



U.S. Department
of Transportation

Memorandum

National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

Subject: Honda briefing at ODI, September 4, 2003

Date: October 2, 2003

From: *Bob Young* - ODI

To: Public File, PE03-039 - Honda Briefing Materials

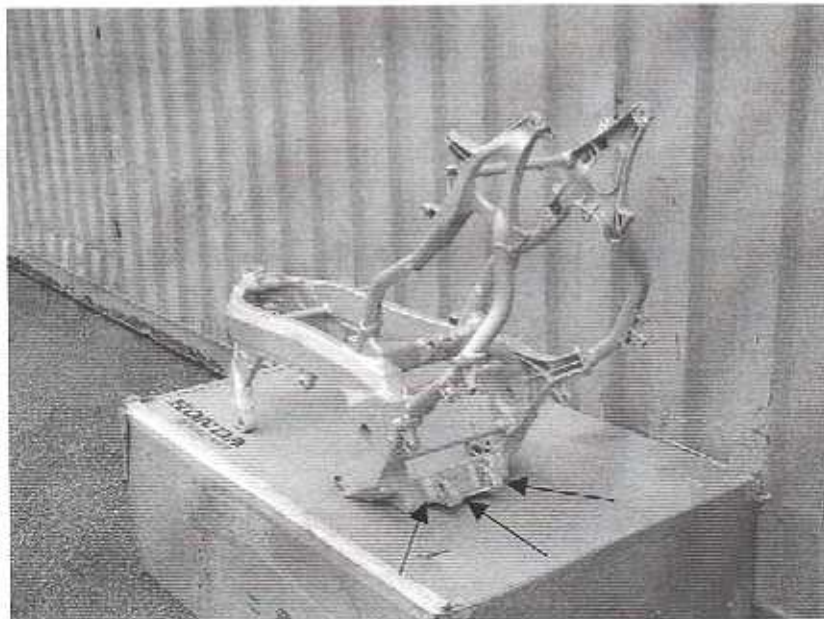
1.0 INTRODUCTION

On September 26, 2003 Honda provided ODI with the documents it used during its September 4th agency briefing. Included with these documents was the company's request that nine pages be treated by the agency as confidential business information and withheld from public access. NHTSA's Office of Chief Counsel (NCC) is currently evaluating that request. Material submitted without a request for confidential treatment is attached to this memo.

Honda requested the September 4th meeting to discuss lower crossmember failures on certain 2002/2003 model year GL1800's. This issue was (is) the subject of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Office of Defect Investigations (ODI) Preliminary Evaluation (PE) 03-039. We opened this investigation after becoming aware of crossmember separations and resulting rear suspension collapse involving these motorcycles.

2.0 THE SUBJECT CROSSMEMBER

The following photograph shows the subject crossmember location.



Both the rear suspension lower linkage and the centerstand are attached to this crossmember and, should it separate from the frame, the rear suspension collapses (although the swing arm is still fully attached to the frame and its lateral positioning is fully maintained), the rear tire contacts the plastic fender liner, and the crossmember and/or centerstand drags on the ground.

3.0 A REAL-WORLD FAILURE

Prior to meeting with Honda, ODI gathered information concerning a failure in the Washington DC metro area. We interviewed the owner and inspected his 2003 GL1800. Here's what we learned:

On May 23, 2003 at about 5:00AM, the owner of a 2003 Honda GL1800, VIN 1HFSC47073A202741, built at Honda's Marysville, Ohio assembly plant in June 2002, was riding with his fellow Blue Knight chapter members on the inner loop of the Washington Beltway. They were traveling about 70mph on their way to Knoxville, TN. While approaching the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, he (and some others in his group) hit a pothole, damaging some of their motorcycles' wheels. He, alone, however, had a crossmember separation. The back of the bike dropped, the rear tire was pressed against the inner fender and sparks flew from the dragging crossmember and centerstand as he guided the bike toward the shoulder. He managed to stop the bike without further incident. Subsequently, a Honda field service representative inspected it. Initially, he recommended replacing the frame but a couple of days later Honda decided to offer the owner a "buyback" and exchanged the damaged bike for a new 2003 GL1800.

On August 13, 2003 ODI inspected the damaged machine and found the following:

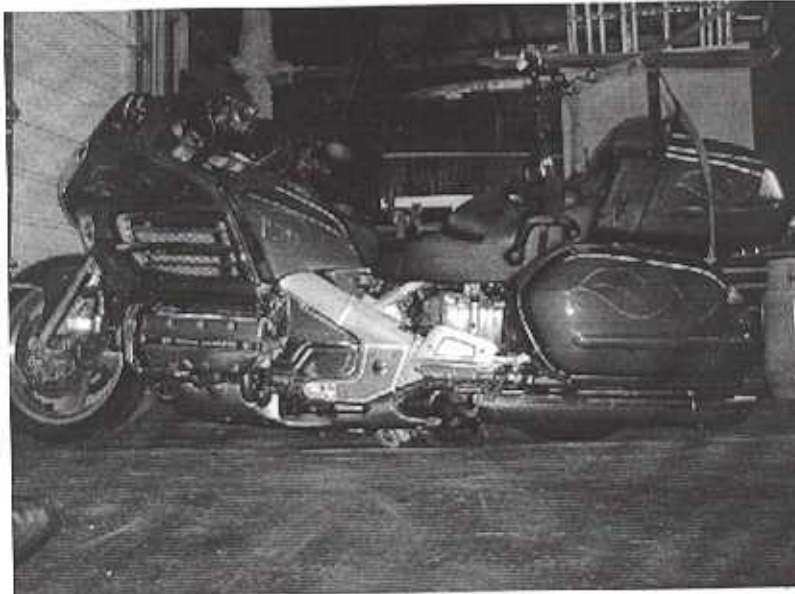


Photo 1 – 2002 GL1800 (built 6-02) w/1600 miles – Separated crossmember



Photo 2 – Separated crossmember dragging on ground



Photo 3 – Separated crossmember and centerstand dragging on ground

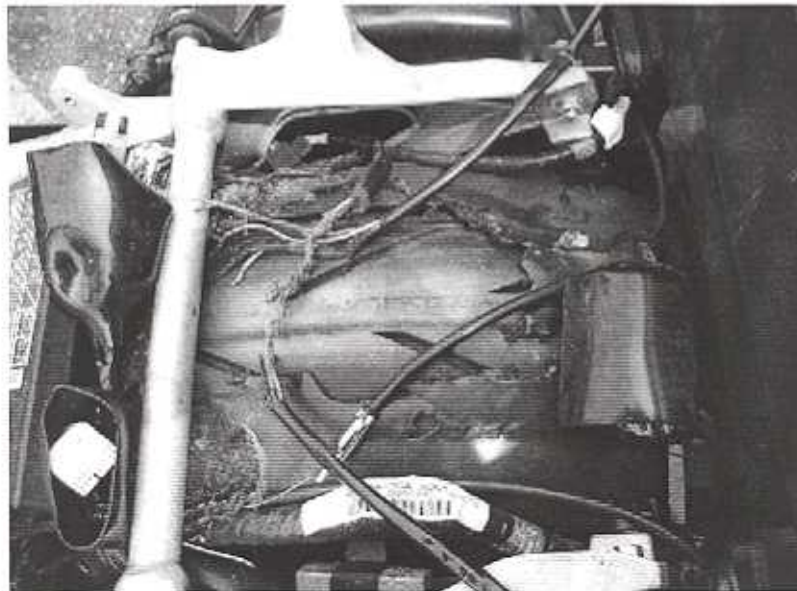


Photo 4 – Inner fender and speaker wires damaged due to tire contact (seat removed)

4.0 A REPLACEMENT FRAME, THE CROSSMEMBER, AND ITS WELDS

ODI also inspected the replacement frame, built in May 2003, intended for the motorcycle described in Section 3.0. This afforded us the unique opportunity to fully view the subject crossmember and its welds. The frame shown was never installed as Honda elected to replace the damaged machine with a new 2003 model.

The following photos show the crossmember and welds on the replacement frame.

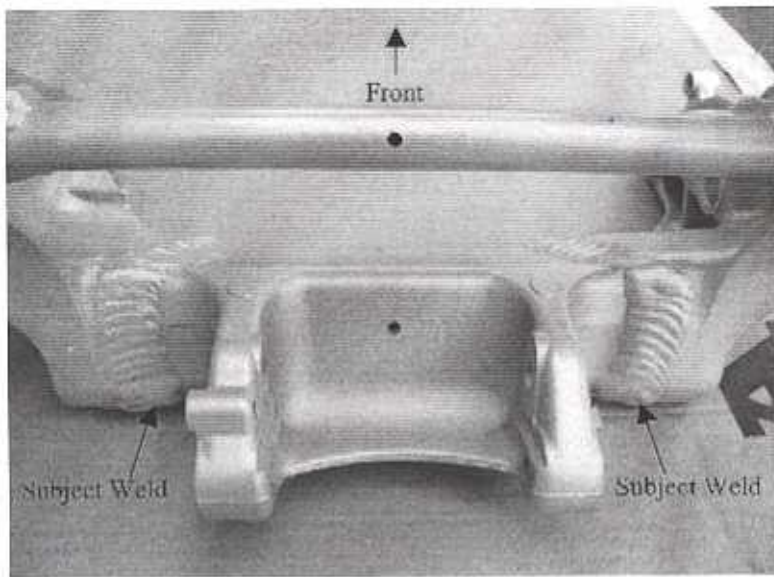


Photo 5 – Subject crossmember

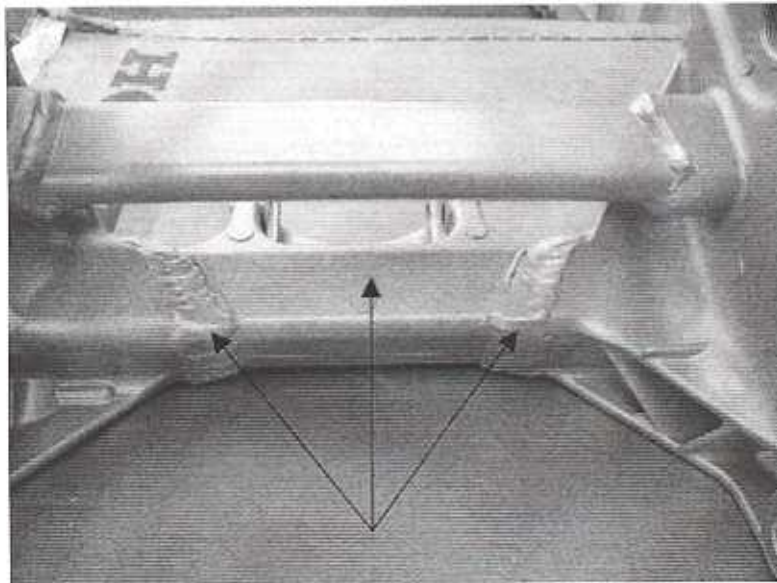


Photo 6 – Subject crossmember & Welds

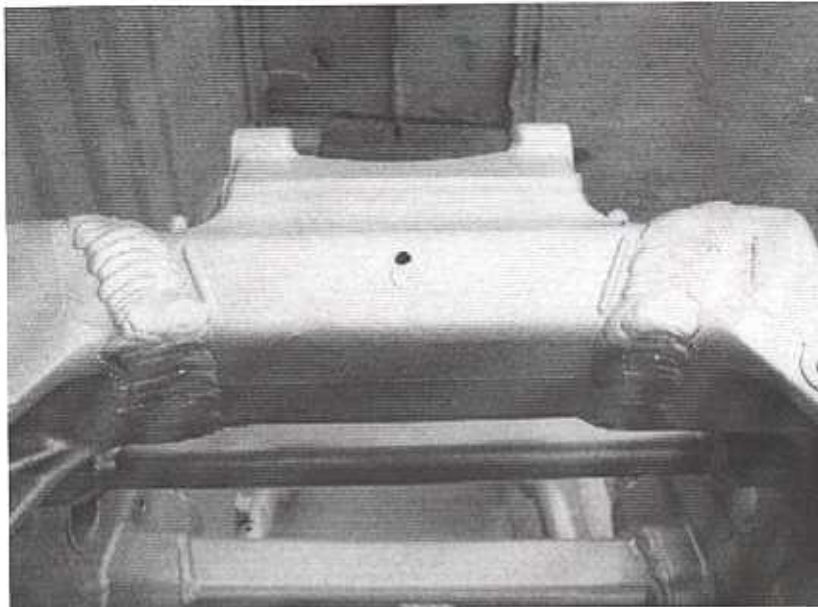


Photo 7 – Subject crossmember & Welds – Bottom View

5.0 HONDA'S BRIEFING

Honda's September 4th Agency briefing was organized into eight sections: 1) Inspection of both cracked and separated crossmember welds, 2) Honda's investigation of the cause, 3) Causation Summary, 4) Failure Predictability, 5) Safety Analysis, 6) Countermeasure Verification, 7) Probable Build Date Range affected by the problem, and 8) Investigation of Units outside the suspect build date range.

Honda's request that certain documents related to items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 be granted confidential treatment by the agency is being considered.

The confidentiality request and the "non-confidential" documents are found in Attachment 1.

6.0 HONDA'S SAFETY-RELATED RECALL

On September 16, 2003 Honda formally notified the Agency (Attachment 2) that the problem is safety-related and that it would conduct a safety recall (03V-350) to remedy those Myr 2002 and 2003 GL1800 "Gold Wing" model motorcycles it believed were built with crossmember welds not meeting its specifications. Honda will notify owners of the affected bikes by mail this week. The owner notification is Attachment 3.

6.1 Recall Remedy

While the recall notification sent to the Agency by Honda describes a remedy (i.e., the existing crossmember welds, *if not cracked*, will be reinforced with additional TIG welds applied by a person certified to perform TIG. TIG, otherwise known as Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (GTAW), is commonly used in high quality welding processes). On October 4, 2003, NHTSA received a complete "recall package" from Honda (Attachments 4 and 5) that includes a service bulletin. Page two of the bulletin tells the dealer, "If your inspection identifies a crack or cracks in or on either the Left or Right lower crossmember frame welds, **STOP** – call your DSM [District Service Manager] or TechLine for further instructions." As of October 7, 2003, Honda has not formally notified us of what action it will take to correct cracked crossmember welds that cannot, for whatever reason, be reinforced.

The Agency does not dictate to the manufacturer what form the remedy must take...manufacturers are responsible for crafting effective remedies. If the remedy does not appear to be effective (based on reports of remedy failures, for example), the agency may reopen the investigation and could request that a new remedy be provided.