

It's All in the Boots...

... Choose the Bike You Want Without Ruining the Ride



Author: Sue Slate, on the track day aboard a Ninja 6R

In 1991, I bought what I thought would be my dream bike. I have a twenty-nine inch inseam and this bike had a twenty-seven inch seat height. "Now," I thought, "I'll feel like I'm six feet tall!"

However, one trip to the Adirondack Mountains and I was not so sure. A ride down the Pacific Coast Highway sealed the fate on what was to become "Slate's Folly."

For years I had ridden tall bikes by putting my left foot down at a stop. This was sometimes dicey when my boot kept going down, down, down into a pothole instead of onto level pavement or there was gravel under foot. It was also annoying to always ask for help when backing into or out of a parking spot. One tenth of one degree of slope was a hill to me while on my tippy-toes. I had this fantasy that if I found a bike with a low seat height, my motorcycling life would be perfect.

Alas, I had not factored in the fun factor afforded by ground clearance. Once on my, "lower than low" motorcycle, I kept scraping my foot pegs and throwing sparks in curves that were barely curves at all to my other bikes. A couple of trips on real twisties and I realized that my comfort level at stops might be enhanced, but the thrill of motorcycling was gone.

So what could I do to ensure a sense of control and stability at stops or ease backing out of parking places while remaining free to be exhilarated through the twisties?

After market shorter shocks were out. They would cut into ground clearance and have a negative impact on performance and safety overall. Seems the engineers who design our steeds do know what they're doing. I had already spent \$800 on shocks earlier in my career to learn this lesson.

So, I went to our local shoemaker, Frank, and explained my problem. I asked him if he could insert a lightweight lift like those used on orthopedic shoes to assist individuals having one leg shorter than the other. In my case, I simply had two 'shorter' legs.



Sue's boots, purchased in 1992, have been resoled multiple times during their 500,000 miles of use. The glued inserts have held up through snow, rain, sleet, hail, and 118 degrees of desert heat.

Frank said, "Sure." He could remove the existing sole, add in the required amount of lift, which came in half inch and inch increments, then finish off the job by gluing on my original sole.

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First though, I had to figure out how much height I needed to add to my boots. This process starts by already possessing or purchasing the correct boots for the job. You need motorcycle boots that can be re-soled or a molded sole made of rubber, not a man-made material. Glue is involved in the process and does not adhere well to man-made surfaces.

If your boot can be resoled, you will not have to worry about the height you lose from have your sole ground down to create a flat, rough surface to which the glue can adhere. You shoe repairperson will simply add the height you have requested and put on your original or new sole to finish off the job. When having your rubber sole ground down to accept the glued on insert(s) and the new sole, factor in what was lost during the grinding process and make sure to add it back in when adding inserts to your boots.

Select boots that have a flat or nearly flat surface. In other words, you want boots with a low or almost non-definitive heel. High heel boots may look fashionable, but for riding, a low or molded heel will serve you better. Plus, you need to add height across the entire bottom surface of your boot, not just your heel.

The next task is to figure out how much height you need to be comfortable on your bike? Put on your boots, gather some scraps of half-inch plywood and secure the help of a friend. Sit upon and straighten your motorcycle. Then have your friend place a one-half inch piece of plywood under each of your feet. See how the seat height feels. If a half-inch is not enough, adjust by adding more pieces of plywood until you find the right height for you.

I felt like a true big shot the first time I threw leg over my bike with its thirty-one inch seat height. My feet were flat on the ground. I even had a slight bend to my knees!

I am still wearing the result of that first experiment, a pair of Gortex lined boots I bought back in 1992. However, my inserts represent growth rings for the different and ever-taller motorcycles I have been able to

enjoy based on a series of \$50 - \$75.00 trips to the shoemaker.

As of now, I have two inches added to my soles! In preparation for riding taller dual-purpose bikes, my final trip to Frank's place was for the addition of a full inch to my boots. Frank scratched his head noting, "Sue, if I add another inch I am going to have to flare the soles out. Otherwise, you'll tip right over!"

I howled and told Frank to flare away. FYI, I have not tipped over yet. In fact, I dance in my boots, teach MSF classes, hike, ride and staff consumer events all in these very same boots. And the bonus... the inserts provide an air like cushion. My feet never hurt!



For myself, there was not an adjustment period to my increased height as it happened gradually over the years as I purchased ever-taller motorcycles. You may not want to run out and buy the first bike you see with a thirty-five inch seat height if you have a twenty-seven inch inseam. There is a limit to this formula I have created. However, if you do add a full inch or two right off the bat, start by getting used to the boots on land before using them on your motorcycle. Remember Frank's flaring trick for stability too when you go to your shoe repair shop.

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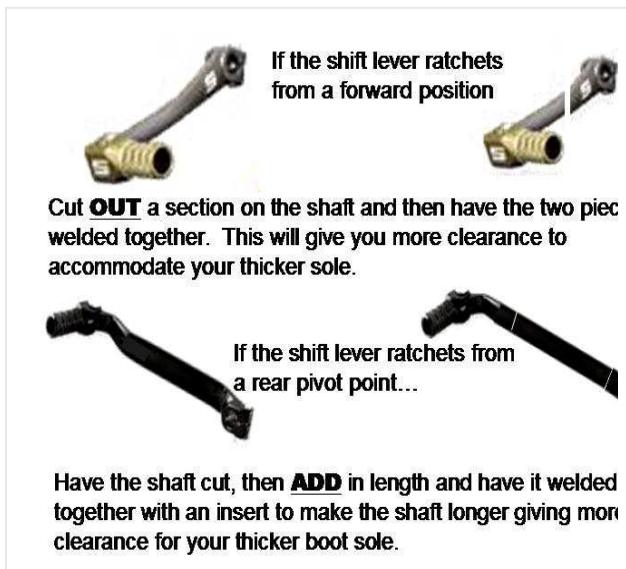
Once you are used to the boots on a variety of surfaces, inclines, and stairs, it will be time to try the boots on your bike. If you have a center-

stand, develop MUSCLE MEMORY for your feet by finding the shift lever and the rear brake levers over and over again in the stationary mode. Even without a center stand, you can straighten the motorcycle and practice one side and then the other until you are confident you can find and execute shifting and braking with your new boots.

One question I am constantly asked is, "How do you shift with those "Moon Boots?" Actually, I've never run into a problem. I have short, fat feet. Picture Fred Flintstone's feet and you will get the idea. Their short length has always allowed me enough clearance to get my toes on top and underneath the shift lever without adjustment or modification.

Not to worry! Should you have longer, svelte feet, unlike my pair of "FLINT STONE STOMPERS." There is another simple fix; but not so simple as just relocating the position up or down a notch at the pivot point for the shift lever. With the thick soles, relocating the pivot point up or down simply forces your foot to hyperextend itself one way or the other while shifting.

Some shift-levers are mounted forward of the foot peg and are directed back to the rider's foot for shifting. Other shift levers are mounted underneath the foot peg with the shaft directed forward for actuation by the rider. The trick is to get more clearance by lengthening or shortening the shift lever's shaft, depending on the location of its pivot point. A picture says a thousand words, so check it out.



Presently I ride a Ninja ZX6R and a NinjaZX14, and have test ridden every model in the Kawasaki line-up. My boots have never failed me. Which, by the way, brings up one more benefit as a result of my new height, when I go to events that offer demo rides, I am not relegated to riding only bikes that suit my natural inseam. A host of motorcycles are now available for me to try. The only problem is, I begin lusting for the new models. That is exactly why I have two new 2007 Ninjas. As soon as I rode I had to have them both!

I have already put in my bid for a thirty-six inch inseam in my next life. Until then, I'll modify myself rather than my bikes to get the best rides possible. The bottom line is, there are cheaper, more effective, and safer ways to ride a variety of bikes without destroying the great engineering rolling off assembly lines these days. Holler if you have questions and good luck with your modifications.

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Mama, LET your Daughters grow up to be KawGirls! Let them grow up to Ride any Bike that they please!

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Kawasaki Models Sue Owns & Rides.



Versys: Seat Height 33"



Ninja ZX-14: Seat Height 31.5"



Sue's Ninja ZX-6: Seat Height 32.3"



KLR 650 Dual Purpose Bike: Seat Height 35"



Ninja ZX-650: Seat Height 31.1"