

Flying Old Glory Could Void Your Warranty

Due to wind resistance from flags fluttering behind his Harley trike, former Wisconsin State Senator Dave Zien was informed by Harley-Davidson that the factory would not honor the warranty after the clutch failed during a ride to Dallas, Texas for the National Coalition of Motorcyclists (NCOM) Convention last month.

Zien, 64, a longtime member of the NCOM Legislative Task Force, says the Motor Company denied his warranty claim because of the excessive drag created by the flapping flags he flies from the back of his 2014 trike, which has 15,000 miles on it and is covered by a seven-year unlimited mileage warranty.

"All they said was, because I fly flags on the bike, there's no warranty on the powertrain," Zien told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel newspaper on May 15. A combat Marine and Viet Nam veteran, the former lawmaker is a Hall of Fame biker who has set several long-distance riding records since the 1970s and says he's always done so with multiple flags on his bike. His 1991 Harley with one million miles on the odometer has been on display since 2000 at the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum and Hall of Fame in South Dakota.

Harley-Davidson told the newspaper that Zien's warranty is still in effect, but because of the addition of aftermarket products -- essentially, the huge flags -- Zien has voided any coverage on the powertrain and transmission.

"The issue isn't that the flags are heavy," Harley spokeswoman Maripat Blankenheim told the Journal-Sentinel, "but they provide terrific drag on the engine and the transmission, especially when the bike is at highway speeds."

She added that the flag mounts that Zien used were not Harley products. "When you alter a motorcycle with non-compliant products, that does impact your ability to make a warranty claim," Blankenheim said. Zien currently has seven flags flying from his three-wheeler including full-sized Stars and Stripes, Don't Tread on Me, U.S. Marine Corps and Wisconsin flags and an NRA banner that proclaims "Stand and Fight", and he says all the flag mounts were installed at a Harley dealership.

The "Million Mile Motorcycle Man" is ready for a fight to defend the right of all to fly a flag on a motorcycle without voiding the warranty. "Ain't nobody gonna stop our flags, not even Harley-Davidson corporate," Zien told the paper.

Electric Cycles Gain Traction

Despite America's love affair with Harley-Davidsons, electric motorcycles are revving up U.S. sales, according to a recent article in USA Today, and two-wheeled e-vehicles are gaining converts among urban commuters and law enforcement.

Sales of high-performance e-motorcycles will rise at least 30% per year through 2023 in North America, cites a report last month by Navigant Research, a market research firm. Co-author John Gartner sees several reasons: consumers looking for refuge from high gasoline prices, increases in city traffic and improved e-vehicles.

Zero, the largest U.S. manufacturer of e-motorcycles, has boosted production from fewer than 100 units in 2010 to more than 2,000 this year, notes Scott Harden, the company's vice president of marketing. Compared to gas-powered counterparts, he says Zeros are cheaper to operate -- about a penny per mile -- and don't make noise, fumes or vibrations.

E-motorcycles sell best in the San Francisco Bay area, southern California, Florida and Texas, says Adrian Stewart, director of marketing for Oregon-based Brammo, which rolled out its first model in 2009.

The U.S. market faces increased competition as BMW launches an e-scooter this year, and Yamaha plans an electric entry in 2016.

Also on the way are three-wheeled electric tuk-tuks, vehicles without sides that have canopies and are common in Asia. Netherlands-based Tuk Tuk Factory is partnering with eTuk USA, which is seeking road-use approval for three models from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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