

Goldwing Maintenance, Shawnee Honda



You and Your Suspension

Every day working in a motorcycle dealership we end up pushing and handling a lot of different motorcycles. There are times when I grab a motorcycle to move it I realize that is significantly heavier than others of the same model. I speak mostly of Goldwings but other models apply.

When we add accessories and pack our machines the extra weight becomes very noticeable for me because I handle the same make and model without anything attached to it or packed in the saddlebags.

I can grab a Goldwing lift it off the side stand and push it about 3 feet and can tell you a lot about your bike and whether the tires are inflated correctly. I can immediately tell you how much extra stuff is in or on your machine by what the front forks do when lifting off the side stand.

Many times the angle of the sitting position will be indicator of how heavy your machine is.

The tour trunk and saddlebags are made to pack and store items. When they are stuffed full of clothes and gear it does affect the suspension and the ride quality. I would guess that after 5,000 miles the front forks of a Goldwing work about half as good as they did new. By that I mean that any damping effect the forks had, no longer exists.

As the fork oil breaks down and wears out, so does the damping. Ironically, Honda does not recommend changing the front fork oil at any mileage interval but, if it is done can make a huge difference in the ride. Changing the oil does not compensate for weight add-

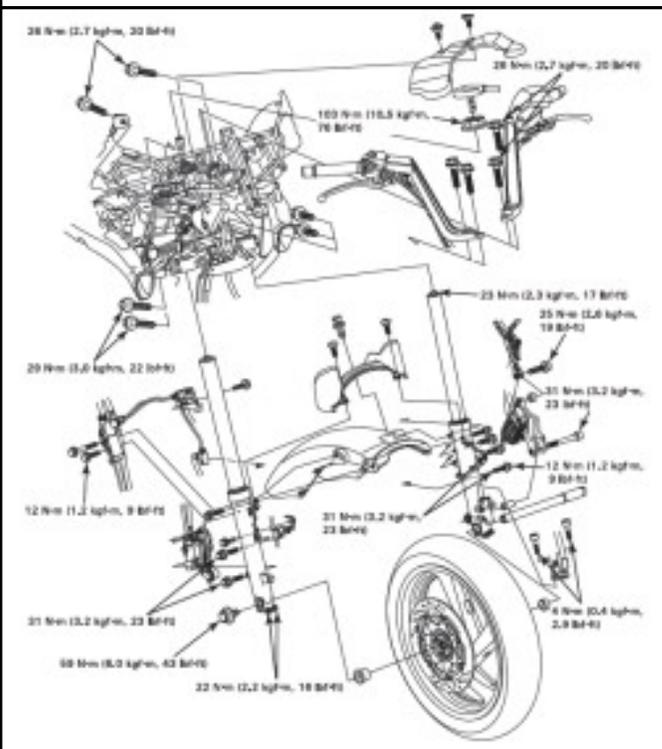
ed. That is the spring's job and most of the time a heavier spring is needed.

The oil can have an effect on bottoming and the resistance to bottoming out. Again a big advantage of working in a dealership is we ride hundreds of Goldwings.

It amazes me sometimes how bad some bikes handle and the suspension performs. It is truly a safety factor that gets completely overlooked. I say it is safety issue because in a panic situation we are most likely going to find the limits of our tires and suspension. Let's hope it was adequate because the alternative hurts and is quite frankly dangerous.

Sometimes a simple miscalculation can turn into accident. I am convinced that many motorcycle accidents could be avoided if the motorcycles tires and suspension was maintained better.

A classic example would be a panic stop. Front suspension bottoms out hard and a worn cupped front tire loses traction. Next thing we know is motorcycle and rider skidding across pavement. Could it be avoided is a million dollar question, but I know if we keep the forks from bottoming hard we are



trolling the energy in a manner that the tire can do its job and hopefully traction can be maintained.

The reason for this article is two fold. One is to get us aware what we can do to be as safe as possible and second is to set your motorcycle up for you. Can you imagine a car or truck that the seat was not adjustable? That is basically what we have with a Honda G.L.1800 Goldwing.

The rear shock has an adjustment that preloads the spring. The one size fits all does a decent job but there is so much room for improvement. Problem is how do you know what you need and like when it comes to suspension?

At some time beg, borrow, or steal someone's bike that the suspension has been modified. Some things will be better some worse but remember our goal is to make the ride more enjoyable (less fatigue) and safer.

In my opinion the Honda Goldwing is the finest touring bike made plus it has a super low cost maintenance factor. If we calculate 25,000 miles at an average of 50 mph (that's high) it comes to 500 hrs in the saddle. My question to you is; if you could make that 500 hours more comfortable, would you?

Fine tuning your suspension and making compensations for added accessories (stiffer springs and valving) could make your ride safer and more comfortable.

We know there is room for improvement and wouldn't you know it, we sell and install it! ;=) (But it is a very hard sell.) Lights and chrome by far outsell suspension components and they are nice. If it was my money, spending it on suspension to fine tune the machine for me is money well spent because it was customized for my passenger and me making the ride more enjoyable.

Next time you are riding or just cruising around spend some time concentrating on your bikes suspension. Drive over some bumps, railroad tracks or some of our interstates paying attention to the fork and shocks. Do they bottom? Do certain bumps make your back hurt? How about your passenger, ask them what certain bumps feel like.

The rear shocks bottoming out is of the tenth power for them if it hurts. When making a quick stop do the forks make a loud metal to metal sound? How much do the forks dive? Is the anti-dive mechanism working?

Most Goldwing owners overload their bike. The limit is 410 lbs. that includes everything, rider, passenger, gear, and acc. Two riders with helmets and riding gear could easily be in the 350 lbs. to 400 lbs. range. Pack the bags and tour trunk and it adds up quick. All the lights and accessories need to be included.

The highway pegs, trailer hitch, passenger armrest, are some common things we don't consider that can be 30 + lbs. the fact is the motorcycle can and will carry much more but the tires are only rated for so much weight. Do you constantly get poor tire mileage? You might be exceeding the weight limit of the tires.

As with all my articles I try to share some knowledge with you. I will never knowingly steer you wrong. I hope we all get to do more riding in 2010 and I hope I sell some of you some suspension that will make your bike ride better and safer, because once you realize how much better your suspension can be, you will be my best salesman. It really does make a difference.

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