

# DOC'S CHARITY RIDE

ELECTRA BETTY'S FINAL PREPARATION. NEXT STEP: TO CROSS THIS GREAT CONTINENT!

Words & Pics Doc

Late model Harley-Davidsons are as reliable as modern cars. How often do you hop in your car with an anxious feeling in the pit of your stomach about whether it will start? Never, right? Or throw a leg over your Twin Cam and experience apprehension as you press the start button? Almost never, unless you've neglected battery maintenance for a long time.

As regular readers will know, when I chose to do my charity Southern Cross ride for depression awareness ([www.southerncrossridefordepression.com](http://www.southerncrossridefordepression.com)) I wanted to do it on a Harley that was built in the same year as my late son Scott was born, 1970. Now to do both the north south run and the east west run meant a trip of some 14,000kms through some pretty isolated country.

Which meant giving the Shovelhead I purchased for the trip a thorough check over to ensure reliability. Well, as it turned out, pretty well everything on the bike was stuffed. Andy of Hyperformance Cycles/SA Choppers put his hand up to help with a makeover and I began sourcing parts. The list is long and most of it has been



covered in these pages previously so I won't recount it here.

Suffice it to say I thought that with a brand new S&S Shovelhead style engine, a brand new Baker Drivetrain 6-speed gearbox, brand new wiring, new starter motor, new battery – the list goes on – that I would have a trouble free trip. Wrong! Starter relays failed (twice), I did in two starter clutches, a new starter button fell to bits, the VOES switch crapped out and the high-low beam switch also gave up the ghost. Which is no fun on the Stuart Highway after dark with road trains



blinding me for refusing to dip my headlight.

And because my Baker gearbox came with a kickstart function, I had adopted the immortal words of MAD magazine's Alfred E Neumann, "What? Me worry?" – which proved to be a mistake indeed. You see, despite weighing in a tad over 100 kilos and having trained with weights all my life, I was nevertheless unable to kick that engine over with enough oomph to get it to fire up. My '48 Pan, no problem.

Well I put what turned out to be a worry after all, temporarily on the back burner, while the bike was stripped down and the tins sent off for the sweet custom paint job she now proudly wears, thanks to Erika of Black Widow Kustom.

With the tins back on it was time to look for starting

LEFT: The decompression releases shown both closed (left) and open (right). BELOW: The top threaded hole as displayed here is the spark plug hole while the bottom one is the freshly machined one for the decompression release.



solutions. Andy suggested that we begin addressing this difficulty by fitting manual decompression releases in the heads, which should make it much easier to kick over. For those of you unaware of how these units function, what they do is vent high cylinder pressure to reduce the associated high starter torque required to turn the crankshaft when starting the engine.

This in turn reduces the cranking amperage necessary to start the engine, theoretically resulting in longer starter motor and battery life. And with obvious benefits to the poor bloke dancing on the end of the kick start lever. And as a wise old biker once told me, "It's truly an art form and a dance – every single time". So Andy got his head tech Adam to pull the heads off, and then send them down to Mark 'Hoody' Hood of Hood Motor Service for machining.

A lot of electronic ignition modules will not fire until the engine has turned over more than one revolution, something readily achieved with an efficiently functioning starter motor and a good capacity, fully charged battery. The Ultima unit Andy fitted can be set in kickstart mode, which enables it to fire on the first revolution as it is kicked over.

At the time of writing these words the bike is not quite finished but our magazine print deadline has arrived. All being well, I will be setting out on the Adelaide to Sydney leg on Tuesday May 3 and then heading west to Perth, before riding back to Adelaide. The dates and towns of where I am staying are listed on [www.southerncrossridefordepression.com](http://www.southerncrossridefordepression.com) along with a new mobile phone number. Anyone wanting to join any stage of the ride is most welcome. Just give me a bell so we can coordinate.

HD



ABOVE LEFT: After putting a new gasket in place Adam places the rear head into position. ABOVE RIGHT: And now begins the process of tightening it to specifications. BELOW: Now he begins the task of fitting new spark plugs and hooking up the spark plug wiring. INSET: New Ultima ignition module.



## WANT TO JOIN DOC?

Doc welcomes any readers who'd like to join him on any stage of his ride. Dates and places, along with a contact phone number, can be found on the website: [www.southerncrossridefordepression.com](http://www.southerncrossridefordepression.com)

