

Oil Cooler Failures

Recently, during a leisurely two-hour ride, I began to smell oil burning. I assumed it was one of the "older" bikes I was following, since I was on my 2003 Electra Glide Ultra Classic sidecar combination. To my surprise, I looked down at the left side of the motorcycle and saw smoke. When I looked at the right side of the motorcycle, the entire right side of the engine, the sidecar, and my pant leg were covered with oil.

I immediately pulled off the road, checked the oil and found it was down about a quart. I called HOG roadside assistance to get the bike towed to the local H-D dealer. After two days of "evaluation," The technicians could not find the problem until they contacted the factory techs. The factory guys asked if the bike was equipped with an oil cooler. They told them, indeed it was. The factory guys told them to bypass the cooler and see if that stopped the problem. It did.

I was told I needed a new oil cooler and thermostat. They asked me how old the oil cooler was. I told them I previously had that same cooler on another Ultra Classic for about 30K, but I didn't see how a couple of metal plates with some tubes running between them could clog up. I suggested that they run some kerosene through the cooler and the thermostat and blow it out. They refused to do anything they described as "shade tree" mechanics and said they would be happy to leave the cooler bypassed, if I didn't want a new one installed.

Because I live in Florida and there is less air blowing across the engine in stop and go traffic due to the sidecar, I feel an oil cooler will help prolong engine life. In the end, they put on a new oil cooler and thermostat, changed the oil filter, topped off the oil, and charged me six hours of diagnostic/installation time. The bike has not blown any oil since.

However, my concern is, what caused the oil cooler to plug? I took the old cooler home and blew compressed air through it and nothing came out. I did the same thing with the thermostat. It seems to me that there must have been something in the oil itself that got lodged in the oil cooler. So, could this problem happen again even with a new oil cooler? I asked the dealer if it did happen again would they have any liability, since this was a new oil cooler and they installed it? He said, "No."

Should I have confidence in this motorcycle for long trips? Any thoughts on what could have caused the problem? If there was something in the oil, why didn't the oil filter catch it? Was the problem caused because the oil cooler was previously used?

Robert Heilman
Robert.Heilman@dep.state.fl.us

Since we don't know what was plugging the cooler, there is no way to guess how it got there (whatever it was). But, it is possible that air could pass through a restriction that oil cannot, so you might try to blow oil through the thing backwards, in hopes that the clog is still there and can be captured and examined. As far as confidence in the bike, if it's running well now, we would just ride it and be prepared to do another bypass if necessary to get on down the road.

Valve Noise Diagnosis

You seem to be able to find the source for various motorcycle problems. What do you know about the valve noises in the FJR1300, and what is the right fix?

Ray Slocomb
rslocomb@rockisland.com

Valve noises can come from many different things, and you don't give us any information as to the type of noise, or the condition under which it's happening (is the bike hot or cold, does it happen when accelerating, decelerating, running at constant speed, etc.?) That said, we first would check the valve clearance or lifter condition on any bike exhibiting valve noise.

But if that doesn't cure it, then perhaps you have a problem with valve guide clearance, or perhaps cam wear. But in these cases, any way you slice it, you are looking at a top end disassembly and inspection.

Twin Cam Bearings—Fixed?

Please help me out a little. I know about the Twin Cam bearing problems with the Harleys and the apparent reluctance on the part of Harley-Davidson to remedy the problem. My question is, are the 2004 Harley-Davidsons coming off the line with "new and improved" bearings, or are they susceptible to the same failure problem? I just bought a new Road King and assume the fix was made, but I want to know for sure. Thanks.

Peter Miller
Divecop@aol.com
Cornwall on Hudson, NY

All new Harley Twin Cam engines are equipped with the latest style cam bearings, however, our Twin Cam Owner's Survey (MCN, March 2004) revealed that there could yet be an ongoing problem. The 1999 and 2000-models identified by H-D as being susceptible to the failure accounted for approximately three-quarters of the reported failures in the survey. However, a quarter of the failures occurred in newer models, and there were cam bearing failures reported even in the 2004 models. Also, because the

failures appear to be mileage related—17,000 miles was average for bearing failure—and the average Twin Cam was ridden only 4000 miles/year, if you do the math, we may well see these figures rise over time.

Maxim Doesn't Rev To The Max

I bought a 1983 XS400 Yamaha Maxim with 20K from my neighbor in the summer of 2003. Being out of motorcycling for 23 years, I fell in love with it. Besides, the price was right, just \$300...or so I thought. I was informed it had not run for two years, with gas left in the system, and had carburetor problems. It also had a flat front tire and needed front brakes. Still, believing I had a good bargain, I pushed it to my garage.

But once it began to run, only one cylinder was working, so I took it to an expert. One carb was bone dry with rusted parts. The mechanic got both cylinders running, but engine rpm was limited to 3000. He said I needed a pick-up coil assembly, which Yamaha no longer had in stock. After locating a salvage yard at CycleTherapy.com who sent me one for \$100, the rpm was increased to 4000. Next step was to replace the CDI box (electronic ignition). Since these are \$400 new, I opted to go with one from the same salvage yard. (But there was no way to run a diagnostic on the used box.) This change gave no improvement. The bike was still cutting out on acceleration.

It was time to get a second opinion. I went to a Certified Motorcycle Mechanic. He concluded I needed new jets and another carburetor cleaning. By now it was winter and the bike sat for four months. Last week, I got to put 80 miles on the bike, running 93 octane gas with fuel injection cleaner added. Up to half throttle it performs well, but under a load or if you accelerate past half-throttle, it cuts out, surges and has no power, until I roll back on the throttle. Needless to say it's back at the shop. The mechanic says I probably need bigger jets.

In talking to others, I have been told to check for the following:

1. Sticking throttle valve
2. Bent floats
3. Bad rev limiter in CDI box
4. Bad plug wires

At this point I am very frustrated. If you could provide some guidance I would be very happy. At 47 and not having ridden for 23 years, I thought this would be a good starter bike.

BeetleGrinder

There are a few things that can cause the kinds of problems you are describing. The plug wires (or boots) are a possibility, as is a problem with the fuel level height (if the level is too low or the carb is not refilling

fast enough). But perhaps there is a more likely culprit. Since the bike surges at high speed it does not sound electrical, but rather that you are seeing a high speed lean condition. Considering the age of the bike, it is very possible that you have developed an air leak in the intake manifold between the engine and the carb. Another thing to check for is a vacuum leak between the carb manifold and the petcock (air going into the manifold will lean things out and the petcock won't fully open). We would check for things like that before thinking about a rev limiter problem or a jet change.

GL Working Part Time

I have a 1985 Gold Wing Limited, and the problem I have is more an aggravation than anything else. The elaborate onboard computer goes off, it could be anytime or anywhere. It leaves the instrument panel not working properly, neither does the onboard air compressor, also when this began happening the electronic cruise totally quit.

It has been to three dealers, two private repair shops, and I have questioned numerous individuals at shows and events. Nobody seems to know how to repair this or where to begin looking. Of course, some have said it was a question of replacing parts until the right one is found.

I'd appreciate any leads you can give me on this. My wife and I do enjoy this old bike.

Keith Mattingly
kmattingly@mcrecc.com
Hardinsburg, KY

In most cases when we see this kind of intermittent problem—technicians hate intermittents, because you never really know when it's fixed—we find that the problem is caused by either a loose connection, a bad ground bonding or corrosion in the connectors. The only thing to do is to trace each and every wire until you find it. It can be a long hard battle, good luck.

Tires Leaking Air Only When Riding

Last year my dealer installed a set of Metzeler 880 Marathon tires on my 2000 Kawasaki Voyager. Since then, these tires will lose air pressure whenever I ride it. However, they will strangely not lose any pressure when stationary, even over an extended period of time.

The dealer does not know what the problem is. However, next week they plan on removing the tires and reinstalling them.

We have inspected for air leaks around the rims and valve stems, and everything seems normal. I do not believe the stems were replaced when the new tires were installed.

Any information you can provide will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Jim LeBlanc
jimmarcy2@comcast.net

Two things come to mind: If you haven't already, pump the tires up to their recommended maximum inflation pressure and paint them with soapy water to try to determine the location of the leaks. Or, the other, try using a metal valve stem cap with a rubber seal, as it is possible that centrifugal force is able to slightly open the valve stem when running (this can be a real problem on race bikes because of their high speeds).

When you dismount the tire, we would carefully check the rim for dents, surface imperfections or rubber/dirt buildup. Note that so-called "liquid tire balancer/stop leak" products can etch aluminum rims or may leave residues that make tire sealing difficult. Also, the tires themselves should be checked to make sure their beads are not misshapen from poor mounting technique.

Sudden Chain Wear?

I have a 2003 V-Strom. It's the best ride I have ever had, and I have had a bunch, both American and imports. When the bike had 1000 miles on it last year, I went on a cross-country trip. I had tightened the chain twice before then. I take very good care of the chain; clean it with kerosene and use good quality lube and do very little dirt riding. The trip was just under 5000 miles and I never had to adjust the chain. Aren't O-ring chains wonderful!

I ended the year with 10k on the bike and adjusted the chain very little, just cleaned it. This spring I took a trip to Montana—821 miles to see my granddaughter. Before I left, I looked at the chain and it had about two inches of slack. I adjusted it and forgot about it. Riding back, I was having so much fun I did the whole 821 miles in one day. But about one mile from home, I heard a slight rattle as I took off in first gear. When I got to my garage I looked at the chain and it was dangerously loose.

I do not understand why this chain would stretch like a new one getting broken in when the bike has over 10,000 miles on it. I pride myself in keeping track of the mechanical stuff. What did I do wrong?

Paul Paine
pp2@cpinternet.com
Grand Rapids, MN

Well, sight unseen it's hard to tell. It may be that the chain was overtightened just before the trip home, or that you managed to unstick some slightly frozen links on the way back from your visit. But, you should also check the condition of the drive and

driven sprockets, in case the real wear has occurred there, and it only appears that the chain has recently evidenced major wear.

More On Marvel Mystery Oil

Al Robitaille states that Marvel Mystery Oil will cause a wet clutch to slip. In the GWRRA forum, many contributors recommend draining off a quart of oil and replacing it with MMO and running it for 150 or so miles before every third or fourth oil change, in order to clean the inside of the engine. I have done this a few times myself, and have not had any ill effects. What is the reality of this?

John King
john.king19@att.net

Okay, like many things about motorcycle maintenance, there are a lot of conditional pieces of advice. Although different riding styles and different clutch plate materials may react differently to "slippery" lubricants, we have never seen any problems with clutch slippage with any additives, including MMO. I have personally put several hundred thousand miles on bikes with all kinds of products in the oil (I get a lot of additives free to test) and have never had a problem with a variety of stock bikes (conditionally—normal road conditions, some hard riding, rarely going above 90 mph, and no wheelies). But as they say, "Your performance may vary."



Downtime Files

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of Daytona Beach, Florida.

Please keep in mind that since the AMI staff has not seen your motorcycle, the answers given are best-guess assumptions based on prior experience and education, and may not necessarily be correct. When in doubt, take your motorcycle to a qualified shop.

Send your typewritten questions and photos if possible to:

**MCN Downtime Files
P.O. Box 6050
Mission Viejo, CA 92690**

Send e-mail questions (with any attached images in jpeg format) to:

**editor@mcnews.com
Subject Line: Downtime Files**