Vulcan Leaking Oil Filter Cure—A Cause Of Head Gasket Leaks?

I am the owner of a 2003 Vulcan 1500L4 and, unfortunately, I had cold weather starting problems before Kawasaki acknowledged the issue. My question is this: About a month after Kawasaki's fix with the new type oil filter, I blew a head gasket in the front cylinder, which my dealer replaced. The dealership called Kawasaki about it and stated that they hadn't had a head gasket problem with any other Vulcan 1500, and questioned if the gasket failure could have been caused by the fix they had done to the filter, and if extreme oil pressure was now blowing out the head gasket instead of the oil filter seal.

I am very leery of this bike now. I sold my Harley to buy the Vulcan and now I'm having doubts and regrets.

Ken Turcotte
kjturk@juno.com
Pikeville, NC

Verify that your positive crankcase ventilation system is working properly. If so, and everything else is working right on the bike, it was probably just a coincidence, a fluke of timing. We don't think you really have any reason to be concerned.

Reader's GL1200 Squeal Prediction

Regarding RD Woolsey's query in the May '04 issue about the squealing '84 GL1200I Gold Wing, I can tell you with reasonable assurance that the squealing is not coming from the wheel bearings or the speedo sending unit. More likely it is coming from the speedometer itself.

Having owned a 1981 GL1100I Gold Wing for over 23 years and 400,000 miles and having replaced more than one speedometer, the sound RD describes is quite familiar to me—it's the sound of the speedo gears saying goodbye, especially in chilly weather.

You can find a replacement speedo in most any cycle-recycler's boneyard for a pittance, unless your bike has the rare digital dash (although if it's an '84 Interstate, I rather doubt it does).

Dave Vick
rigger@tds.net
Central Michigan

An Expert's Take On Chain Wear

Re: Paul Paine's letter in the July 2004 issue titled "Sudden Chain Wear." It doesn't sound like Paul has done anything wrong. What likely is happening is the chain has reached the end of its useful life. Chain wear (or elongation) is characterized by a curve that is very similar for all chains. There is a break-in section, a flat section and then the gradual upward curve section. The "T" axis is time, or it could be miles or revolutions or km, it just depends on what units you want to use for measurements. The "E" axis is elongation or wear, or commonly misnomered "stretch." Some chains have a larger or smaller break-in section, a shorter or longer flat section, and the same for the upward curve, depending on the quality of the components, grease, assembly, etc. Then user maintenance and environment come into play, also.

I suspect what is happening is Mr. Paine is likely in the beginning stages of the last upward slant of the wear curve—when the chain will wear rapidly relative to its previous performance. This happens for a couple of reasons: Nearly all of the sealed-in grease has been consumed and/or escaped, and the pins and bushings have worn through to a softer underlying material. So, ride it out as long as you can, then replace both sprockets and chain and ride some more! Regards.

Keith Foster
KFoster@reginausa.com
Product Engineer
Regina USA

Shiftless Shadow ACE

My 1999 Honda Shadow ACE (VT1100D2) has had an intermittent shift problem from 5th to 4th gear ever since I bought it in the summer of 2000.

Occasionally, when I'm slowing from 25–20 miles per hour, for example, the transmission will not shift from 5th to 4th gear even though I pull the clutch lever completely to the hand grip (as the owner's manual instructs) and depress the shift lever completely. The shift lever does not "grab" the next gear, no matter how many times or how hard I depress it. The transmission will only downshift when I release the clutch lever slightly and get the characteristic "clunk" from 5th to 4th gear.

This shifting problem has also occurred at other speeds and conditions, such as cornering or braking. And, it sometimes occurs when shifting from 4th to 3rd gear.

I first reported the problem to my local Honda service department at 600 miles and an additive was put in the oil which did not help. I returned the motorcycle again to the local Honda service department at 1500 miles and some unspecified clutch parts were replaced and the clutch freeplay was adjusted, which did not help either. I recently checked the clutch freeplay and it is properly adjusted. The shift lever is securely attached to the shaft.

I'd appreciate hearing what you and the MCN readers might have to say about this. Thank you.

Robert D. Ekholm
rekholm@optonline.net

There are a few things that can cause the kinds of problems that you are describing. If the bike had more mileage on it, we might suspect a bent or worn shift fork or worn shift drum. But because of the low mileage, we doubt that is the cause. Since the bike has had problems since early in its service life (you first reported it after 600 miles), there may be a misalignment or end-play situation in the shafts. The only way to really tell is by disassembly and inspection.

Vulcan Grinding Its Teeth

I own a 2002 Kawasaki 1500 FI Classic. Is there any word out on the starting systems on these bikes? One day I shut it off and the engine seemed to kick back. The next time I went to start it, it sounded like some of the teeth were missing off the starter. I pulled the starter off and it was okay and the gear the starter meshes with was okay, too.

While I had the starter out, I checked to make sure it was okay, and it sounded and worked like it should.The bike is just two months out of warranty, and I was wondering if Kawasaki ever took care of any circumstances like this.

Karl Fleege
KJF3@AOL.COM

It sounds like something shifted in the engine. You may want to check backlash in the gears to see if you are getting proper engagement. We don't know if this problem is widespread in this model (yours is the first case we have heard). Perhaps the other MCN readers can give us some feedback on this one.

GB500 Imitating Classic Brit Bikes

I have one of the nastiest of all problems—an intermittent cut-out. I have a 1989 Honda GB500 and I really like the bike. It has almost 7000 miles on it. While riding, the engine will all of a sudden simply stop firing. It seems to happen in all gears and does not seem to be related to weather or temperature. Generally, after waiting for a few minutes, perhaps 3–15, the bike will fire up again. Generally it won't misbehave again for days, but on occasion it has stopped repeatedly after traveling just a few more miles.

The battery is not being disconnected since the horn and lights continue to work. It also seems not to be related to fuel, since there is no sputtering or coughing.

There has always been plenty of gas in the tank and switching from main to reserve makes no difference. It just runs or it doesn't.

It appears to me to be an intermittent short in the ignition circuit, but I would appreciate your opinion and advice on how I might chase this down, what particular components to check, or any other tips you might have in locating this problem.

Thank you very much for your help.

S. Neil Rasband
rasband@beethoven.byu.edu

It sounds like you do, indeed, have an intermittent in your ignition system. If the problem was fuel related, the engine would not just stop, but rather gradually lose power. You may not be looking for a short, though. It is very possible that you are looking at an open circuit condition in either the triggering circuit, or in the power going to the coils. The first thing to check is the condition and fit of <u>all</u> connectors involved in the system. This includes the grounding wires/straps and connections in the multi-pin connector at the ignition module.

Check for the presence of 12 volts at the ignition coil while it's not working since the ignition box switches the return side.

Good luck, intermittents are the bane of technicians, since you never know when they are really fixed.

Punctured Near-New Tires

Yesterday I had a puncture in a Metzeler MEZ4 on the rear of my Suzuki SV 650. It was not a blowout, instead air gradually escaped over a couple of miles or so before I realized just what had happened. I don't know what caused the puncture, as nothing was in the puncture when I stopped. The puncture was about the size a 3" or 4" nail might produce.

I plugged the puncture using "The Tire Plugger," which was recommended by MCN some time back. The Plugger was easy to use and it worked—I made it the 90 miles home with no loss of air pressure.

The Metzeler has only about 700 miles on it so I don't want to spend another $170 on a new one, nor waste the natural resources necessary for making a new tire if I don't have to.

The last time I had a puncture was with a tube tire which I knew how to deal with.

My question to you is, can this tire be safely patched? The puncture is near the center of the contact patch. If it can, should the plug be removed or should the patch go over the plug? Or perhaps, should the head of the mushroom shaped plug be removed, leaving the stem in the puncture?

Great magazine, by the way.

Mike Johnson
mike-johnson52@webtv.net

We don't like riding on plugged or patched tires since it degrades the speed rating and reliability of the tire, and $170 is not that much considering that tires are such a critical safety item. That said, if the tire is working fine, the plug is installed right and the tire is holding air, why do anything more?

Discontinued After Four Years?

"We don't have that part anymore, too bad!" I had my H-D dealer install an H-D cruise control when I purchased my Road King new in 2000. The cruise is now not working and H-D has stated they can't fix it, replace it, or put a new model in, as they've discontinued that model and all its parts, and the new replacement only fits 2002 and newer bikes.

So my question is simply: Do motorcycle and auto manufacturers have any obligation to offer replacement parts for a specified time period? I thought I remembered reading somewhere that auto manufacturers were legally obliged to carry parts for 10 years. I'm looking for some recourse to take with H-D. You consistently produce the best motorcycle magazine on the market, keep up the great work!

J. S. Sutherland
jimsuth@us.ibm.com

As near as we've been able to determine, you're probably out of luck on this one. While vehicle manufacturers must agree, under the Uniform Commercial Code, to make parts available for 10 years, as you noted, the loophole you're caught in is that "parts" are defined as standard-equipment components necessary for the normal, legal operation of the vehicle.

As you noted, your cruise control, even though a H-D unit, was a dealer-installed accessory. As such, it is not a "standard" component of the vehicle, nor is it necessary for the normal operation of the vehicle.

We're afraid you will probably have to search salvage yards for your parts, or buy an entire used unit.

If any of our readers are better-versed on the applicable laws, we'd like to hear from them, but this is the best information we could come up with.

Re: Race Eye For the R1100S

As a budding motorcycle mechanic I read the article "Race Eye," by Bill Shaw, with great interest. I am always looking for information on performance modifications that use the holistic approach in understanding the effect of changes to the system.

Coming from the American V-Twin world, I see a lot of folks who buy aftermarket intake and exhaust systems to increase the performance of their bikes. Most of these decisions are made by the customer based on the name brand and the cool way that it looks on the bike. Dyno shootouts have shown that many of these components are not well-matched and result in erratic air/fuel mixtures or horsepower gains that are not in the rpm-range that the rider was looking for.

In Bill Shaw's article I noticed that they were measuring the "vacuum" in the air box and looking for a reduction in vacuum when changing the snorkel and air filter. Is the reduction in vacuum due to the increased flow through the intake? Also, could you please explain why some bikes are designed with a large airbox that reduces the turbulence and some just hang the snorkel and filter out the side to get the ram air effect? Thanks, this question has been bugging me for some time.

Ted Clark
TC88B1@hotmail.com

Okay, reduced vacuum is, indeed, the result of better flow, and your holistic approach is the way to go to get an engine to breathe right—the intake, cams and exhaust have to work together. More air available at the intake won't go through valves that are not open long enough, and if the exhaust does not clear out the cylinders properly, there is no place for it to go.

As far as "ram air," the idea there is to generate some "positive pressure" to help stuff more air/fuel mix into the cylinder than just the piston's vacuum effect can do... it's a volumetric efficiency thing (think of it as a free "turbo" type effect).

Downtime Files

is a joint service of
Motorcycle Consumer News
and the American Motorcycle Institute 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