



RESTORING AN OLD WING

SUSPENSION, THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE

by Bill McIlrath GWRRA #22638



The story begins after Wing Ding 32 in Des Moines, Iowa. There were three of us heading east. In the lead is fellow Chapter Member Bob Wilson, B2, Marion, Ind., followed by his son, Chris Wilson, Chapter F, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was riding shotgun. Three 1800 Wings, one up, towing Bushtec trailers. Ordinarily, I do not mind zipping along on the highway, but Bob and Chris were moving at a pace that I found uncomfortable. Something about their bikes was different — they had Traxxion Dynamics front suspension.

Fast forward about 26 months. I receive an email on a Friday confirming my need to be at the Traxxion factory in Georgia first thing Monday morning. Fortunately, plans for the trip were already set up just in case and getting there on time was not a problem — for the most part. (Do not head there by way of Atlanta, Ga. for a morning appointment unless you absolutely love rush hour traffic. I do not.) Fortunately, I was running ahead of schedule and despite the lengthy delays, I still made it there a bit early.

The factory is located near the end of a nondescript group of industrial buildings, and from the outside it looks surprisingly bland. Once inside, the story changes and the further in you get the bigger the impact. The entire staff had been alerted about my visit on behalf of *Wing World* magazine, and there in the lobby I found my name in lights. They have a programmable sign used to display the names of customers scheduled to be there on any given day. Impressive.

Going into the employee-only area, I learned that Traxxion Dynamics is very focused on making all of their products here in the United States. Their part specifications are so exacting that they have found it nearly impossible to get anyone to make parts to their standards. This means Traxxion has to have their own machine shops — impressively clean ones at that. Their equipment comes from Haas Automation, Inc. (also made in the U.S.A.), and yes, the floors are clean enough to eat on. The shops are so impressive that Haas Automation even uses one of them as their east coast showroom, and they bring potential customers to Traxxion Dynamics to see the equipment in action.

About a year prior to this visit, our forks were rebuilt at a local Honda dealership. Over time I was starting to have a lack of faith in how it handled, just short of being afraid to ride it. Slow speed turns were especially disquieting and all of this was causing some negative riding habits. It felt like the steering head bearings were shot. Our visit to Traxxion Dynamics involved getting our Wing set up with the whole package including AK-20 cartridges; a stiffer triple clamp assembly with All Balls steering head bearings; fork brace with fork protectors; and a redesigned rear shock with a steel braided brake line.

Normally, the time required to do all of this work is about a half day. Knowing this left me assuming that they take off the forks and have a rebuilt set waiting to install. Nope. They completely disassemble, inspect and rebuild your forks using the AK-20s. Over time, the fork tubes wear on the inside where the lower



bearing slides up and down with every bump. It ends up one of my lower tubes was nearing “marginally excess” wear, and the other was way over spec. (These forks were rebuilt about ten thousand miles before this; they should have told me that at least one fork tube was bad, but maybe that level of inspection was not part of a normal Honda dealership rebuild.) Both needed to be replaced. This, and not the fork bearings, were the cause

while adjusting the pre-load, a change from the stock shock.

I had read a number of testimonials about co-riders who found the ride with this setup to be softer. Unfortunately, this is the one thing that did not work out for us as we had hoped. Lyn sometimes feels that bumps bother her back more now than they used to. Without riding a series of roads with bumps at a fixed speed and then repeating after a change like this, it

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of the poor handling. Fortunately, they keep the lowers in stock, as well as the factory oil seals, bushings and bearings. These are about the only items you will find there that are imported. By mid afternoon, the Wing was finished and I departed.

I found myself at a hotel in Manchester, Tenn. that night after riding some of the smoothest asphalt I've ever experienced. It was impossible to determine if the road was really that smooth or the suspension that great. The Wing felt foreign to me and it took time to fight off the bad habits I'd developed due to the poor handling of the past. It's no longer the bike we bought in 2001, and I fully understand and agree with people who buy brand new Wings and take them straight to Georgia to have their suspension fixed. With the redesigned rear shock assembly, I've actually felt the height of the seat change a little

is difficult to gauge if things changed or not. Hopefully, when the time comes to have the suspension serviced, we will have a solution. The future holds a trike conversion for our Gold Wing with those two large soft tires in the back — that will be the ultimate change for rear comfort.

For decades, I've been a year-round rider despite living in the northeast. This winter the Wing was parked and just never got back out of the garage — until today. Anticipation was high wondering how it would feel riding this “different” machine after a long hiatus. The trip wasn't all that long but it was evident immediately how solid the suspension felt. Approaching my house I thought, “They did a great job the last time they paved this road.”

I'm ready for you now, Bob and Chris.