



IDBIG's Tech Tip

To upgrade, or not? That's a difficult question.

By Dale Heimbigner
Lawrence's Motorcycles, Inc



We, the Harley faithful, have always wanted to keep our bikes "forever" and we've always had good reason, because our bikes were made to live forever. But lately it seems that even Harley-Davidson Motor Company is starting to come around on the idea that nothing lasts forever and neither should a motorcycle. This isn't all their own idea, of course, the EPA probably has a say in it, and Harley has done the best job of resisting this trend as anyone. The technology of the day suggests that we should use our vehicles for awhile, and then dispose of them. But, what if we aren't ready to ditch the history that we have made for ourselves with our beloved machines? What if we love our bikes but wish they had some of the features of the more modern bikes now emerging from Milwaukee?

A wise man once told me, "The secret to happiness is the progressive realization of worthwhile dreams and goals." In other words, give yourself something to look forward to, and as you reach your goals, you will feel a sense of achievement and pleasure.

It has always been common for people to want to make their bikes "their own" by adding performance when they can afford to do so. Well I've got some good news! S&S and Baker have the best 6-speed transmissions available, and they will change the entire character of an older machine. They are smoother, quieter, more durable, and lighter shifting than any factory transmission ever thought about being. I personally looked for an older Road King so that I could upgrade to an aftermarket 6-speed because I prefer them to the Harley transmission. Why is that, you say? Well, Baker's bread & butter (pun intended) has always been transmissions and their success and reputation proves their innovation and quality. S&S has been in the performance aftermarket for nigh unto 50 years now, and through the leadership of Brett Smith is poised to build the best performance parts for the next 50 years. Both of these companies offer Direct-Drive variations of 6-speed transmissions, which allow more efficient flow of power with less loss to friction. Overdrives work by passing power through the gear teeth until 5th gear when the input shaft and output are connected together for a 1:1 ratio, then in 6th gear the output is geared to turn faster than the input, hence the term "overdrive". In top gear, a true overdrive transmission is running through the gear teeth again, creating a little more friction. The Baker direct drive transmission changes the gearing of the primary and arranges the gearing of the trans such that 6th is now the 1:1 ratio. This means more efficient passage of power through the top gear, in which we spend the most time. S&S accomplishes the same task by changing the final drive ratio, but still allows a 1:1 ratio inside the transmission. Both Baker and S&S employ the best technology available in their manufacture, utilizing lightweight dog rings and short throw shift drums to make shifting vastly superior to factory production units. This alone changes the character of the motorcycle enough that it becomes a pleasure to ride, even if it weren't for the extra gear.

If you, like me, have a bike that you dearly love, and want the advantage of another gear when you are cruising down the freeway, you might consider upgrading to a direct-drive 6-speed transmission. The advantages are numerous, including better gas mileage (who would argue with that?), better shifting, longer life for your motorcycle, and although not inexpensive, it is considerably less than purchasing a new machine. The fun factor alone is enough for me....

Dale Heimbigner
Lawrence's Motorcycles Inc.
208-664-8032

*Stop by and tell Dale you read his article in the Inland Northwest Biker Information Guide!!!