

UKRAINIAN CONNECTION

On The Road And Sharing The Ride With Others

By Rob Dingman

Given the interest generated in my sidecar project by my previous mentions of it in this space, I thought I should provide an update.

As I indicated the last time I wrote about it in the June issue, when I got the Dnepr sidecar frame and body, there was no doubt that it should be attached to my BMW airhead rather than my Honda Nighthawk project bike, as I originally planned.

The Nighthawk went to the back of the garage, and it was full speed ahead in the new direction of attaching the sidecar to the custom 1986 BMW that started life as an R80RT. I have written previously about the many modifications I made to the bike, whose model name I changed to R8T, inspired by the modern R nineT.

Although I shortened the subframe to make the rear of the bike look less clunky, I made no changes to the bike's frame. This made it easier to acquire a commercially available subframe needed to attach the sidecar to the bike. It is probably a more expensive route than doing custom fabrication, but I would recommend this approach, since someone else has already worked out the proper engineering and attachment locations.

Since I was mating one marque of sidecar to a different marque of motorcycle and the motorcycle wasn't purpose-built to accept a sidecar, the sidecar frame required some modification as well, to attach to the subframe I had added to the motorcycle. These parts also were commercially available and allow adjustments to place the frame in the appropriate position.

Although I don't know what model year it is, the Dnepr sidecar apparently was from a two-wheel-drive military model. Since the sidecar frame didn't come with a drive-wheel axle assembly,

and since I was not going to be able to use the driven sidecar wheel anyway, I had to acquire a swingarm.

Since Dnepr is a Ukrainian marque, parts are not readily available here. I had to scour the web to find the parts I needed, many of which came from Ukraine. In addition to the swingarm, I ordered mounting struts, an assortment of hardware and rubber bushings, a luggage rack, cockpit cover, seat hardware and seat covers. I also was able to acquire a number of necessary parts from the United States through Craigslist and eBay, including a fender, turn signals and a Honda GL1100 rear wheel that fits the sidecar well.

Acquiring parts from around the country and from other countries certainly was complicated and slowed by the global pandemic. Some of the items I ordered took months to arrive, and some never arrived at all. Once I acquired everything I needed, the rig came together pretty quickly.

I paid AMA Charter Life Member Charlie Kline to paint the sidecar and frame to match the custom color of the BMW. Charlie also did the welding I needed. He did an amazing job.

Perhaps the most intimidating part of the project was getting the geometry correct and making sure the sidecar was safely affixed to the motorcycle and properly aligned. There is a wealth of information available on the web to assist with this process.

The most valuable piece of information I found was regarding the three essential factors to adjusting and aligning a sidecar: lead, toe-in and lean-out. Each adjustment can affect the other two. The process, therefore, requires some trial and error and a lot of patience.

When I completed my first set of adjustments, I thought I had nailed it. The bike and sidecar seemed to track straight and, after riding around the block a few times, I thought I was ready for a passenger. About three-quarters of the way around the block, I discovered that I hadn't tightened the fasteners quite tightly enough. I could feel the sidecar gradually slipping out of alignment. It was rather embarrassing having to ask my wife to get out and walk home. Fortunately, we were only about a quarter of a block away.

Once I tightened everything more securely, I gave it another try. After my first test ride alone, I gave one of my neighbors a ride, because my wife wasn't eager to ride again. Before I knew it, it was about two hours later, and I had given every neighborhood kid and many of their parents a ride around the block.

For most of them, it was their first experience with a motorcycle. And, judging from the grins I saw on the face of every passenger, it was a very positive experience. It is my hope that some of those kids will grow up to be motorcyclists. Maybe even some of their parents will take up motorcycling.

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