

A nationwide survey of Gold Wing owners revealed that of all the air deflectors made for this particular model, those from only five different manufacturers comprised over 95% of the usage among GL owners. In the test results, you will find four of these models rated. The fifth pair of deflectors were perceived to be of such poor quality that we could not bring ourselves to even include them in the ratings. (See the sidebar at right for more details.)

Each pair of deflectors was mounted on each of two different Gold Wings, ridden by two different couples, and tested for at least 5000 miles by each. Each test period by each couple included at least two extended rides in the rain (100 miles or more), two in temperatures exceeding 100°, and two in temperatures below 30°. In all, the testing covered a period of over two years and 50,000 miles of riding, in every conceivable type of weather condition. Separate, shorter test series were also run at the same time, utilizing riders and passengers of varying heights and bikes equipped with several different kinds of aftermarket windshields, both taller and shorter, to see if the results in these conditions would vary significantly from the primary test results—which they did not.

Each test couple was asked to fill out questionnaires, rating each set of deflectors on the following criteria:

- ✓ Ease and appearance of installation
- ✓ Ability to deflect cold air from both rider and passenger
- ✓ Ability to deflect rain from both rider and passenger
- ✓ Ability to hold adjustment where set
- ✓ Ability to bring cooling air onto rider and passenger
- ✓ Perceived quality and durability



## BUYER BEWARE

**T**HE FIFTH MODEL of air deflectors we tested had no brand name, and was purchased through the J.C. Whitney mail order catalog. However, we want to make it clear up front that this is not an indictment of J.C. Whitney, as we have purchased many quality products through it previously, at excellent prices. Unfortunately, that was not the case this time.

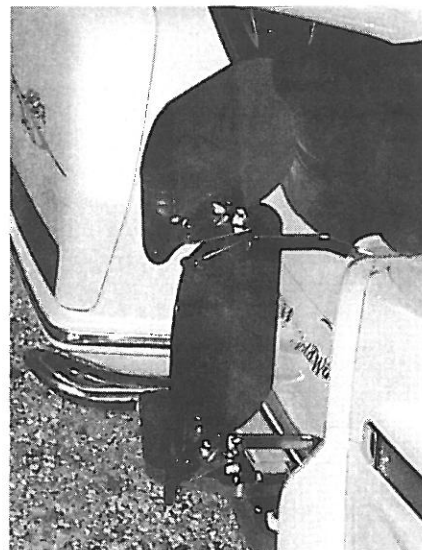
The Whitney deflectors, on first inspection, appeared to be exact replicas of the top-rated Baker Built units, yet constructed in Taiwan (Baker Built products are 100% made in the USA). Closer examination, however, revealed that in this case, at least, beauty was indeed only skin deep—if that. The attaching hardware, which appeared to be chrome, was in actuality made from some type of cheap pot metal with a thin coating of chrome-colored paint. Likewise, the “chrome” tension-adjusting knobs were a cheap, chrome-painted plastic. The deflectors themselves appeared to be constructed of a brittle acetate that scratched and cracked easily, unlike the acrylics and polycarbonates used by most of the major manufacturers.

Within 90 days of installation on one of our test bikes, the Whitney-Taiwan units began to fall apart. Three of the four tensioning knobs stripped their threads, the chrome paint began peeling off the attaching arms, and rust pits began to appear on all the metal parts. The deflectors themselves became visibly clouded with scratches, and a corner broke off of one.

MCN not only does not recommend these units under any circumstances, we refuse to even grant them a rating alongside the other products, and urge our readers to avoid purchasing them. This product is junk, plain and simple, and shouldn't even be offered for sale.

In addition to these subjective ratings by the testers, the MCN crew added its own hard facts on:

- ✓ Price
- ✓ Warranty
- ✓ Quality of materials
- ✓ Measured space from fairing when deflector was fully open
- ✓ Measured space from fairing when deflector was fully closed
- ✓ Exposed frontal area (drag)



Combining the results from all of the above, final ratings were given to each model of air deflector based on:

- ✓ Value (quality/price/warranty)
- ✓ Function Cold/Wet (effectiveness blocking cold air and rain)
- ✓ Function Hot (effectiveness in supplying cooling air)
- ✓ Frontal Area (open/closed/neutral)

Here again, we need to stress that although some criteria were quantifiable, such as the size of gaps or air leaks between the deflector and fairing, much of the rating was done on the perceived effectiveness of the products as experienced by the individual testers.

## Bottom Line

All of these products work, after a fashion, and even the worst of them provides increased cool air flow in hot weather and improved protection in cold weather and rain for both the rider and passenger on a Honda GL1500. The trade off is in increased drag, which affects both handling and gas mileage. Most touring riders—and especially their back seat passengers—find that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

In addition to being functional, air deflectors can actually enhance the appearance of a full dress touring bike like the Gold Wing. Most manufacturers offer a wide variety of colors, to match the bike's paint, and it is not at all uncommon to find owners who have had their deflectors etched with personalized designs. When done right, the deflectors become an attractive addition to the machine.

It's not hard to see why air deflectors, after seats and windshields, are the most-purchased accessory among full-dress touring bike owners. 🍀