

It's Never The Same

By Wally Wersching

I sold my '57 Pan in 1972. I wish I hadn't, but I was in college and needed the money. I bought a '75 AMF Harley FXE in 1976 that was a real piece of junk. I was lucky to sell it before it completely fell apart.

In September 1982, I had the itch to buy another Harley. I had been riding Hondas and still owned a good GS850 Suzuki. I missed the ride and feel of my old '57 Pan but having gotten married in 1978, I knew that my wife, Cindy, would never ride on a "hardtail." Besides, I didn't think that my back could handle it either. I decided to look for a Duo-Glide or Electra-Glide but not an AMF bike.

I heard that a friend of a friend had a '60 Pan for sale. I went to look at it one evening after work. It was a '60 FLH. Someone really deformed it. It had a twelve inch extended front fork with the stock rake. It was like riding up hill all the way. With the stock kickstand, it leaned over way too much. It had no seat. The owner said it fell off when he was bringing it into the garage. We took turns trying to start it. About the time we were ready to quit, it started. It had a loose sound as if it had too many miles on it. At the time, there were not many Panheads available for under \$2000.00, so I bought it. I agreed to pick it up later in the week after work.

When I got home and told Cindy what I had done, she could not believe that I had paid that much for an old Harley. She was very upset.

Later in the week, Cindy and I went to pick up the bike. I paid the owner the money. He loaned me a piece of carpet to sit on so the battery acid wouldn't eat at my shorts when I rode it home. After another dual kick session, I got it started.

It was getting dark as I rode it home. I noticed that the lights on the bike were getting dimmer and dimmer. Luckily there was a license plate on the back of it because that's all Cindy could see as she followed me. Whenever I hit the rear brake, the engine would die because the battery was dying fast. I had to use the front brake for all my stopping. Cindy almost hit me a couple of times. I just made it to the house when it died. Now, Cindy was even more upset that I had used our savings to buy this piece of junk! She was very kind though. She did not say "I told you so!"

There was a lot of work to do to get the bike road-worthy. I took everything off the frame, pulled the heads and jugs off and checked the bottom end. I was relieved when the bottom end measurements were "in spec" and I didn't have to split the cases. (Splitting the cases is a lot of extra work and money.) While the heads and jugs were at the machine shop, I cleaned everything else.

Richard, one of my neighbors who used to be a Hell's Henchman, gave me a new fiberglass "bobbed" rear fender. I didn't really care for the "bobbed" style, but I used it anyway. Richard was a good friend, and I did not want to hurt his feelings. I made a front fender from universal fender stock.

I could not find any "candy apple" paint in spray cans. While buying parts for my bicycle, I noticed that Schwinn had a similar four stage paint system for their frames and decided to try it on the '60 Pan. I painted the tank and fenders with a silver base coat with a dark red overcoat and then clear over it all. It looked great!

I had the forks cut down to only four inches over, bought a "take-off" Superglide seat at the local Harley dealer, and "chopper wired" the electrical system.

When I got the heads and jugs back, I bought the right size pistons and rings and mounted them on the rods. Everything else went together just the way the book said. I put the engine back into the frame and hooked up everything. It was starting to look like something! But would it run?

After filling it with gas and oil, I rolled it out of the garage. I tried to start it the way I used to start my old '57: three kicks with the choke closed and then with the key on and the choke one click down, one hard kick to start. It did not work on this one. It didn't even pop or sputter. I must have kicked that bike over a hundred times, talking nice to it before every kick and cussing at it when it wouldn't start. All the time, Cindy was watching from the kitchen window, shaking her head. I must have looked and sounded pretty funny.

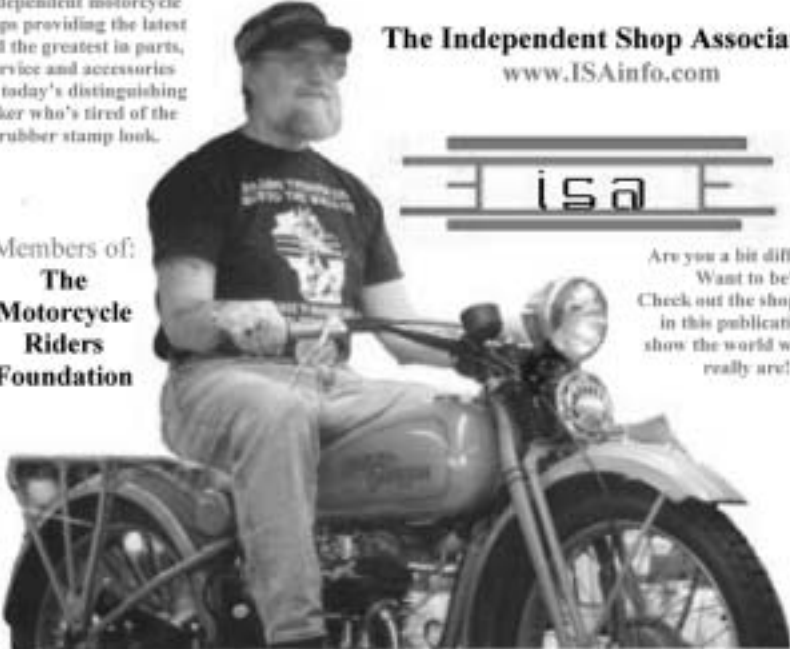
It finally started but it was running rough. The carb was way out of adjustment. After adjusting the primary and high speed settings, it ran pretty smooth. I shut it off and tried to start it again. This time it started on the first kick. Hopefully, I could start it easier now when it was cold. That was wishful thinking. It turned out to be a hard starter. It always took twenty to thirty hard kicks before it started. I even changed the carb, but it still was hard to start. Many times when I was kicking my leg off, I would think about my '57 Pan and how easy it had been to start.

Even though the bike rode well, my old friends were not there to ride with me. I did not realize how much they added to the enjoyment of my '57 Pan. Most of them were married now as I was. They had sold their bikes to buy station wagons and minivans. I made some new friends but it was not the same. I was older and I didn't party as hard as I once did. I found myself riding alone most of the time reminiscing about the past. Thomas Wolfe was right. "You can't go home again." It's never the same!

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