

A Story from Wally... A Real One-Kicker

Some friends that rented a garage across the alley from our house in Chicago rode motorcycles. After I graduated high school, I convinced one to show me how to ride. My first ride was a stock '49 Harley-Davidson Hydra-glide with a foot clutch and a tank shift. It was difficult to learn all the levers and when to turn each grip so that I didn't fly over the handlebars trying to start it. Once I mastered it, I got to go for short rides on weekends. It was fun! I realized then that I had to have one for my own.

When I was nineteen, I saved \$450.00. My girlfriend, Hollie, wanted a Marquis diamond engagement ring, which costs the exact sum I had saved. I also found a 1960 BSA 250 Silver Star at the local Triumph dealer, which cost \$450.00. I had to choose. I chose the bike! It didn't last very long though. It vibrated itself to death with parts falling all over the streets of Chicago. But it did last longer than Hollie and me.

The next bike I owned was a Honda 90. I had it shipped to the island of Grand Turk in the Bahamas while I was in the US Navy. The Honda was perfect for that island which was only six miles long and one mile wide. When I left, the bike stayed. I sold it to a first class petty officer who wanted to go "down the road" to fraternize with the natives. After I got out of the Navy in late November 1969, I told my Chicago friends that I was in the market to buy a bike. I had some money saved and this time, I wanted a Harley. On December 6, 1969, Herb, an old friend who rode Triumphs, and I drove to a garage where we were supposed to meet a guy named Flakey. He had an old Harley for sale.

Flakey hadn't been ridin' much since he hurt his leg at work. With Christmas coming, his wife was nagging him to, "get rid of that old thing." We went into the garage where he showed us his bike. It was a 1957 FLH (Panhead Hardtail). It had no front fender along with a five-inch extended front fork and the stock sixteen-inch tire on a rusty spoked wheel. It had no speedometer because the gas tank was a gold metal-flake "turtle tank" full of bondo ripples and cracks. The bars were Sportster buckhorns with only a left-hand cracked mirror. The exhaust pipes were the standard "Easy Rider" upswept style with "shorty" mufflers and fishtails. But these pipes were a little different. After they swept up and back, they went straight up for about three feet before the fishtails. Because there were no supports, they banged into each other as they wobbled back and forth. The homemade flat rear fender tilted to the left and the license plate was mounted at the rear axle on the left side with wires dangling and rubbing against the rear tire. The rear wheel was another rusty spiked one that matched the front. The seat was an aftermarket "solo" seat with external springs. The engine was a mass of tangled wires, oil, and dirt. I wasn't impressed!

Flakey limped over to the bike. Turned on the gas and flipped closed the choke. He then proceeded to kick the bike over with his left foot on the right side of the bike. It looked very awkward but it worked. He kicked it three times then adjusted the choke to two notches down from open. Then flipped the toggle switch that was taped to the frame and jumped off the ground and onto the kick-starter. It fired right up. It sounded wonderful even though the pipes were rattling like a New Years Eve noise make. I knew that to start a Harley, or any bike, in December in Chicago with only one kick was no small feat especially after not riding it for months. Flakey knew his bike. Now I was impressed!

I didn't take it for a ride due to the snow blocking the garage door. I bought it anyway,



Wally's '57 Pan

and it was the best \$550.00 I ever spent. I picked it up the next weekend and rode it home with the pipes flopping and rattling. I froze my butt off.

I convinced my parents that my bike should go in the basement. They weren't real pleased about it but went along. Once in the basement, I could clean it up and get it ready for spring and my first summer since the Navy.

The first thing I did was to take everything off that could come off. All that was left was a frame, a pile of parts, a dirty oil stain on the floor and the smell of solvent throughout the house. Mom really loved the mess!

As I reassembled it, I cleaned, painted, and polished everything. Luckily most of the parts were usable. I made front and rear fenders from universal fender stock; cut the pipes right before they went straight up and remounted the fishtails; painted the spikes on the wheels (the chrome cleaned up OK) and "chopped wired" the lights, ignition and charging system nice and neat routing all the wires and tying them into a loom.

I had to do something about the gas tank. That "turtle tank" was too far gone to fix. A friend gave me a Sportster tank with a few dents in it. I really wanted a stock set of split "fat bob" tanks, but money was short. After I had the Sportster tank straight and primed, Little Eddy, who was the Enforcer on the Hell's Henchmen, MC, said he'd trade a stock set of '60 FLH tanks with speedometer and brackets for the Sportster tank I painted it metallic burgundy. Soon I was mounting the stock '60 tanks. Then I wired the stock ignition switch and wound the speedometer cable through the frame to the transmission.

I painted the fenders and tanks with a gold "candy" base and a blue transparent overcoat with a clear coat over it all. It looked about a foot deep in a shade of what is now called "teal".

Herman, a friend with a welder, made a "sissy bar" out of half inch solid steel bars with two stainless steel military shells on top and a chrome drawer handle for a cross brace. I mounted the license plate on it.

To make it "street legal" it needed a horn. There was no horn on it when I bought it from Flakey and I really didn't want wires tied to the handle bars so I used a good quality bicycle horn mounted to the handle bar. It may have looked and sounded funny but it was legal!

Now it was ready! In early April '70, I rolled it out of the basement and into the backyard. I remembered how Flakey had started it in December. I turned on the gas. Closed the choke and kicked it over three times. Now was the time to turn the key and see. I turned the key and with one mighty kick it started!

It was the best rush I had had yet. After some minor clutch, chain, and brake adjustment, it was ready for anything. With my tool kit strapped to the handlebar, I took it on the streets of Chicago.

I couldn't have done it without the help of many good friends. That's what it's all about. That's what makes a bike special and mine was very special to me. That was a great summer of riding! I made many new friends and went to some wild parties on my '57 Pan.

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