

21 Years Of Grunge

I have just completed reading my very first issue of your magazine and have thoroughly enjoyed it. I have just purchased a 1982 Kawasaki 440 LTD so that my wife can begin her riding career, and also so that I can "learn" about motorcycle mechanics! My question is about cosmetics. The bike sat outside in the weather for many years. The engine block is extremely dirty with grease, oil and dirt, so dirty that it has that gritty aluminum feel all over. I have washed it in soap, WD-40, kerosene and most recently tried a spray-on foam engine cleaner from the auto parts store. I have also scrubbed with brushes and sponges. While I have removed most of the baked-on oil and grease, a lot of the dull gritty dirt remains. Do you know of a product that really works to remove this? There are so many nooks and crannies in the block that I feel a spray or liquid would be the best.

Joel Lenderman
jslenderman@comcast.net
Media, PA

Without seeing the bike, we can't be sure, but it is possible that what you are seeing is either corrosion—aluminum oxide—or decomposing clear coat. If it is the clear coat, you may be able to remove it with lacquer thinner (make sure to follow safety precautions and have good ventilation while working). If the problem is oxidation, we've had good luck with Lime-Away spray kitchen cleaner, which is made to dissolve similar hard water spots and oxidation on plumbing fixtures, etc.

Sympathy For Kaw Tranny Troubles

While reading this month's issue of "Downtime Files," I couldn't help but feel sorry for the Concours owner whose transmission failed. I have a 1999 Kawasaki Nomad with a little over 25K on it. While touring this past summer I had the horror of my oil pressure going to zero at about 75 mph on Interstate 40 in the middle of nowhere. After two of the worst days of my life, I managed to rent a U-Haul truck at a cost of about \$1700 to get me back to Florida from New Mexico. By the way, when you're in the middle of nowhere, beware of the local towing dealers, they gouged me good. Roadside assistance plans don't work more than 75 miles outside of a major town's perimeter if you need to have your bike towed.

After my local dealer got the engine apart they found that the oil pump gear had failed. All the teeth had sheared off and, much to my surprise, the oil pump gear was made of some sort of nylon material. I did what anyone else would and sent Kawasaki the letter from hell (in a polite way). My point is

this: If you are going to put numerous miles on your motorcycle, buy the extended warranty if it's available, because that's what saved me. The extended warranty cost \$530 for three years and was well worth it. Even though I wasn't very happy about Kawasaki's workmanship, in my case they did replace the gear with a steel gear, gave me six months more free warranty and assured me that all Vulcan engines will have metal oil pump gears in the future.

I think Kawasaki makes a good motorcycle. I've put well over 300,000 miles on Kawasakis since my 1973 Z1. This is the first time I've been on the side of the road broken down.

I think all of the major motorcycle brands are good machines, but sometimes we buy the ones that were made on a Monday.

Butch Suggs
hnrsggs@adisfwb.com

We totally agree with you that getting the extended warranty is a great idea. Sometimes designs and materials that look great on paper (or on a computer screen) just don't work out real well on the road.

We have never been big fans of plastic gears in mission-critical applications, and are glad to see that the Vulcans are now using the steel gears exclusively for the oil pump drives. We are also pleased to hear that Kawasaki did right by you in replacing the failed unit.

VFR800 Interceptor Stalling

I bought a 2002 Honda Interceptor VFR800 in July of '02. From day one it had a stalling problem. It was my first fuel-injected sportbike and I thought that I just needed to get used to riding it. I traded in the '94 Honda Magna that I owned for three years, and I never once stalled that bike during 8000 miles. Now with 4000 miles on my VFR I am positive that I'm not doing anything wrong.

The stall will usually occur while shifting from second gear to third, with the clutch pulled in, and when I roll off the throttle the bike just dies. I then (while still rolling), immediately pull in the clutch and hit the starter button. The bike will start back up every time. I contacted the dealer and Honda and they both said that until I can reproduce this problem in front of them, they aren't going to do a thing.

The frustrating thing is that I cannot reproduce the stall at will, it is totally random, I never know when it will happen. I just installed a Power Commander III on the bike and the stall will now occur when the engine is cold, which it never did before.

I checked out some of the Honda owner websites and this problem isn't just with my bike, but others have had the same trouble.

Most seem to adjust the idle speed and will not have anymore stalls. I have tried that but with no success. One rider, with a dealer that cared, got the ECU replaced and his bike is running fine. The dealer I bought my bike from couldn't care less. Until I can ride it to their shop and stall it in front of them, they will not even talk to me. To my surprise, Honda had the same attitude.

Steve Spencer
ss1346@socal.rr.com
Orange County, CA

In all probability, the reason that neither the dealer nor Honda will deal with the problem is that you have installed a Power Commander, which affects the mapping of the fuel system.

Since the problem happens when the bike is cold, it's likely you have the maps set too lean in the Power Commander. We suggest that you bring the bike to a Dynojet Authorized Tuning Center, equipped with an exhaust gas analyzer and a dyno, and have them remap your system. See the January 2003 issue of MCN for a review of how this is done. You can call Dynojet, (800) 992-4993, for the location of a dealer near you.

Vanquished Victory Transmissions

I am writing to you in hopes that you can help shed some light on a problem that many owners of 1999–2001 Victories have had, and we seem to be getting no answers from the company itself.

The problem is the amount of transmission failures they've had, and there is still no recall or explanation to the buyers of what will be done to make things right.

Many of the owners of these Victory models are hoping that their failures happen before their warranties run out, because in those cases, Victory seems to be standing behind the product and replacing it with the 2002 or 2003 kit.

Another problem seems to be finding mechanics in the dealerships who are properly trained to fix and repair the bikes, and who can also get the parts in a timely manner.

Victory must have realized that there was a problem because the word is now that they no longer use the same transmission supplier that they once did, and are now importing them from a supplier overseas. This is fine. Victory owners just want a transmission that works properly and isn't destined to fail at some point in the future.

Victory owners have contacted NHTSA with their concerns but so far nothing has been solved. My question is, why hasn't there been a recall on the transmissions for these year-model bikes? And, at the very least, Victory should acknowledge the problem and warranty the transmission for the

period of time the original owner has it. Any help you can give us would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to know more about the issue, check www.theymc.com or vicictorymotorcycle.com.

I own a 2000 model SC and really like the bike. I just want to see the problems taken care of in a manner that reflects cooperation between the factory and consumer.

Mike Byles
mbyles44@msn.com

Thank you for sharing this information with us. We are fans of the Victory motorcycle and truly hope that the change of transmission manufacturers has improved their reliability (although they were not really all that bad).

As far as the problem of finding properly trained technicians able to service the machines, we find that is universal in the industry, but feel that over time the situation is improving greatly. As the industry matures and customer satisfaction becomes more and more important, the number of professional motorcycle technicians that have been properly trained will increase.

Forward Weight Transfer = Stalling?

My 1992 CB750 Nighthawk has had a quirk for most of the seven years I have owned it. When braking fairly hard with the clutch in, the engine will stumble for a second and then continue to run smoothly. If I happen to be going downhill at the time, it will stumble and then stall. Afterward, it will start immediately and run smoothly. It has 15,000 miles on the original spark plugs. Is there something amiss in one or more of the four carburetors? I really don't want to get into them, but will if I have to. I would appreciate any help you can offer.

Karl Ratti
Landing, NJ

First, spark plugs are only good for 5-10K miles in general, due to normal electrode wear. Also, the float needles wear over time, and if they are leaking even slightly, will cause a higher fuel level than required.

Did you buy the bike new? Or if not, how many miles were on it? The fuel level can be checked without removing the carbs by using a clear hose attached to the carb drain spout. Lay the other end next to the carb body, loosen the drain screw, and you will see the bowl level in the hose. Check to see that each is the same.

Remember, the carbs are 10 years old and a rebuild is not a bad idea. Make sure they all have clean jets and air passages and that the fuel level as well as needle positions are equal. When the bike refires after stalling, does it need any throttle or does it start without touching the throttle? Does it

show black smoke or smell rich (like too much gas)?

Finally, is the oil level in the engine correct? Could the clutch be dragging? Will the bike coast with the clutch pulled in while in gear?

GS1100L Oil Light

I have a 1980 GS1100L, with 4000 miles clocked. The oil pressure light comes on at low idle—1200 or less when being warmed up—and continues to come on and off if the rpm drops below 1200 or so until having been driven about 5 miles. The oil cap calls for 10–40 and that is what is in the machine now. Originally it came with synthetic oil, and I thought that that might have something to do with it, so I changed it to Pennzoil. If anything, it is a little worse. Any ideas?

Vincent D Aszman
Vincent.d.aszman@boeing.com

The problem with your machine can be a few things, the first thing to check is the condition and amount of oil in the machine, and if it is correct, the next step would be to perform an oil pressure test in accordance with the service manual. If the pressure is actually okay and the light comes on, you have a bad sending unit. If the pressure is in fact low, the problem has to be either the pump, the relief valve or a partially obstructed oil gallery.

Electrical Outage

Beginning last summer, my 2001 Valkyrie Interstate developed an electrical problem. Periodically and unpredictably, when I push the starter button it loses all electrical power for about a second, then cranks and runs normally. There are no signs of a weak battery like dim lights, slow cranking, etc. Rather, it is like someone detached and then reconnected a battery cable (which I have checked). The clock, radio and tripmeters also reset to zero, which is an annoyance, and I worry that someday on the road it won't reconnect at all. The dealer has been unable to help. Any suggestions will be greatly appreciated.

Doug McGinty
dmcginty@huntingdon.edu

The problem on your bike can be quite a few things, but it sure sounds like you have an intermittent open in your system ground circuit. The first thing we would do after checking the battery connections is to turn the bike on and start turning the ground straps and connectors, trying to make the bike fail. Next would be a step-by-step examination of every connector on the bike.

One other possibility that could be causing your problem is the connections on the

battery side of the starter solenoid: If they are loose, the vibration of the solenoid when it first engages could be disconnecting the contacts. It is very unlikely, but not impossible.

Reader Suggests Possible Defect

I read with great interest the letters column of your October issue. In one letter entitled "Sluggish Throttle," Dan Sekerak wrote about the trouble he was having with his 2000 ZRX 1100.

I had similar trouble with my 2002 ZRX 1200, and I sent him a note about it. But I wanted to mention this to you, in case the feedback you get indicates that other owners like Dan have the same problem.

I don't know if it's a design/assembly defect or what, but the issue on my bike was a cable that separated from the hood on one of the spark plugs. Eventually, the problem got so bad (the cable must have been pulling farther and farther out) that when the mechanic pulled the gas tank and turned over the engine, he mentioned that the blue flashes were "just awesome." That kind of arc just below about five gallons of gasoline sure caught my attention.

Great magazine. Keep up the good work!
Jeffrey M. Jirschele
jjirschele@claritypublicrelations.com



Downtime Files

is a joint service of
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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