

PRODUCT REVIEW

Hunter FlatBars

by Ed LaPlante

I STARTED RIDING DIRTBIKES in the mid 1960s. At 18 years old, I was diagnosed with lupus and, later, scleroderma. These autoimmune disorders cause symptoms similar to arthritis. The fingers on my hands are fairly crooked, so riding more than 100 miles with standard handgrips causes severe pain and cramps in my shoulders, elbows, and hands. Being 56 and not ready to give up riding due to the pain, I wanted to find a solution.

Enter the Hunter FlatBars—flat handgrips with a foam grip cover that replace the round handgrips that come standard on every motorcycle. Ken Hunter, inventor of the FlatBars, claims that these bars, which put the damping material between your hands and the engine, isolate up to 70 percent of the vibration that normally reaches your hands. After reading some reviews on this product where Hunter performed the installation at his northern California shop, I decided that I would try to tackle the installation myself in order to do a complete review.

Installation requires cutting of the OEM handlebars at a specific dimension, cutting the plastic throttle tube, and drilling holes in it—all fairly exact. I was a little skeptical about this, but with confidence in my mechanical skills, I dove into the project. Most importantly, I found that you must comprehend and follow the instructions carefully. (The instructions are available online if you want to read them before purchasing the product.)

After some head scratching and multiple readings of the instructions, the installation went well, except when I ground off the locating pin that keeps the right handgrip switch assembly from rotating. Had I thought through the process, I would only have ground off the portion of the pin that protrudes through the bar so the FlatBar could fit inside the bar. Without that pin the switch assembly could not be tightened down enough to keep it from rotating. Putting some electrical tape under the switch assembly enabled me to fix that problem.

The FlatBar on the clutch side is held in place by an expanding insert like a bar-end mirror would use. The throttle side is a little more tentative. It uses the same style insert as the clutch but cannot be tightened as the throttle needs to turn. The insert keeps the FlatBar from vibrating and adds stability. The only thing that



Hunter FlatBars are just that—flat bars. In the photo at left, the foam grip cover has been cut away to reveal the heating elements on the FlatBar. The photo below shows how the FlatBars are not at all like standard OEM handgrips. Photos courtesy of Hunter FlatBars.



holds the throttle side in (other than that insert being pushed

into the bar six inches or so) is four small screws going through the throttle tube into the FlatBar. The throttle tube then sets in the switch assembly which is tightened to the bars (which is why the pin I ground off is so important). I was a little concerned about this set up, but after 2,500 miles this assembly is very solid. The clutch side loosened while I was muscling the bike onto a service rack for new tires, but that was resolved with a quick tightening of the allen screw.

When I had installation questions (such as after I ground the pin all the way down), Ken Hunter personally talked me through the process. He is currently reviewing the instructions to clarify a few points and make them easier to understand.

The installation was completed in early April, just in time for the start of the Oregon riding season. Being a long-time dirt and street rider, I am conditioned to the feel of a round bar. Though the FlatBars feel a little strange at first, they are comfortable after a few rides. My hands are relaxed and the feel has become natural. The flat surface of the bar allows me to rest my palm on the throttle and hold it in position easily.

I have racked up over 2,500 miles using the Hunter FlatBars. The bars are solid. There have been no problems with flex, movement, or looseness. My riding buddies and I twist the throttle hard while pushing our bikes on the straights and in the corners. I have complete confidence that these bars will stay in place and do their job well.

Since I live and ride in Oregon, I ordered my FlatBars with the heated grip option. The wiring instructions are clear so that part

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of the installation was easy. The switch to turn the heat on and off is mounted in my bike's fairing. One of my April rides of 250 miles started at 33 degrees, but the heated FlatBars made the ride comfortable. I even used them in June for a morning ride using my summer gloves. After having heated grips, I think I would even want them if I moved back to Arizona. Those desert mornings can be cold.

I am very pleased with my FlatBars. They are extending my rid-

ing time by reducing my hand, wrist, and elbow pain. My physical limitations are greater than what most riders endure. I will never be pain free on long rides, but this new handlebar system has made riding better for me. Before I installed the FlatBars, I would have hand discomfort at 100 miles or less. Now I can go at least 200 miles and the pain is not as severe.

Hunter FlatBars retail for \$95; the heated bars retail for \$150. They can be ordered for a variety of bikes at www.hunterflatbars.com. **FZ**