle shirt guy, and if you don't allow tank-tops then he doesn't want to play. Behind the handle-bar mustache and dark shades is a very supportive dad who recognizes the whirlwind ride he and his family have been on the last few years. That doesn't mean he likes it when they skip out on a gorgeous sunny afternoon to hit the links, but still, perhaps every "typical golfer" out there has something to learn from this most untypical golf family. ■

Bill Giering won a 2007 International Network of Golf Award for Golf Journalism. He writes from his home in Menands, N.Y.

What is a Chopper?

The official "American Chopper" website tells us that the Chopper is created by removing or chopping off unnecessary components from the bike. Who needs a front fender, big headlights, crash bar, or big seats? Chopping them off makes the bike lighter. Handle bars are higher than on traditional bikes, and are thus called ape hangers. The front tire is small and the rear tire is fat. This makes for a bike style that is unique and tailored to the rider.

But OCC carries this tailoring quite

a bit further. The bike they designed for Intel, for example, has a fingerprint recognition starter system and an on-board computer that displays the vitals of the bike, including oil pressure and speed.

Despite all the gadgets, Choppers are serious machines that demand talent and guts. When you're cruising down a country road at high speed, you know that the slightest mistake, the smallest loss of confidence can turn this day from glory to a disaster. Maybe golfers and easy riders have more similarities than differences.