

The Baker DD7: When is enough, enough?!

*Bert Baker
Baker Drivetrain*

When Lisa and I decided to pawn her jewelry, quit our jobs at GM, and cash in the kids' college savings to start making six-speed transmissions in our basement, everyone around us thought we'd lost our minds. We had both worked our asses off to get through college and had great jobs as engineers for the biggest, best company in the world, The General. Neither of us being the type to do what people expect us to do, we followed our hearts and traded it all in to follow our dream of bringing the six-speed overdrive to market. Here we are over a decade later, and while we're sitting around dreaming up new, cool shit, the rest of the world is still copying our original six-speed design. But how do we decide what to bring to market and when?

As I see it, if you understand the market, the market tells you. The need for the six-speed was driven by the surge of big-inch motors in the market. The stock five-speed, standard for decades was no longer enough. The need for right-side drive was driven by the need to counter the powertrain offset and maintain the balance of the motorcycle during the wide tire craze. The noise and vibration characteristics of Harley's Twin-Cam motor were the inspiration for the birth of the Direct Drive Six Speed. Once six-speed transmissions became standard on nearly all production motorcycles, the game changed again.

It's funny, the first suggestion of a seven-speed transmission came from our 6-year old son as he watched the very first six-speed ship off to Ron Simms (OK, so we gathered up the kids and made them watch, but that's beside the point). He was a curious fellow, a real thinker and he asked with boyish wonder 'When are you going to make a seven-speed, Bert?' Now, I'm an independent thinker, I like my ideas to be my own. Without giving it any thought, I brushed off the question with a quick, 'no one needs a seven-speed Joe'. Truth is, at the time, no one did need a seven-speed transmission. For the time being, enough was enough.

Time has a way of changing things. In 2006 six-speed transmissions final-

ly became the industry standard with the introduction of the Harley-Davidson Cruise Drive 6-speed. We consider Harley-Davidson our friend. They provide an incredible market for our products, and their products sometimes provide us opportunities to improve upon their ideas and bring new products to market. The Cruise Drive 6-speed is a good example, as it was long awaited and well received, but left room for improvement in the areas of gear ratio spacing, shift quality and noise characteristics.

Of course seven-speed transmissions were the next evolutionary step, and suddenly there was a need for it. It is more than just a big ego and numbers game. Seven-speed transmissions may seem like a gimmick, but the more gears you have, the smaller the rpm drops between gears, and the more able you are as the rider to stay right in the peak power band at any given speed. The key to success in any business is to 'find a need and fill it', which is what we did with our new Direct Drive Seven-Speed Builder's Kit (DD7). We packaged our DD7 inside the new, larger Cruise Drive transmission case and achieved our goals of improving the overall riding experience as it relates to launching the bike, shifting smoothly through the gears and ultimate rider satisfaction.

Over the years we've brought many new products to this industry. What to bring and when is the eternal question around here. We'll continue to look to the market for cues, and to trust our instincts. I'm sure people wonder what's going on in this giant melon on my shoulders. The truth is some days, I don't even know, but suffice to say that it is a mixture of things. Some kick-ass new designs and innovations for the motorcycle industry, for sure, lots of stuff nobody cares about, and a fair amount of whacked out, scary shit that's not fit to print. The one thing that's for certain is the sky's the limit. I decided a long time ago that nothing is impossible. Our son was the first person to ask when I was going to make a seven-speed, but he wasn't the last. I've been asked the same question hundreds of times over the past 11 years. My memory sucks, so I don't really know what I used to tell them, but I should have said 'when the time is right.' At Baker Drivetrain, enough may be enough at any given time, but we never say never. **IW**

