



LIFE'S AN ADVENTURE

CATCH AND RELEASE

I was mad. I had driven two hours with a pal who asked me to help him buy his first bike. The lying creep selling the bike didn't like me at all when I asked why the front wheel had spokes and the rear wheel had a Comstar solid rim. The bike had obviously been crashed big time. The whole front-end was from a different motorcycle. The bike was shiny and ran great but the frame was bent. I could see paint flaking off the frame's down tube. When painted metal bends, the paint breaks and flakes. My buddy would have bought the bike if I wasn't there to notice the flaws.

Be careful when buying a used bike. Lots of motorcycle experience won't always help you make a smart purchase. In 1985, I read an ad for a 1981 BMW R100CS. I had never ridden a BMW before and knew very little about them. I did like the quirky, unique look of the boxer engine heads sticking out each side. It was in absolutely mint shape. The owner had a bike cover over top of a baby's blanket covering the bike and it had never been ridden in the rain. I was ready to buy it until the owner started it up. At idle the whole thing shook with a chug-chug-chug sound. When I revved it up I felt the whole bike move to the right and I thought the motor was about to blow up. I was really disappointed since it seemed in such great shape. I told an instructor friend who owned a boxer, he laughed and proceeded to start his bike up. It sounded exactly the same. My ignorance almost cost me one of the best bikes I ever owned. I bought it, put 100,000 km on it and sold it ten years later for exactly what I had paid for it.

The budget history of my motorcycle acquisition demanded that I usually sold the current ride in order to afford the next one. It's like fishing for me. I catch and release all but a few I

want to keep. Most of my 'next bikes' had larger motors or were newer than my last bike. I made a steady progression in engine size from 85cc in 1969 to 125, 175, 200, 250, 350, 550, 750, 900 to the largest GL1100 in 1981. I guess it was a safe way to slowly move up to faster and heavier bikes. Now I buy bikes to fit the use I want it for. It doesn't have to be bigger or newer. My favorite bike right now is a 1975 RS100B street bike. It's a hoot to ride.

[At idle the whole thing shook with a chug-chug-chug sound. When I revved it up I felt the whole bike move to the right and I thought the motor was about to blow up.]

Depending on your mechanical experience and how much time and money you want to invest, a rat bike could work for you if the price was right. I once had two and a half bikes donated to our newly formed off-road rider training school. My buddy who owned a street training program couldn't use the very tired and broken bikes anymore so he gave them to me. Two were in bad shape but with lots of elbow grease and some new parts they became great staff bikes. The third bike really wasn't a bike. It was four boxes of parts that used to be a street legal Kawasaki KE 125. My son was three at the time and we spent a great winter in the basement cleaning parts and polishing with steel wool and Autosol paste. The auto body shop at the local high school welcomed the tank and side covers. I had them painted racing green and then carefully assembled all the parts.

Most of the bike was there but I spent many hours at Grand Prix Cycle where Bob had an enormous collection of motorcycle parts in an old chicken barn. Eventually I was able to find a front rim, spacers and axle that fit the Kawasaki. The big day came in the spring and a buddy came over to help pull the bike up the basement stairs. I soon felt like the fool who built a boat in his basement since the bars were too wide to fit up the stairs so off the bars came. Once outside and the bars back on, it started right up. When my pal who gave me the bike saw it he said, "Hey, is that bike the same model as the piece of junk I gave you?" I smiled and said, "that is the piece of junk you gave me."

I thought it might help to have some tips for buying a used bike.

- 1) Find out as much info as you can on-line or over the phone. Why is the seller selling it? Is it in stock condition (pipes, motor etc.)?
- 2) Don't be surprised if the seller wants to meet in a public place rather than their home. If you are selling a bike, don't give your address and tell the possible thief that you are working Wednesday night.
- 3) I touch the engine case when I first see the bike. Did the owner start it up before I arrived to warm it up. A bike in need of a tune up will start better warm than cold.
- 4) Look at the overall condition. Do the left and right engine cases and pipes look similar vintage and condition? One side of a bike looking brand new could indicate it has been dropped on that side.
- 5) Check for vise grip marks on the speedo cable if it has one. The plastic nut that holds the cable on will show marks. Was it unhooked for the last few seasons?
- 6) Look for scrape marks under pipes,

levers and handlebar ends as well as on engine cases.

- 7) Look and feel for rust bubbles under the lip of the fuel tank. Look into the tank as well for rust.
- 8) Tire condition can tell how a bike was used. If the rear tire is bald only on the centre and side tread is great then perhaps the bike did lots of burn outs.
- 9) Look at how much chain adjustment is left. If there is no adjustment left, the chain and sprockets will need replacing. Also check sprocket condition. If the teeth are hooked in the direction of travel or worn down the sprocket will need replacing.
- 10) Check the oil. Ask when was it changed last? If the seller says, "You have to change the oil?" then leave quickly. I keep accurate records of all maintenance done to my bikes. I think it helps sell the bikes if the potential buyer has

confidence in how you treated it.

- 11) What shop did the owner have the bike serviced? Are there records?
- 12) Will the owner mind if the shop checks the bike over in a pre-delivery inspection. Most shops will do this for an hour's labour and prepare a list of all the parts and repairs needed to make the bike safe. That list may help you bargain for a better price or convince you that the deal is bad.
- 13) Is there an accurate ownership? Are there any leans on the bike? Get any promises of repairs done in writing.
- 14) On a receipt list the buyer and seller's name, model and serial number, vehicle identification number, the date, the price paid and the condition. Fit or unfit (in some provinces the street legal vehicle must have a safety inspection performed with ownership change).

- 15) Cash talks better than a personal cheque and has more bargaining power. I try never to insult when making an offer. I will list the legitimate issues, costs and then make an offer. If it is turned down then I will thank the person very much and leave them my number in case they change their mind.

Those are just a few things to check over. The best place to buy a used bike is from a dealer who will give some warranty on parts and labour. Buying used from a private individual can be a way to save a little money but you can also get burned easily. At least involve a knowledgeable friend if you are looking to buy used. If you have no friends, you will as soon as you get into our great sport. **MMM**

Ride safely!

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