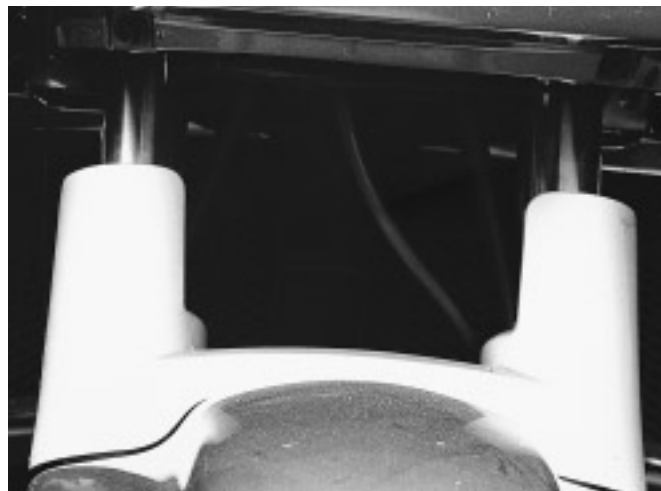


How-To



Owners of Gold Wing models (through 1987), among others, found that covering the exposed fork tubes with wrap-around vinyl "sliders" could extend fork seal life as much as 200 percent.



Honda got wise to the problem in 1988, adding plastic shields to the front fenders of GL1500 models to protect the fork tubes. Dealerships reported an 80% drop in fork seal replacements needed with this model.

subsequent seal failure it can cause, is to cover or "shield" the tubes in some manner that goes beyond the normal protection offered by dust seals.

My old CB200T has the traditional, accordion-rubber "gaiters" over the shock tubes, and the seals have failed only once in 12 years, at 80,000 miles. That's why you still see gaiters on virtually every off-road bike made. But somewhere along the line "fashion" and "design" overcame common sense, and we all started insisting on street bikes with modern-looking, totally exposed, polished fork tubes. Gaiters were dropped almost entirely, determined to be much too old-fashioned-looking, or as contributing in some miniscule manner to fork "stiction." Maybe so—but they worked.

Some riders, wise to the ways of seal failure, have developed "home remedies" to

protect their forks. Among the ones I've seen are sections of rubber hose attached to fork housings with hose clamps, or the more attractive addition of vinyl "wrap-arounds" that velcro around the tubes and slide up and down with the forks. Some of these are even color-matched to the bikes.

I used to own a Honda GL1200 that needed the fork seals replaced at 21,000 miles, 43,000 miles, and 62,000 miles. Then I covered the exposed upper tubes with vinyl "sliders," and never had to replace the seals again. The bike's current owner now has the odometer up to 124,000 miles, and the seals are still holding.

Honda must have gotten wise to this, because the GL1500 models came with plastic "fork shields" built right onto the front fender. Even though they don't quite cover the entire exposed area of the tubes,

they must do a pretty good job because the Honda shops we interviewed said fork seal replacements on the GL1500 series were running about 50,000 to 70,000 miles apart, as opposed to an average of 25,000 miles apart on earlier GL models. The new GL1800, and many of Honda's and other manufacturers' sport and touring models now utilize some form of these shields.

Of course, remedies that involve shields and covers like the old gaiters are practically unthinkable if you ride a standard cruiser like say, a Virago or a Shadow. The aesthetic beauty of the machine would be severely compromised. In cases like that, refer to Rule #1: Clean!

Other Considerations

Despite all your best efforts, odds are that sooner or later you are going to suffer a fork



The best preventative medicine ever found for fork seal failures are the old style "gaiters." Some may argue they increase fork stiction and hide minor leaks or tube damage, but no one can argue with the fact they dramatically increase the fork seals' service life.



Unfortunately, "gaiters" would look downright ugly on most cruisers like this Honda Shadow. That's when you have to resort to old-fashioned elbow grease to save your seals, unless you're lucky enough to own one of the very new models with built-in fork shields (usually those bikes with upside-down forks).