

## How I Found My First Suzuki Stroker Street Bike & Regained The Path To True Stroker Happiness

**Surgeon General's Warning: Reading the following material may cause extreme drowsiness and readers are cautioned not to attempt....etc., etc., blah, blah, you know the rest. :-)**

My GT550A that some of you have seen in my recent pics was bought that way in 1990. At that time it had 660 miles on the clock. Yes, 660 miles!! How did this happen ?? Well, like a lot of things in life, it was a "next-best" choice.

A little background on my motorcycle career: I had worked as a wrench at two different Suzuki dealers for 5 years in the early-mid 70's and so knew Suzuki strokers of all sizes quite well. I had never owned one, being a dyed-in-the-wool Honda four stroke rider. In 1974, though, I bought a nice new Suzuki TS185 dual purpose bike, sold my Honda CB750K0 and took up dirt biking for the next 14 years. Although my mind had been opened to the virtues of "stokers" by the little 185, I still wasn't convinced about street usage of two stroke bikes. In 1988 I found and restored a low mileage but neglected Honda CB750K6, the last of the original-style SOHC Fours. This was the bike that I was riding when I stumbled on the GT550.

I had been looking for a Kawasaki H2 Mach IV 750 for a couple of years without any luck. My Honda was nice but I figured I'd inject a little "excitement" into my life with a "Widowmaker". If you're going to own a stroker, why not the biggest and baddest of all of them....right??? (I did find and restore a Mach IV much later but that's another story entirely.)

Looking through the hot-off-the-presses Bargain Finder/Buy & Sell paper one Spring Thursday in search of a Mach IV, what do I see but a GT550 for sale with only 660 miles on it. I figured that it must be a misprint and the seller meant 6600 miles....or maybe 66,000 miles.....although that would have been a stretch for a mid 70's two stroke street bike of *any* kind. I called the seller and, sho 'nuff, he claimed it *did* have only 660 miles on it. Thinking to myself "I gotta see this!!", I told him I'd be around the next afternoon to have a look.

Friday after work I cruise on over to the seller's place and look over the bike. It's quite good looking, in a subdued kind of way, with all the chrome and Forest Green Metallic paint. As advertised, it *does* have only 660 miles on the clock and *is* in as-new condition. It even has the original owner's manual, tool kit and Bridgestone Super Speed tires. Truly amazing!! But wait a minute....the seller (a mid-50's ex-bank manager turned realtor!!) tells me "it's not running quite right". "How not quite right?" says I. "Well", says he, "it only runs on *two* cylinders until you get it up to about 50MPH or so....and then it *really* takes off when the third cylinder cuts in !!". Having been a wrench as mentioned above, I know what ills these bikes were/are prone to. The commonest ill is the old ventilated-piston syndrome which, to anyone who knows strokers, is a *very bad thing* :-) Thinking that this can't be the case what with the "increased performance" at 50MPH, I flip out the kick starter and roll the engine over by foot. Nope.....three healthy pops that spoke of good compression....so the problem was somewhere else. Hmmm.....this is not the place to troubleshoot the bike since I don't own it....yet. After much haggling, the seller and I agree on a price and I return on Saturday afternoon with my bike trailer and the cash.

After the money changes hands and the bike is loaded up, the seller tells me the whole story of how the bike ended up in his garage (see "The Story Behind The Story" below). I drive home and unload the bike into my garage. Sunday morning up bright and early with the necessary tools, I start looking into "the problem". Let's check the points gaps and timing first.....what the heck??...#3 cylinder timing is retarded so much it's firing about 5 degrees *after* TDC!! No wonder the poor old girl won't run right!! So, I set the point gaps and timing properly, put some fresh gas, new plugs and a good battery in her.....two kicks and away she goes, idling smoothly at 1000RPM and responding nicely to the throttle. With only 50HP on tap, fairly conservative port timing and a none-too-svelte dry weight of 440lb (200kg) to lug around, it's no rocket ship....but was/is still a heckuva lot quicker than the four strokers of the day.....and it's still a very nice bike to ride around the city or for short tours out in the country. I guess if I was 25 years old, I *could* ride it to Vancouver or Winnipeg....if I had to. Now *that* would be an adventure.....

## **The Story Behind The Story Of My GT550**

As mentioned previously, exactly how my 550 ended up in the hands of a doofus is quite a tale in itself and was too long to include in the original story....which was long enough already.....right??:-)))

Annnnyyywayyy....It seems that the original owner (hereinafter referred to as the "dead guy") who had bought the bike new in 1976 lived in the interior of the province of British Columbia on an acreage outside of a medium sized town. He rode the bike very little for one year and then suddenly died. He didn't leave a will, so his estate was tied up in court for quite a number of years. At the end of all the legal to-ing and fro-ing the contents of the house and outbuildings on the acreage were to be auctioned off and the money turned over to the dead guy's estate.

This is where things get convoluted. The doofus I bought the bike from in 1990 had a brother-in-law who was retired and lived in the town in BC where the bike came from.. (Keep in mind that during a conversation one time, Doofus had mentioned to brother-in-law that he'd thought he'd like to have a motorcycle....someday.)

The brother-in-law, to while away his retirement time, helped a local auctioneer at his auction sales, moving things on and off the stage as they were sold and being a general help all around. In return, the auctioneer paid him under the table in cash and everyone was happy with the arrangement.

The estate auction of the dead guy goes ahead with brother-in-law helping the auctioneer with all the usual household goods being sold. Comes the end of the auction, brother-in-law is wandering around the acreage grounds and peering in the various outbuildings/sheds to see what he can see. He comes on one shed that's full of old broken furniture and rolls of worn out carpet and lino and other useless junk (evidently the dead guy was a pack-rat....like most men :-)). Some of the carpet rolls are up on the wall held by lengths of lumber. One of the rolls has kind of come unrolled and the loose part is hanging down to the floor. Guess what's sitting behind the loose carpet ?? (No prize 'cuz it's toooo easy). Brother-in-law spies the 550 all dusty and cobwebby and remembers that Doofus had said he'd like a bike, sooooo.... he calls the auctioneer over and says "Looky here. Let's make a deal."

The auctioneer just about faints dead away because he was hired by the estate lawyer to make a proper inventory of the goods on the property and he'd obviously missed a substantial asset of the estate. His butt is now hanging over a big cliff. The auctioneer grabs the estate lawyer, who is still adding up the take from the auction, and shows him the bike. The lawyer gets a sudden rash because he's signed off on the inventory provided by the auctioneer and, as we all know, no lawyer likes to look stupid.

Well, a deal is quickly reached whereby brother-in-law agrees to take the 550 as his day-labourer fee, the auctioneer takes a chunk of his fee and puts it into the proceeds of the sale and the lawyer's butt is covered because the non-inventoried asset is properly sold, even if not at auction. Paperwork for the 550 changes hands and brother-in-law goes home to phone Doofus to tell him he now owns a motorcycle. Doofus is ecstatic and can't wait for brother-in-law to haul it to Cowtown the next time he comes visiting.

Soon enough, brother-in-law comes to Cowtown with the 550 in the back of his pickup but tragedy has struck!!! The low-rent rope he has tied the bike down with has let it fall over!! Unfortunately both "S" marked mirrors are history and the original stock bars are slightly kinked but all else looks okay.

The bike is unloaded into Doofus's garage and brother-in-law disappears from the story.

Sometime later, Doofus tries to start the 550 but no joy.....so he calls the guy down the block.

Now the "guy down the block" happens to be known as the "Lawnmower King" which has nothing to do with the movie at all. He's called that because in this area of upper-middle-class office worker types, he's the only guy that can get their lawnmowers running every Spring. He's the "one-eyed man in the land of the blind", to quote an old saying.

The King comes over and looks at the 550 and recognizes that it might be a little more complex than a lawnmower, but not wanting to lose face in front of Doofus, says "Sure, I can make it run!!". Things go downhill from here. Fresh plugs, a new battery, fresh gas and the "careful" setting up of the points all fail to get the 550 to run on more than two cylinders. The King digs back into his memory banks for stroker info and thinks maybe the #3 cylinder is loaded up somewhat. Recommended cure: long periods of idling to clear it out!!! Everyone knows that'll cure it...right?!?!? The ignorance of some people is totally unbounded !!!

The King finally relents and takes it for a spin but still no joy on #3 until it cuts in at about 50 MPH and then the 550 just about spits him off. The 550 defies all the King's efforts to make that #3 cylinder fire so he finally admits defeat. The poor 550 now languishes in Doofus's garage for two summers in spite of all efforts to sell it. It seems that no one wants to buy a three cylinder bike that only runs on two cylinders.....until I come on the scene to rescue it as related in the story above this one. The rest is history. My 550 now has 4500+ miles and has been trouble-free ever since I brought it home..... and that's the "Story Behind The Story".

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