

Grand Rapid Police Department evaluation

Officer Edgcombe and I participated in an introduction and evaluation of the 2011 Victory Police Motors. We met Mike of Victory Police Motorcycles in Lansing, MI at Full Throttle Motorsports to test drive and evaluate the 2011 Victory Police Motorcycles.

We arrived at Full Throttle and were immediately impressed with their attention to detail. To the rear of a large enclosed trailer were Mike and Rob polishing two black and white police versions of the Victory Commander I motorcycles. I was caught off guard by how striking these motorcycles are. A third black and white Commander I motorcycle sat on the hill on the grass that appeared to be positioned as a display. A solid white Commander III police model sat directly behind the trailer and a fully blacked out Commander I motorcycle sat in the trailer that had no chrome or shiny surfaces. Officer Edgcombe aptly called the Commander I (while referring to the rear end of the bikes) "THE BAT BIKE," due to the sweeping shape of the saddlebags and rear fenders that form a similar shape to that of the caped crusaders cape.

The paint scheme of the Commander I was different than I've seen on other police package motorcycles. The main body color was black with a 4-6" white stripe along the center of the sides of the tank. The top center V section of the fork mounted fairing was white. Both of the white sections (tank and fairing) have badge stickers (the Victory Police Motorcycles logo) similar to the badge stickers on our current motorcycles. The rear mounted top box and saddlebags, front and rear fenders are solid black. This is a very striking and attractive combination of colors and design.

We then spent about an hour with Mike and Rob going over all the features and mechanical aspects of the motorcycles. They explained the Victory's design philosophies and their mechanical and structural differences compared to those of the Harley Davidson Road King (windshield) and Electra Glide (fork mounted fairing) which are direct comparisons and competition.

Frame and Engine-

Each of the Commander series motorcycles are based on the civilian versions of Victory touring lineup. They all share the engine and frame that was designed specifically for the flagship model, the Victory Vision.

The frame is a one piece design using the engine as part of the frame. The gas tank is an integral part of the frame. Victory states that this design gives the frame better structural rigidity than the Harley Davidson design. Sport bikes have used this proven design since the late 80's.

Ergonomics/Comfort-

As you are seated on the motorcycle, unlike other brands, you are set into the motorcycle the same as you are into sport bike. This centers the weight and balance of the bike

allowing you better balance and a more comfortable feel. The handle bars are pulled back to you much like the older Harley Davidson FXRP, BMW K1200LT and Yamaha Venture Royale. The switches and buttons controlling the lights, siren and other functions are all within fingers reach. Although I did not have an opportunity to try it, Off. Edgcombe stated the cruise control was dead on at 70mph. Keep in mind, the lighting and siren controls that make this bike a police motorcycle are add-ons to the bike and are installed at the factory. Their positions at the grips are within fingers reach as well and integrate with the stock controls so well that you don't realize they are a factory add-on until you are told.

The floor boards are positioned a little further forward and are much longer than found on the Harley Davidson's, thus allowing you to stretch your legs and extend further forward. This makes for a very comfortable ride as noted by Off. Edgcombe as he taxied from wb 96 to the downtown Lansing exit. He looked as if he was very relaxed and comfortable and stated he was as well. The floor boards are also an integrated part of the safety/tip over system designed to keep the motorcycle from tipping all the way over. More on that subject in the safety section. The standard and optional brake pedals are adjustable allowing four inches of travel along the lever to adjust to an individual officers liking.

On the opposite side of the motorcycle, the heel/toe shifter is also adjustable with a smaller heal tab. Victory's reason for this is to allow more room for larger feet upon the floorboard without making erroneous shifts.

The stock handlebar position was very comfortable for me. The pulled back handlebars had a nice length that allowed me to swing them to full lock without stretching. This made for comfortable, relaxed and confident turns; whether they were u turns, 360's or 90 degrees through cones. The handlebars were available with chromed mounting tabs for a radio or moving radar head unit.

Now, the seat is the stock two up seat that comes with the standard Victory Vision and Cross Country. It is fixed mounted to the frame and is very, very comfortable as well as height adjustable. As stated earlier the stock seating position on this motorcycle is as if you are seated lower in the motorcycle like the sport bikes. The Harley Davidson seat is higher, further forward and can only be adjusted up and down by an air bladder underneath you. The Victory's riding position and seat are better suited for long term and long distance riding which will cause a lot less fatigue over the course of the day.

Suspension/Handling-

The suspension felt soft and smooth. As Officer Edgcombe stated, "It rides like a Cadillac." At higher speeds, specifically highway speeds, it did feel like that older Cadillac soft ride which is very pleasant and comfortable. It was soft to the point where you did not feel as if it were a police packaged motorcycle, rather, a touring motorcycle best suited for nice long evening stroll with mama to Grand Haven for ice cream. The lane changes were smooth and easy. A light push of the grip would take you to the left or right lane with little to no resistance without feeling loose, yet, well balanced. The same

maneuver on the Harley Davidson was stiffer, tighter, almost as if the bike gave a purposeful resistance much like a football practice drill where the coach tells a player to hold the bag up for the player about to hit it, but give him some resistance to make him feel it.

We then decided to go to the MSP track and to see if they had cone courses set up to try them in the courses.

When we arrived, we could see that they had cones out there on their brand new black topped track, but no motor cone courses. Lt. Wilson gave us permission to use the track anyways.

While there, one of their motor instructors told us he rode the Victory's and stated he too was told of a female officer who was in the keyhole and lay the bike over on the ground. This officer then pulled back on the throttle, and the bike stood back up and kept going. He too was as skeptical as we were, so he tried it. To his surprise, the bike did as he was told. It stood back up and he continued through a 360. He told us to look for the scrape in the new black top. He then stated they later measured the scrape to be fourteen feet. We located the scrape but didn't measure it, but it appeared to be so.

While on the track, we rode around cones that were there set up for vehicle operation. We toyed around leaning the bike over and taking sharp leaning turns that we do normally to practice and warm up for training. As part of the tip over protection, Victory uses cast steel skid plates that are bolted to the underside of the floorboards. This allows you to scrape the skid plates without scraping and replacing your floorboards for a couple hundred dollars as on the Harley's. These skid plates cost \$12.50. We rode the track for approximately forty five minutes scraping those boards leaning the bike over to find out if we could tip it and stand it up as told to us. Officer Edgcombe was able to do it in a 30mph cone weave. He drove through cones at 30mph and tipped the bike over to the side causing it to strike the floorboard on the ground. He stated the bike bounced back up at speed when he pulled the throttle. Another maneuver he stated he felt this was in a u turn that was performed while using the clutch, throttle and brake to control the speed. He felt the bike surge forward as he had it leaned all the way to the floor board. He surmised the anti-lock brakes released causing the bike to surge forward and stand upright.

Keep in mind that this is an unnatural feeling. We are trained to lean it over while counterbalancing and using the clutch, throttle and brake simultaneously to keep the motor up on two wheels at slow speed. To purposely tip it over while riding is just not a natural thing to do. However, when you look at this from the safety perspective, this is an amazing byproduct of Victory's tip over protection.

Based on previous experience riding both the Harley Davidson and BMW police motorcycles through the cone courses, and upon this short ride on the Commander I, I am fully confident the Victory Commander can make the cone courses normally performed in police motorcycle training. And although it has a longer wheelbase which will require

proper setup of the front wheel, the front end of the Commander It feels lighter than the Electra Glide (fairing). When entering a turn or leaning on the Electra Glide, there is a weight shift when the weight of the fairing is tipped into the turn. The Commander I doesn't have this weight shift. As a matter of fact, and to my surprise, it feels as if it has no fairing at all. It dips in smooth and easily, very much like the BMW K1200RTP which has a fixed fairing.

Braking-

Although we didn't have opportunity or equipment to measure the stopping distance we were impressed that all Victory Police Motorcycles come standard with ABS brakes which include floating rotors for better heat dissipation. We made multiple runs at varying speeds from 30 to 60mph and grabbed on the brakes. The grinding and pulsing of the ABS brakes quickly and very smoothly brought the Commander I to a consistent straight line halt with ease and confidence. There was no fade whatsoever.

Safety-

There is a long list of safety features for these motorcycles but first and most important is the fact that Victory chose to make the safest motorcycle they could build as a civilian model before it became a police motorcycle. Standard ABS braking, the tip over protection and many other features designed into the pre-existing civilian models combined with enhanced features such as a metal top box (will not smash like fiber glass or plastic), the factory installed basic lighting package and other features make this motorcycle a very attractive competitor. An amazing amount of thought went into the engineering of the police packaging which Mike stated were ideas given through surveys by actual working police motor operators. One of which the engineers are currently developing is the emergency auto siren/lighting function. This function is for an emergency situation where the officer goes down and is unconscious or needs assistance, the lights and siren will automatically turn on to alert passersby to the officer in need of assistance.

Electrical and Lighting-

Victory offers lighting in different packaging levels. The base package includes Tomar lighting but Whelen and Code 3 are available upon request at a higher cost than the Tomar. HID lights are available as an option as well as driving lights that can be used as wig-wags in white in the front and red in the rear. The rear also double as brake lights.

All of these options are powered by an auxiliary battery that is mounted within the rear top box. All lighting and electronics are wired into a fuse panel designed to make connections simple and easy. The panel and all wiring run throughout the motorcycle through two lines that plug into the bottom of the top box with two twist on molex connectors. This makes the connections and installation simpler and reliable.

Victory states they work directly with the manufacturers of aftermarket equipment and they warranty the installation of those products for the same five years as the motorcycle. They will also install the equipment you currently have. In addition, as a service to you and the manufacturer, they will draw out a schematic and send one to you and the manufacturer for troubleshooting problems on their motorcycle. They will also deal with the manufacturer directly on your behalf.

Storage-

Storage capacity in the Commander I's saddlebags is listed as 21 gallons. The Harley's are 14.88, Honda- 8.98, Kawasaki- 10.6 and BWM- 12.2. The saddlebags click shut when closed. Both Harley's use a hockey puck twist lock to secure it closed, then a lock at the back of the bag to lock it.

The top box comes in two sizes, small and large. The larger was specifically designed to accommodate the larger laptops such as the Panasonic Toughbook as well as the radio and other electronics.

Victory Police Motorcycles has taken the philosophy that BMW established some years ago with their police package motors. They want to deliver to you a turn-key police motorcycle with lights, siren and as many options as you need, ready to go when you take delivery from the dealer and start it up. They then take the next step by establishing a customer service culture that they want your business and give a five year warranty to back up their product. This warranty is included with the installation of options installed by them at the factory.

Financing-

Victory has a lease program that appears to be modeled after the BMW police lease to own program. You can lease the motor for five years, at the end of the lease, you purchase the motorcycle for \$1.00. You then own it, so, you can keep it, sell it, or allow some diabolical genius named Edgcombe to use it for crash testing at a MATAI conference. You then purchase a base motor and transfer that motor's lighting and equipment to the new motor at a lower price. And if you send the lighting and options to Victory, they will transfer and install them on the new motor at no extra cost.

Another option available is a grant writing program that connects you with someone to write a grant for you to finance your police motors.

In my opinion, based on the appearance, features, the turn-key engineering and the performance, let alone the warranty and the customer service options, the Victory Commander I is pound for pound and dollar for dollar, the better choice over the Harley-Davidson police motorcycles. Although Victory has an uphill battle against nostalgia, I believe that once those die hard's try the Commander I, they will actually consider it. Oh, by the way, for those of you who are of the "BUY AMERICAN" persuasion, Victory is the other American made motorcycle.

By: Walter Tett Grand Rapids MI Motor Officer