

# Lesson Learned...

By Roger Bowles, TRT Correspondent

Ordinarily, I don't rent motorcycles...I have two of my own and I can always count on one of them getting me to where I need to be. However, my son graduated from high school last week and he lives in Pennsylvania with his mother. He also owns a 1988 Honda Hawk and acquired his motorcycle license two months ago. I wouldn't have missed his graduation for anything but I only had three days off before I had to be back at work. He wanted to ride motorcycles with me the day after graduation so time became an issue. No way did I have time to ride up there and back, plus get in a day of riding.

I had heard about the Harley rental program and went about finding a dealer at least within a hundred miles or so of where he lives. As luck would have it, there just happened to be a Harley dealer in Orwigsburg, PA that rented bikes...about 40 miles away from where I was staying. I had already rented a car at the Philadelphia airport, bought my plane ticket and made the hotel reservations...so I figured the day after graduation I would take the rental car and follow him up on his bike to the dealership to pick up the bike.

The rental process went smoothly. I called, told the dealer which bike I wanted, a 2011 Fat Boy Lo (less expensive

the bike and he gave me a form to note any damage to the bike. Like an idiot, I gave the bike a quick visual, and not seeing any damage, I signed the form. I had done this hundreds of times with rental cars in the past and there was never any problem. The rental agent joked that as long as the bike didn't come back with any dents in the tank then everything was cool.

My son and I, and my two buddies, took off for a day of riding the central Pennsylvania countryside...lots of hills, rivers, small towns, two-lane blacktop, and deer signs everywhere...but it was a blast. There were a few twisties but nothing really extreme and the speed limit was usually 40 to 55 miles per hour...a pretty smooth leisurely ride through towns like Jim Thorpe, Mechanicsville, and a decent lunch at Grumpy's Barbeque near Allentown. I took it easy and enjoyed the ride.

We returned to the dealer about 4:00 p.m. to turn in the bike and take another look around the sales floor (really tried to talk my son out of the crotch rocket thing and at least put a Harley in his head). The rental agent took my paperwork and went outside. When he came back in, he told me that he would be sending me a bill for the damage. What the hell? I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I had babied

that bike all day and not so much as one bird had shit on it...the tank was even full of gas. I wanted him to show me so we went outside. He reached up underneath the engine guard and told me that I must have dumped the bike or it had fallen over. I told him I had three other witnesses that would vouch for the fact that nothing had happened to the bike all day. My buddy even told him that he was riding behind me and nothing had touched

the ground and we hadn't run over anything in the road. I reached up where he was feeling and felt the rough edge...like a scrape...but the floorboards weren't scraped, the edges of the hand controls weren't scratched, the derby cover and saddlebag wasn't touched...

The rental agent explained that although I had purchased the extra insurance, the first \$1500 of damage was my responsibility and that I would be getting a bill after Service did an estimate. Red in the face by that point, the only thing I could think of was the scene in Gran Torino where Clint Eastwood says, "Ever notice how you come across somebody once in a while you shouldn't have \*\*\*\*\* with? That's me." I told him that if I would have damaged his bike, I would own up to it and pay for it...but I didn't and I'm not paying for damage that must have already been there.

Therein lies the lesson for me. I didn't think to check under the bike or go over it with a fine tooth comb like the rental agent did when I returned (but he didn't that morning). Giving the guy the benefit of the doubt, maybe he missed it that morning and thought that I really did damage the bike. I don't want to say that he or his dealership is a tad twisted in their business dealings...they have an excellent reputation otherwise from what I have heard and read. It boils down to the fact that I didn't do a thorough examination of the bike and document the damage when I received it.

So bottom line...just something to consider...if you do the fly and ride thing or rent a bike...my experience might save you a few bucks and a headache...and keep you on good terms with an otherwise good dealership. You owe it to yourself to take a magnifying glass over a bike and document every single speck...even under the bike! Incidentally, I have been back over a week and still haven't heard from the dealership...maybe they reconsidered.



than the touring bikes) and gave him my credit card number...oh...and I elected to take the "extra" insurance. Not being too familiar with Pennsylvania roads, I thought it might be a good idea. I also phoned a couple of friends of mine that live up in that part of the world and asked about good places to ride. They are both riders (BMW riders ... but they are still good people) and volunteered to lead the way that day for us. My son was okay with it so it was on.

The morning after graduation, we headed up to the dealer bright and early. The rental agent was very friendly and I shot the bull with the sales rep while the paperwork was being prepared...and pointed out a few fine choices of Harley Davidson motorcycles to my son, who is still fixated on buying a crotch rocket. I signed the customary paperwork and the rental agent made a manual credit card slip with my credit card and explained it would be used in case of damage to the bike. We then went out to look at

