

Harley Hard Bag Conversion

In the spring of 2002 a set of aftermarket hardbags for Harleys (Bates bags from the 1960s) came up for sale on the Yamaha ISRA forum. It seemed like a good winter project. Once I got them I realized that there was a lot of work ahead of me. The right side had gone down hard, grinding the bag rails at 45 degrees and shattering the lid hinge area. The left side had been sitting in water and had extensive damage and surface rust too. All the rails were out of alignment and the "flash" holding the two right side rails was missing. (An aluminum pop rivet special was in its place) Even so, they had a unique look, so I dug into it and decided to get the fiberglass and paint work done outside, during the warmer weather.

After a few weeks they did start to look more promising. I rubbed down and re-glassed several places, found keys that fit the latches, and got all the hardware cleaned up and clear coated it. Amazingly enough, other than a few places (where leather wrap could cover it up) the chrome came up with just a nice patina of age. A few cycles of priming and painting had some nice looking lines emerging on the fiberglass.

The mounting had to be redesigned and welded up to fit the VStar mounting points. (The stock rear signal moustache had to go too, and I shed no tears over removing that I can tell you.) Basically I had to drill new holes in the main back rail, and add an extension to allow the bags to move back farther and clear the passenger area.

Chrome spacers were needed to line the bags up with the fender lines as well. (Half an inch at the front and three quarters at the rear) I also built in a "leveling joint" in the mid-section, so that I could tip the rear of the bags up and down until they blended in with the lines of the bike.

Once the bags were fit I did have to fabricate two brackets to damp the vibration a bit more, and I designed these to hook into the now unused fender bolts that had held the rear signals. (to either side of the stock brake light) The top bolt was also used to take a bracket that holds the "wiring bundle" in place.

Ah yes - the wiring was a challenge unto itself. The clean look of the laydown license plate leaves you a nasty nest of wiring to hide somewhere. In my case I had even more wiring to deal with, as the hard bags were going to house new running/brake lights as well. (add in another half a dozen wires with bullet connectors) Being a bike commuter, into downtown Toronto, Ontario I was glad to have two more brake lights for the sleepy cagers to spot. I mean, between the coffee cup, the cell phone and the electric razor or make-up brush they have a lot on their hands. Usually not the steering wheel.

Tech Tip: keep your old hand grip rubbers if you replace the stock units. The thinner one from the throttle side makes a tidy little roll to house the wiring. Two tie wraps to hold it all in and it just tucks under the license plate nice and weather proof and out of sight.

Here's what arrived at my place. Like they say, things look better in pictures, but I had a blast doing the work and it was worth it. Hey - the price was right too. I've never had a list member burn me.



Top left: Looks not too bad from a distance even now

Top right: You can see the grinding on the rails and bag in this shot, at the front.

Bottom Left: Brackets galore, and a cut through the rail repaired with a hose clamp. Glad I can weld !

Bottom right: Yup - even a half wit should see these light up.

Here's what the end result looks like, with the Bates bags and the HD police fairing in place. I think they fit in with the retro theme I'm working toward, and they make for a very comfortable touring machine that you can get off feeling refreshed after a full day.



Here are a couple of close ups of the hardware. The back end looks so much better without that moustache !
I wish that I had though to take a few shots of the mounting hardware , while off the bike. Oh well.



Compliments of:

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