

# CLASSIC BIKE RAMBLINGS

## THE LOST ART OF THE KICKSTART (or how the easy button ruined America)

I was having to do some long division just today, and it seems the dilithium crystals in my calculator had made their last voyage, and it occurred to me that I possess a few obsolete skills no longer needed in our "easy world". I found I could still do long division, I can still write cursive (although it does look a bit like hieroglyphics) and as I sat in my bike barn on this cold April day, I looked at 5 of my motorcycles that had kickstarts and it occurred to me that very few of us possess this skill, or these machines.

The very art of kickstarting a motorbike brings a oneness to you the rider and it the machine. You dial in the ticklers on the carbs, set the ignition advance /retard, find out how many throttle twists your beast likes, (given the day of the month and the alignment of the planets ( sometimes a well placed Tibetan monk chant also helps) and on a couple of my bikes is a compression release lever as a helper and then when the gods of "past top dead center" are amused and the goddess of hyperextension does not need a sacrificial knee or calf, it all comes together ! Science, magic and the here and now explode in a harmony of exhaust tones ! That's unless one small thing was amiss, your calculations and tinkering just a wee bit off and an that occasion the goddess of hyperextension may call. This being the condition when your kickstarter fails to engage the cog and you kick through open airspace with no resistance, your leg becomes extended about 2 inches past its pre-engineered length.....hence the name hyper-extended.

Then there's the opposing force of evil at work on the mechanics of kickstarting known as the "explosive kickback syndrome" a little to much gas, that extra 2 tickles, a few to many "throttle twists" and the wrong choke and the resultant opposing force-backfire explosion has been known to hurl a rider (well is he really a "rider at this point?) many yards away. The British still find skeletons of wayward kickers 10 sometimes 20 feet up in the trees, many times mistaken for lost parachuters from the war, but then find a rusting Triumph or a Norton near with its kicker deployed. NASA has also recently released a top secret paper identifying many pieces of space junk as decades of Harley riders hurled there by errant starting procedures . Often the term rider and kickstarting do not go together. I have often been limping rather than riding. I have 2 bikes that have the kickstart almost as a holdout. My 1974 Yamaha 650 was built around the beginning of the end, when motorcycle engineers must have come to grips with the "easy button". Cost, weight and its complexity and most of all a public that wanted quick, easy painless starts. This was the end of the ever reliable kickstarter .I do believe the "easy button" started at the sales level of the big manufacturers. It must have sounded something like this "hey Gunther what if ze motorbiken easian to starten? to which Mr. Suzuki replied "we have moe rider not in hospital, more ridey" to which Mr. Smith said "brilliant' we will have many more riders, young, old and of all sizes. Thus at this imaginary sales meeting I think the fate of the kickstarter was sealed. But when it comes to starting an ornery, obstinate, cranky, kickstart bike, that everyone in the lot has lost their leg to , or had a stroke on.....trust me.....go find a British guy, they seem to have the knack, but I guess that comes from starting Triumphs, Nortons or BSA's in a rainy, foggy country that never quite mastered motorbike electrics.

It's odd in an almost masochistic way. Now I actually look for bikes now with this ancient appendage hanging out of its case, its a point of sale now. There's something to starting a

bike with your foot, rather than a press of a button, almost like a CPR where you start the beast breathing with a bodily force. I have a few low dollar bikes, a few higher dollar bikes and I have never found any relationship between what they cost me and the fun (or pain) they have given me.....except for one thing. The ones that kick to life, they do seem to offer more pleasure and more personality, and I do think some of us should still know how to write cursive, do some long division on paper and kickstart a motorbike. The kickstarter connects you to the beginnings of motorcycling ,

its a throwback to the Iron Age. It taught you patience and technique and it connected you directly to the piston that was going to take you on your journey. Now you are isolated by wires, solenoids and starter motors from that connection. Speaking of connections when they all go bad you will wish that they held on to the kickstarter ! But then who has ever heard of hyper-extending your thumb while starting!

I think maybe the "easy button" and a lack of wanting to learn a true trade, to learn techniques and patience, instead of the need of instant gratification . Well that may have gotten US in the economic fix we are in. But that is another story.

MR 300 welcomes comments, ideas and pictures. Contact him at Mr300@floridafullthrottle.com. Also, look for more pictures and fun stuff to waste time with on the Mr 300 link on the Full Throttle Website - [www.FloridaFullThrottle.com](http://www.FloridaFullThrottle.com)



By Robert Demoss

## TOMORROWS BEST BETS

Mid-High Range  
late 60's Triumph T120 Bonneville  
price then (1968) \$1375  
price now \$4500 - \$14,000

Entry-Low Range  
1978 -1981 Kawasaki KZ 650 SR  
price then (1978) \$2395  
price now \$1000 - 2000

## SUPERBIKE UPDATE

Only the race held in Valencia can make this issue. With team BMW barely cracking the top 15 in race one and two. The big news is Ducati taking 1/2/4 in race one and 1/3/4 in race two. With team Xerox (Ducati 1098) rider Noriyuki Haga placing first in both races and setting a track record in race number one. He now maintains a 40 point lead in the championship after 3 rounds. Hags known as a "win it or bin it" rider had a "win it" performance at Valencia. Next stop 4/26 Assen, Netherlands and 5/10 Monza, Italy.

## MR 300 ALL CLASSIC TEAM



Nicholas Athanason (and family) Nick has always put up great trophies for all the shows hes sponsored. And always has a couple for the antiques and old school bikes. Big events, small events you want to be there. He's cool, he's fun, he's a professional. Here's to you Nick for being the fifth member of Mr. 300s all classic team.

