

Broken in Half, Miles from Home

By Carlton Larsen

The ride to Yellow Grass, an hour and a half each way, would be a good shakedown for my heavily customized 1980 Maxim 650 Yamaha. A Mac four-into-one pipe, Uni filters, and a 750 Seca engine with a Dyno Jet kit all add up to a rather lively 650 and it looked to be a beautiful evening for a ride. Three hours riding, a couple of hours of visiting, I would be home by 11 p.m. and well rested for Sunday morning. Excellent, but my bike had other plans.

It started fine enough and as the tripmeter happily counted the stress relief, I reveled in the first really nice riding day of the year. I remembered that it was only two weeks since I had last ridden Hwy 48, and that time I had been stranded on the way home on the Royal Enfield Bullet—80 kmh winds and freezing rain turning to snow climaxed in a frozen carburetor. Welcome to May in Saskatchewan.

The Maxim kept getting excited and wanted to run. A couple of short bursts to triple digits were too much to resist with the roads totally devoid of traffic. Highway 48 is the only road out of this town with reasonably smooth pavement, so the temptation overcame me. I soaked it all in as I rode; the beautiful sky, the freshly leaved trees, the small towns. I passed a single running shoe in the middle of the highway and once again pondered this great mystery of the highway: where do they come from, these lonely shoes?

All good pavement must come to an end, at least here in the land of frost heaves and plus 40 to minus 40 seasons. Highway 48 gave way to "Hwy 35." Although 48 is a delight, Hwy 35 is where potholes are born and nurtured until they are big enough to go eat cars and bikes on their own. Speed went from 120 kmh down to a perhaps excessive ninety. Constant cornering on the arrow straight road still resulted in the occasional hit from below. Little did I know what was happening with each of those asphalt sucker punches.

The next turn was for a shortcut. I could shave off quite a few kilometers by taking the gravel backroads straight

across. But the road soon shrunk to dirt only and then turned into a prairie trail level with the fields. The next grid road looked like a launching ramp tailor made for modest air. Since I am "born to be mild" I crossed it at a speed which merely extended the suspension and I may have grabbed as much as an inch of air. This is when the day deteriorated rather quickly.

At this point it's necessary to mention that my bike is equipped with vintage Shoei hard saddlebags. I built the custom-mount system and I am quite proud of the way they don't sag, and the way they ride and look. The hard bags and the Slipstreamer "Hellfire" windshield make for a comfortable and capable commuter and long distance mount. They also tend to accumulate lots of goodies.

And lots of weight.

On landing I immediately noticed something was wrong. I assumed the seat had come loose and I slowed to a stop to latch it back down. The Maxim seemed reluctant to hop up on its centrestand perch. Once there, the bad news struck. The seat was indeed loose. The rear rack also moved up and down freely. The fender moved with it. So did the saddlebags. In fact the rear wheel did too. I removed the seat with a sense of dread. Sure enough, I was in a rather difficult situation.

The nearest farm was a couple of kilometres away, and no vehicles were in sight for miles. I was a very long way from home, and about 20 kilometres away from my destination and there, staring me in the face, was a catastrophic failure. All four of the frame tubes forward of the rear suspension had broken off.

I stood staring, stunned by what I saw. A couple of experimental tugs on the rack confirmed the bad news. The

only things holding the back wheel on were the swingarm, the aluminum grab rail, and the wiring harness. It was too far to walk, and the bike was already broken in half so I had little to lose. I carefully climbed back on the loose seat and eased into first gear. At 10 kmh, rising to 40 when I finally reached the pavement, it took over an hour to cover that 20 kilometres. The story has a happy ending. I knew my friend lived next door to a skilled welder. Under Darren Domes' creative hands and humming Mig welder, the Maxim gained a couple of pounds and a good deal more strength than it brought from Japan.

If there is a moral to this story, then there are at least four. First, it is important to cultivate friendships with welders and neighbours of welders. You never know when your bike may break in half. Second, if you add a major component to your bike, make sure the frame is strong enough to take the increased loads. Third, potholes take their toll and contribute to metal fatigue.

And last, keep your wiring in good



shape, it may hold your bike together some day.

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