



THE WAY I SEE IT BY GENEVIEVE SCHMITT

Fitting Your Motorcycle To You

In my February 2009 column, I discussed the modifications done to my 2008 Street Glide thus far. After I wrote that, I got busy with more mods that truly fit the motor-

cycle to me. That's part of what owning a motorcycle is about, customizing this and modifying that so a touring motorcycle feels like a rolling couch that's comfortable enough to hang out on for hours on end.

Last year I wrote about putting on a Harley-Davidson Reach seat that lowered me, but more importantly, pushed me closer to the bars. I discovered I needed to be even lower to maneuver the bike confidently in all situations. I didn't want to get caught on a grade where I needed someone to push me. That meant I needed a lower suspension. I asked around and settled on Progressive Suspension shocks. My dealer recommended them, and a female friend put them on her Street Glide and loved them. I was told I shouldn't lower an already lowered-at-the-factory touring bike (meaning Harley slammed the suspension on the stock FLs to create the Street Glide with a low 26.3" seat height). I didn't care. I wanted it lower; I'd deal with any issues that came with the mod.

I chose Progressive's 11-1/2" Harley-Davidson 412 series. I lowered just the rear to start. Installing aftermarket springs in Street Glide forks is time consuming, so I wanted I see what it was like just lowering the rear. The ride is definitely stiffer. I didn't realize it until I hit my first bump and the Glide didn't glide over it; I actually felt the bump. It certainly is not a deal breaker, because now I can not only flatfoot the bike, but also have enough bend in my knees to muscle the 700-plus-pound machine around parking lots with relative ease. Over time I got used to the new suspension as if it were stock. However, I noticed something interesting this summer: When I loaded a 30-pound backrest bag onto the bike and filled both side bags for my 3,200-mile, 26-day trip, the ride seemed a lot smoother. I asked David Zemla, director of marketing for Progressive Suspension, why this was so. He told me there's really no bagger suspension setup for anyone under 150 pounds. My 117-pound weight was not enough to compress the new springs to their maximum performance. By adding the additional weight, I was now experiencing the true ride of the new shocks, which were absolutely fantastic. Since most riders are heavier than me, these shocks should do just fine for them. David also told me that taking 1" out of the suspension travel in the rear is "darn near 1-to-1," meaning seat height will drop about 1". However, taking 1" out of the front suspension does not equate to a 1" drop in seat height; it's less. I measured my new seat height and it's now 25" laden.

Another change I made to my Glide was switching out the stock handlebars with 14" apehangers. The low, wide stock bars were not comfortable to me. Fourteen inches was as high as I could go without limiting my reach when turning. I chose Wild 1 Chubbys in satin black, and I just love how they fit me. Higher bars meant I needed longer clutch, brake, and throttle cables. I ordered the Classic Black series from Barnett, which are black vinyl cables with chrome ends. I wanted Barnett's new Stealth series, black vinyl cables with black hardware, but they were not available when I needed them. I then changed to black Harley aftermarket Tribal grips and satin black levers to match the bars.

The next comfort mod: I had Harley Tri-Line highway pegs installed on my highway bars so I could rest my feet while touring. I had them placed facing inside the bars instead of outside so I could reach them. And while I was perusing the Harley parts catalog, I added a few things just for looks: a classic flame derby cover and a flamed shift linkage since I have flames in my paint job.

The most common question I hear from women is "How do I get a motorcycle to fit me right?" Harley is making the process easy with its Fit Shop, an online guide that lets visitors try out aftermarket accessories on a particular model to see how they look. The web tool is pretty clever. Check it out at www.Harley-Davidson.com/FitShop. If you want to see how something feels, like a particular seat, visit your local Harley dealer. Fortunately for women, March is National Garage Party Month, and May is Women Riders Month, so Harley dealers across the country are holding Garage Parties for ladies to get them in the store to try out the motorcycles with different accessories. Women can also get educated on the Harley models, learn how to pick up a dropped bike, and have fun trying on all the cool MotorClothes. "Garage Party events provide women with a no-pressure chance to learn, socialize, and ask questions about Harley-Davidson motorcycles," says Leslie Previsch, women's outreach manager for Harley-Davidson Motor Company. To learn more, visit www.Harley-Davidson.com/GarageParty. Once you have a motorcycle that fits you just right, you'll wonder why you ever put up with one that didn't.

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