



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

## Way To Go Dealers

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I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, but I was glad to see 2009 over and done with. I was getting tired of the doom and gloom economy and the dismal sales numbers (or complete lack of sales numbers) in every industry

from automobiles to zoos. Yes, zoos. Budget cuts all around the country put the squeeze on some zoos. According to a report in *The New York Times*, six major zoos in the suburbs of New York City had to cancel orders for new species, postpone upkeep, and start charging for attractions that for years were free.

Motorcycling didn't fare well either, as we all know by now, with motorcycle sales dropping off nearly a third from the previous year. But that depressing economic situation gave dealership owners and staff incentive to work harder to earn new business and retain existing customers. And according to a new survey, they did a darn good job at it.

Each year, JD Power and Associates, the company that does those customer satisfaction surveys in a variety of industries, conducts a Motorcycle Competitive Information Study. This survey tracks just how satisfied motorcycle customers are with their buying and ownership experience. In 2009, for the seventh consecutive year, motorcycle ownership experience satisfaction increased, reaching its highest level yet — quite a surprise considering the state of the economy. "Given that industry sales are down roughly 30 percent during the past year, manufacturers are competing more than ever for every customer," said Todd Markusic, senior director of the powersports practice at JD Power and Associates. "The result of this increased competition is that the quality and performance of bikes is at an all-time high, and dealers are paying

much more attention to their customers' sales and service experiences." Satisfaction improved across all five factors measured in the study — product, quality, cost of ownership, sales, and service — with the most substantial increases occurring in sales and service.

There were several highlights in the results of the study in regard to sales and service. The first was that customers who receive a follow-up phone call after the sale are more likely to say that their overall experience was a good one. The simple concept of calling customers to see if they have questions about the new bike goes a long way in that customer's overall satisfaction of the entire sales process. A dealer should know that, in addition to providing an exclamation point on an already satisfactory customer experience, a phone call is a great way to right a wrong should something go awry during the sales process. People are generally very forgiving. If a dealer is apologetic about a goof (for example, if the bike got scratched during delivery or an after-market part was not installed correctly), genuinely tries to correct it, and then follows up with a phone call afterward, a customer is more likely to report general satisfaction. "While it might seem that calling customers after a visit would be standard practice for dealers, 20 percent of customers don't receive a call after a new bike purchase and 56 percent don't receive a call after having their bike serviced," said Markusic.

Another highlight of the study is the

part that focused on the length of time a dealer takes to perform repair work. According to JD Power, "It's an opportunity to make a lasting impression." I'd say so, as we often don't forget when a dealer takes an unusually long time to work on our motorcycles. The average repair time for maintenance work is one day, while the typical repair takes three days. Dealers who are able to complete repairs in less than three days may benefit greatly. The average satisfaction score among customers who have a repair completed in less than three days is higher compared to that of those who receive their bike back in three days or more.

Obviously, certain repairs or custom work can take up to a week or longer, but the survey is based on typical repairs. For me, all I ask is that a service writer is honest with me about the amount of time he thinks my bike will be in the shop. I've found that each time I've had my Street Glide in for custom work, it came back in less time than was estimated by the service writer. I'm guessing he may overestimate the length of time it takes so that he gives himself some leeway should the shop get behind. But since the shop is run so efficiently, my bike has been returned to me sooner than I expected every time, and that makes me a happy customer.

The 2009 Motorcycle Competitive Information Study, now in its 12th year, includes responses from nearly 8,000 owners who purchased a new 2009 model on-road or dual-sport motorcycle between September 2008 and May 2009. The study was fielded August through October 2009.

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