

AFTERMARKET SEATS and Other RIDING COMFORTS

How Finding the Right Aftermarket Seat was Priceless to Us!

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Like many things people buy, motorcycle seats are made for people of “average” height and weight. My wife Lyn and I—who stand 5’2” and 6’2” respectively—are not exactly “average”. Here is our story about finding the perfect seats for our rides...

My first new Wing was a 1984 GL1200A. After a few years, I decided to replace the seat and selected a Saddlemen’s Road Sofa™. I was happy with that choice for many a mile. But after my friend and fellow GWRRA Member Brian Medvidick helped me buy and restore a “totaled” 1985 Limited Edition, the ‘84 went to him.

It was September 1991 when the one-month restoration was complete and the Limited was on the road. And although its stock seat was better than the ‘84’s, it still wasn’t something on which I would want to spend all day.

My First Long-Term Aftermarket Seat: A Gem

By that point in my life, I’d already been to numerous motorcycle events and had pretty much seen all of the different types of seats out there. And though I do realize that opinions are subjective and that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, one brand stood out in my mind as being aesthetically *dis-pleasing*. However, as I later learned, the reason I didn’t care for this seat’s looks is exactly what makes this particular seat so comfortable.

To me, the saddle portion looked like it had “wings” because of the way it stuck out to the sides. But if you think about it, that’s exactly what your rear end does when you’re sitting on your bike—it sticks out to both sides. To check further into its design, I went to Russell Cycle Products’ website to see how its “Day-Long™” seats were made and why they looked so “unique”. I then exchanged a number of emails with folks at the company and—finally—placed an order for a “Dual” Day-Long Touring Saddle.

I’m happy to say that I put many a mile on that seat and never had a single complaint with it. In fact, my longest day on it was almost 1,100 miles, and I was in great shape at the end of the ride.

My Second Long-Term Aftermarket Seat: A Let-Down

By the new millennium, it was time for another Wing and as I rode my 2001 Wing out of the dealership it felt quite comfortable to me. But by the end of that first week, there were already 2,500 miles on it!

Now I’d been told by friends that the bike and its seat might not fit my over-six-foot-tall frame too well, but it seemed to work out well at first. My wife, Lyn, and I enjoyed a number of short rides, then planned a weekend trip. However, that’s when she dropped the news on me that, for a co-rider such as herself who stands just over five feet tall, the passenger portion of the seat was uncomfortably wide for her legs. Additionally, she said the trunk rest leaned back too much for her and something major had to change before we could go on a long distance ride.

I contacted the dealer from which the Wing had come and they had an aftermarket seat that was narrower, so out came the credit card. The new seat did fit Lyn better, but the seat’s matching trunk rest was totally unacceptable. We shipped it back to the manufacturer for alterations to make it more suitable. However, the process went poorly and became quite a customer service debacle. In addition, I also had an issue with the seat. For me, it was that the seat was hard.

Even after many miles ridden, the seat and I still did not agree with each other and I was constantly switching seats: I’d ride the stock seat when I traveled solo and switch to the aftermarket seat when riding 2-up. Nine years—and over 60,000 miles later—all I had was less padding on both my rear end and the stock seat!

My Latest Aftermarket Seat: Back to the Start

Earlier this year I retired, so I plan to spend a lot more time on the bike. But I won’t do that the way it is now with its current aftermarket seat.

I decided instead to go back to my first long-term aftermarket choice in seats—a Day-Long—so I contacted Russell Cycle Products again.

The company's ordering process is fairly straightforward; you begin with your—the rider's—height, weight, waist, and inseam measurements. The company offers either a "Solo" or a "Dual" saddle. A "Solo" is built specially for the rider and is more or less stock for the co-rider. If you order a "Dual" saddle, then you'll also need to provide your co-rider's measurements and you'll need to provide an additional photo that shows both of you in your riding positions. Ours will be a "Dual" and will be made with the driver's pillion two inches higher than the stock seat to help accommodate my long legs. In addition, there will be a few other alterations.

Next, you provide the specifics of what you want for seat cover materials, colors, and stitching. You can even get accessories like built-in heat and backrest. In addition, if you'd like they will also cover your trunk and armrests to match. Personally, I had wanted

longer passenger armrest pads the first time around. So for *this* request, I made my own and shipped them along with the seat and trunk rest to get them covered to match.

One thing that comes standard is the "comfort guarantee". If you aren't comfortable, they'll make two attempts to rework the seat to your satisfaction; if they can't, you can get a full refund. Restrictions do apply, so I'd encourage you to visit the warranty portion of their website for details. As for me, I never needed to exercise the guarantee before, but I did like having it available. I trust that, once again, the guarantee will be unnecessary.

Once your order is accepted, a production date is scheduled and you need to box up your current seat so it arrives at the company before that date. We have a late-March production date for ours, and I am anxiously awaiting its arrival so that we can ride in true comfort once again!

Seat Company Q&As

In order to better learn how custom, aftermarket motorcycle seats are made, we asked several manufacturers a series of questions. Their answers give insight both into the decades-long process of how companies produce custom seats and also offer insights into new technology that has recently become available.

The participating manufacturers/distributors/retailers whose answers appear below are Diamond Custom Seats, Hartco International, Russell Cycle Products, and Ultimate Seats USA.



Diamond Custom Seats' Valkyrie seat, available for all years of Valkyrie (Seat only MSRP starts at \$499). (800) 722-9995 or (386) 698-2737 or www.diamondseats.com.



Hartco International's New PRO TOUR® series saddle, available for all models of Gold Wings, GL1000-GL1800 (Seat only GL1800 MSRP starts at \$999). (800) 446-7772 or www.hartcoseats.com



Russell Cycle Products' "Day-Long"™ Touring Saddle, available for all models of Gold Wings GL1000-GL1800 (GL1800 MSRP for full set starts at \$1,120). (800) 432-9566 www.day-long.com



Ultimate Seats USA's GL1800 Lowrider / Midrider / King®, available for all years of GL1800 (MSRP for full set starts at \$1,120). (877) 672 0288 www.ultimateseats.ca

Q: What do you feel is the greatest advantage to a rider to get an aftermarket seat on a newer bike?

Hartco: If a rider is going to spend the big bucks on a new bike and then be crippled at the end of the day or looking for a place to pull over and rest every fifty or a hundred miles, then the purpose of the bike has been defeated before it begins. A rider and passenger should be able to ride tank to tank and then fill the tank *sitting on the bike* because they are comfortable.

Q: What happens to stock seats after awhile, especially those of older model Gold Wings and/or Valkyries?

Ultimate: GL1500 stock seats are usually broken down with age and use. They offer little support in that condition. Valkyrie stock seats are just plain uncomfortable. In fact, stock seat comfort design in general leaves a lot to be desired and, if rides of over 100 miles are anticipated, a new seat is usually necessary.

Q: How does fitting a seat for a Gold Wing and/or Valkyrie differ from fitting other brands and models?

Diamond: Gold Wings and Valkyries offer large platforms on which to construct larger and more comfortable foams.

Q: How much does customizing a seat to a specific rider/co-rider matter and why? How do you do so? What measurements are needed and what does the process of customizing entail?

Diamond: The rider is usually completely different in stature than the passenger. It makes sense to construct each area for each rider so that both can enjoy the ride. Some seat makers don't pour the foam separately; the density in the front is the same as the foam in the back. If the passenger weighs a hundred pounds less than the rider, she isn't going to have a good day. Every seat we make is based on height, weight, and inseam for both rider and passenger.

Russell: That's the secret to real comfort, support, and ergonomics. It's all very important to long distance riding, which is what a

"Day-Long" is all about. We take height, inseam, waist, and weight, along with required photos. We determine saddle size, placement, height, and suspension tension with this info.

Ultimate: It is very important to design the seat for a range of user's height, weight and leg inseam to achieve optimum comfort, support and function. Height, weight and leg inseam measurements are needed to design a seat for correct positioning to the handlebars and the ground. These factors are also important for positioning foot-pegs and floorboards to the seat.

Q: How much does stitching matter and why?

Hartco: Stitching is helpful in holding a cover in place; however, it is normally for aesthetics.

Russell: Stitching is not really important. We use a pattern because it allows the cover to contour better to the saddle shape.

Ultimate: Stitching thread material must be UV-resistant and bonded polyester-based. In addition, seat cover seams must be double-stitched and triple-stitched in high tension areas.

Q: What new methods and/or materials are now offered for creating seats, and why are they superior to past methods?

Hartco: We offer the hand-poured polyurethane foam that we have used for years but add a layer of Visco elastic foam, developed by NASA for the space shuttle.

Russell: There are quite a few new materials, like gripper vinyls, etc. Most of our customers prefer leathers and standard vinyls.

Ultimate: The greatest advances in new seat development are in materials technology. Together with our raw material suppliers, we are continuously testing and upgrading. The Ultimate seat base pan uses a revolutionary new process of injection molded fiber reinforced rigid urethane, which provides an extremely strong but lightweight

and still flexible support for our memory foam one-piece molded computer-controlled density cushion. Also, the seat cover material is a new marine grade that looks and feels like a leather hide. It's mold proof and resistant to freezing and very hot temperatures, so it's virtually maintenance-free.

Q: What does your company do to prolong a seat's life?

Diamond: Our seats are built to service the customer for many years, sometimes lasting as long as 20 years. This of course depends on the size and weight of the rider and the climate and manner in which he stores and maintains his bike; but our seats are simply better because they're hand-built to fit each customer.

Hartco: We have recovered seats that are 18 years old and been told by the customer, "Do not touch that foam, it's still perfect."

Q: What do you feel sets your seats and company apart from other seat manufacturers?

Hartco: The fact that we hand-make every seat to exact specs. The other "off the shelf seats" are meant to be a one-size-fits-all application, which just doesn't work well. Hartco has been building custom seats for Gold Wings for thirty years, and Diamond has been manufacturing custom seats for forty! Our seats are built from the ground up, individually for EACH rider and co-rider, one at a time. The foam is hand-poured to both the rider and co-rider's weights. The seat is then hand-shaped to fit the specifics of each rider.

Ultimate: Our design expertise guarantees to give a long distance "no numb bum" ride with our exclusive comfort memory foam (our secret). Correct nose angle design prevents the rider from sliding forward because "YOU SIT IN OUR SEAT, NOT ON IT". We offer a 14-day trial test period for full refund, our base pans and all brackets and hardware have a lifetime warranty, and we have excellent customer service.

Some Other Cool Ways to Improve Rider/Co-Rider Seating Comfort

Backrests:



Utopia Products Inc. says: "We built custom-fitted touring seats for our first 20 years in business and took #1 in *Motorcycle Consumer News* about 20 years ago for design, comfort, quality and service. About that same time, we switched over to manufacturing backrests instead. Our "Utopia" Built-In Driver Backrest installs in minutes without taking off seat covers and is available for GL1000s - GL1800s (with or without heated seats) and Valkyries. For more info, call (888) 343-3320 or visit www.utpr.com."

Seat Pads:



Alaska Leather, "Home of the Sheepskin Buttpad", says: "Our buttpads can be used instead of, or in addition to, a custom seat. They're cool in the heat, warm in the cold, and very affordable. We recommend our large deluxe for the GL series driver's seat. It covers the top seating surface only and is a piece of grade A domestic sheepskin, sheared to 1" density. It has a single elastic strap connected with a quick release on each side; it just clicks on and off. Our pads also fit older models and trikes. Plus, they can be washed and fluffed up with a wire brush to feel like new any time. For more info, call (877) 562-2324 or visit www.alaskaleather.com."



American Motorcycle Specialties says: "Our Comfort-Max® Gel Pads come in all sizes to fit all older and newer Gold Wings and Valkyries, but we specifically recommend our Ortho-Deluxe Sheepskin Gel Pad. It has a unique, cut-out section that eliminates painful pressure on the tailbone and helps your spine relax. It measures 18"W (max width is the most important measurement because it supports more weight over a larger area, thus reducing pressure) x 17"L and has a 4" wide front. Our pad is very wide. For the passenger, we recommend the Jumbo (16"W). The pad comes with 3/4-inch thick gel and a layer of memory foam on top, which adds an additional element of comfort by contouring the hard and soft parts of the body. For more info, call (800) 710-7237 or visit www.amspecialtiesusa.com."



David Scott Company says: "Our Blue Diamond® Gel pad is 14"W x 17"L and is 1/2" thick. It's 3.5" wide at the nose and about 9.5" at the tail. Our product line is *not* water-based gel and will therefore not leak, ooze, or evaporate if cut. Since it's a solid and not a liquid, it can be custom-cut to size and we have several size options for any Gold Wing or Valkyrie. It is designed to be inserted permanently within the seat or attached to the top of the seat and is specially formulated to reduce pressure, vibration, and shear during prolonged usage. For more info, call (800) 804-0333 or visit www.davidscottco.com." ●