



## Comfort Seat Evaluation

by Mike Langford Butt Lite IV participant

I've had 3 motorcycles that have made long distance rides with me, each has had it's own seating problems. The CB500F stock banana seat was certainly not made for LD comfort but I solved that problem by mounting a highway patrol saddle I managed to pick up at a swap meet. This was by far the best seat I've ever had and I wish I had it now. Next in the stable was a GS1100GK with a Corbin seat. Everybody says Corbin is a good seat but I found it to be way too firm. The Suzuki/Corbin set up was what I called a "10 aspirin bike", a long day (10-12 hours) in the saddle only took 10 aspirin to tolerate. In 2000 I acquired a K1200LT and aspirin consumption dropped considerably.

While the stock seat on the K1200LT is reasonably comfortable right out of the factory it didn't take me too long to discover that it was not acceptable for long-distance riding. Long days on the K12LT typically go well for the first 12 to 14 hours and then I develop the "squirms". This is where I find myself shifting seat position frequently (as often as 30 to 60 seconds) to try to eliminate the aches and pains that are accumulating in my butt, thighs, hips, and interestingly shins. Typically, squirming is of no help and I start popping the aspirin.

In an attempt to increase my level of tolerance into the 20 hours plus saddle time required for LD events I've tried a variety different seat cushions: a Travelcade Gel Cushion, a gel bladder removed from a wheelchair cushion, and a sheepskin seat cover. The Travelcade was an absolute waste of money, not only did it not improve the ride, it increased the problem due to not being large enough for my fanny, creating overhang areas that became quite painful. The gel bladder from the wheelchair cushion was excellent in reducing the discomfort since it conforms to your body. The problem with this solution is that the bladder needs to be confined in some manner to prevent it from slipping, sliding, and bunching up. It was this bunching that no doubt created the leak. I discarded the gel bladder after only 3000 miles. I've never used the sheepskin for long rides, only day trips, because I didn't consider it to be an all weather product. Therefore, I have no direct experience with how the sheepskin alone performs after 12 hours.

In preparation for the Buttlite III, a seven day seven thousand mile endurance rally, I knew that I had to find some way to stay in the saddle for hours and days on end. Heretofore, two days in the stock saddle was about all I could tolerate. Some internet research indicated that the Airhawk cushion might do the trick. It had seen some very positive reviews and I was ready to purchase one. Having wasted many dollars on unacceptable products I posted a question to the LD Rider Forum to get feedback and confirm my purchase decision prior to gambling the \$150 purchase price.

The LD Rider Forum is a great resource! My posting received two noteworthy responses, one from Russ Lane who graciously offered to lend me his Airhawk for the duration of the rally, and one from James Dennis at Cycle Solutions, LLC (<http://www.cyclesolutionsllc.com>) My heartfelt thanks goes out to both of these gentlemen, without their support I have no doubt that my Buttlite adventures would be been much less enjoyable.

Jim at Cycle Solutions, is working on prototype seat pads based on his parent company's technology ([www.oregonaero.com](http://www.oregonaero.com)) and offered to make a custom seat cushion for me to evaluate. I'm an old Robert Heinlein fan and firmly subscribe to his philosophy of TANSTAAFL (there ain't no such thing as a free lunch) so I was a bit skeptical. I did some homework on Oregon Aero and they seemed to be on the up and up.

The marketing information Jim sent told me that "the Cycle Solutions cushion is made from the same visko-kinetic foam that Oregon Aero uses when the build the seat cushions for the Air Forces ejection seats. VK foam and conform foams have a unique ability to "eat" vibration energy as well as spreading the seat load out to the entire seat surface area, as opposed to only those areas in direct contact with your posterior." This was pretty interesting so I poked a bit on their web site and found "Achieving Comfort and Safety in Aircraft Seating" at

<http://www.oregonaero.com/learn/AchievingComfortandSafetyinAircraftSeating.aspx>.

The science and testing behind their product seems to be rock solid. Now assured, I was more than willing to accept Jim's offer and generate this report.

Disclaimer--I got a free seat cushion out of this deal but you can be assured that the opinion I am expressing here is an honest evaluation of this product.

Jim sent me instructions on how to measure the seat for their fabrication process. The pdf file contained clear and concise imagery and directions indicating the required measurements. I attached pictures of the LT seat just to assist in the process but this was not requested.

Per our arrangement Jim shipped the cushion a few days before I was to head out to the rally. Also included in the package was a pair of ShockBlockers® Insole Inserts <http://www.oregonaero.com/products/category.aspx?ID=228> and a new addition to the product lineup ShockBlockers® Glove Inserts.

Frankly, the cushion didn't seem like much when I got it. It is very thin (which is a positive since many solutions elevate you too much) and the foam seemed to be very firm (reminiscent of the Corbin). Giving it a quick sit on my dining room chair, it seemed that it would be too firm and I had reservations about how well it would perform. I was glad that I had the Airhawk as a fall back, if needed.

Jim had told me that the cushion was a prototype and wouldn't have the fit and finish of a production model. This was apparent in some of the stitching but did not represent a problem. The fitment and shape of the cushion appeared as if Jim had had my seat in his shop when he made the cushion. It was the proper shape and size and the attachments were virtually in the exact same position as those I had prepared for the Airhawk. I was very pleased with the way the cushion readily adapted to the work I had done. Strapping was included with the cushion but due to the good fit to those I had already prepared I did not use the included straps.

In fairness to the reader I must note that I used a sheepskin over the Cycle Solutions cushion. There had been several postings on the LD Rider forum indicating that the sheepskin was a good option. I decided that sheep seem to do a pretty good job in all weather conditions so I opted to give this a better evaluation as well.

The first evaluation of the Cycle Solutions cushion was an 1100 mile, 16 hour, straight through ride from Raleigh, NC to my "pit stop" at a relative's house in Kansas City, MO where I installed new tires and changed the oil in prep for the rally. I fully expected that I would leave the Cycle Solutions cushion there and go on with the Airhawk.

The first thing I noticed on my ride to KC was that I sat in the same position for several hours with no desire or need to reposition myself. It seemed to have conformed nicely to my shape and was not creating any new hot spots or discomfort. Based on this initial evaluation I decided to continue using the Cycle Solutions cushion and retain the Airhawk as a backup.

Day two was only a 500 mile or so jaunt to Niobrara, NE. For me, starting out on day two (and up) is always an adjustment as the aches and pains from the previous day/s work themselves out. After only about 2 hours on the road I found myself to be as comfortable as on day one and throughout the remainder of the rally I never did experience any further "day 2" issues.

The short version is that over the 10 day span of the approximately 7000 miles on the road I never did swap out to the Airhawk.

Here are my observations and notes from my experience using the seat cushion during the rally:

- Leg one--Niobrara, NE to Tombstone, AZ. 60 hours, distance ridden ~2700 miles, two rest stops: one ~3 hours, one ~4 hours. No seating issues, quite comfortable, no squirming.  
**NOTE:** At the end of leg one, just outside of the checkpoint in Tombstone, I took a minor spill in some sand and succeeded in twisting my ankle quite severely (subsequently I learned it was broken). Even though I was in a fair amount of pain I elected to continue the rally.

- Leg two--Tombstone, AZ to Atlanta, GA. 50 hours, distance ridden ~2300 miles, two rest stops: one ~6 hours, one ~3 hours.  
During leg two I was not experiencing any seating discomfort. This may have been masked somewhat by the twisted ankle and the NSAIDs I had been taking for the swelling and pain. I had a long interstate run from Phoenix, AZ to Atlanta, GA and on day two of this leg I decided that a change in riding position might do my ankle some good. I removed the sheepskin that I had been using up to this point and continued with just the cushion. After several hours (perhaps as many as 12) I noticed that I had the squirms. I found this quite interesting because it was the first time in the entire trip I had experienced any seating issues. Pondering this for a bit I decided the sheepskin must have been doing more than I thought, I put it back on and the seating problem was immediately solved.

At the Atlanta checkpoint it was obvious that the swelling in my ankle and leg was excessive and that I could not continue the rally without risking serious tissue damage. After recuperating for about 24 hours I rode the 400 miles back to my home in Raleigh, NC. This was a non-stop run that did not give me any seating discomfort.

I had also fitted the ShockBlockers® Insole Inserts into my boots. Did they reduce vibration and fatigue as advertised? I really can't say. They did seem to do a good job in reducing perspiration and foot odor. In previous rides in high temperature environments I can say that my feet were baked on more than one occasion. Throughout my ride I never noticed my feet being hot and when I removed the boots my socks were not soaked with sweat. I honestly think this is one of the finest insoles I have ever used and I don't think you could go wrong in trying out a pair.

I didn't try out the glove inserts. My summer weight gloves fit too snugly for me to add the inserts. I am looking forward to fitting them to another pair of gloves and giving them a try.

My recommendation?

- If the cost of the Cycle Solutions is competitive with other options (\$100 to \$150 range) I would highly recommend it.
- For duration's in excess of 12 hours you really need to add a sheepskin cover.
- While I don't have any direct experience with custom made seats (like a Russel) based on my experience this certainly made my LT seat into a "day long" saddle and may be a strong competitor to an expensive custom seat.

Mike Langford  
Rider #44  
Butt Lite IV

**For more information contact:**

**Cycle Solutions, LLC  
98 Chelston Rd.  
South Euclid, OH 44121-3433  
216-536-0931  
216-291-3317 fax**

**[www.cyclesolutionsllc.com](http://www.cyclesolutionsllc.com)  
[info@cyclesolutionsllc.com](mailto:info@cyclesolutionsllc.com)**