

Motorcycle lubricants

Capturing the views of users in Asia

Market research carried out in four Asian countries reveals the views of four-stroke motorcycle owners and service centres on their choice and use of lubricants.



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While the motorcycle market in Asia Pacific already accounts for a significant part of global demand it continues to grow very quickly – which means understanding the needs of its users is increasingly important. In its World Motorcycle report, published in 2009, Freedonia estimates that Asia Pacific, prompted by population growth and higher standards of living, will post the second strongest sales advances to 2013, behind Africa. While China will account for 55% of these additional sales (spurred by strong electric motorcycle demand) internal combustion engine powered motorcycles will continue to account for more than 95% of all demand outside of China in the same period.

In order to better understand this burgeoning market, Infineum commissioned independent market research of four-stroke motorcycle users in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and India. The study captured the views of over 1,000 motorcyclists and 200 motorcycle workshop mechanics. The results give Infineum a better understanding of buying behaviours, perceived value attributed to various oils, and the product attributes that are most valued. Unless stated otherwise, the market share figures in the report were based on information provided by the research company.

Owner profile

Of the people interviewed, around 6% owned motorcycles under a year old and almost three quarters of the machines were three years old or less. Only 8% of the owners completed in excess of 30,000 Kilometres (km) every year, with around 60% saying they travelled less than 15,000 km on their bike annually.

Workshop profile

The workshops covered can be divided into four broad categories: motorcycle manufacturer workshops (single brand), independent workshops, motorcycle dealer workshops and fast lube/oil change centres.

Indonesia

Indonesia is the largest market in Southeast Asia with 2009 sales reported at 5 million units. The two leading motorcycle brands here are Honda and Yamaha, which together account for the majority of the market.

In this region motorcycle owners state they experience high oil consumption and typically change their oil within two months. Brand familiarity ranks high when it comes to lubricant selection. In terms of buying preference, owners state that quality and price are the two key factors they consider, with long drain and fuel economy being slightly less important. It is apparent that as the motorcycle ages so the owner is more likely to move away from the OEM workshop for servicing. From the workshop perspective product quality is of highest importance.

Thailand

In 2008 1.7 million motorcycles were sold in Thailand, with Honda and Yamaha holding the majority of the market. In this region users do not report any significant issues with their machines, although workshops report high smoke and high oil consumption. Owners here are price sensitive when it comes to oil choice and will typically select the lowest cost brand. However, both owners and workshops have a strong brand loyalty. Quality and price are the most important factors in lubricant selection and it is essential that the oil offers adequate engine protection, however long drain is also seen as important.

Top product related brand discrimination factors

Top product related brand discrimination factors		
Owners	1. Protect against heat 2. Reduce friction 3. Smooth engine start up	Opinions are generally fairly consistent across regions.
Workshops	1. Protect against heat* 2. Smooth engine start up 3. Long drain#	With the exception of 'Protect against heat', opinions differed greatly across the regions.

* Rated top priority in all regions except India, where instant clutch engagement was top priority
Rated highly in all but Vietnam

Vietnam

Annual sales of motorcycles in Vietnam are around 2.7 million units, with Honda accounting for just under half of these sales. Lubricants are changed every 2,000 km or two months and owners mentioned a number of issues, particularly thin oil, high oil consumption and oil leakage. The market here is very price sensitive and users are happy to switch to a different oil to save money, although owners and workshops seem to consider brand 'fame' as being more important than quality. The leading brand is recognised through its advertising and is seen as being both good quality and value for money.

India

According to Honda, India represents the world's second largest motorcycle market behind only China, with industry-wide motorcycle sales in India from January through November 2009 reaching approximately 7.9 million units. The four-stroke motorcycle market in India is dominated by four brands: Hero Honda, which accounts for almost half of the market, followed by Bajaj, TVS and Honda. In recent months Electrotherm, which produces electric bikes, has seen large increases in sales – although this is currently a small proportion of the market.

Riders and workshops in India report high oil consumption, dirty oil and oil leakage as some of the issues experienced. At two and a half months, the average oil drain interval tends to be longer

than in the other countries surveyed, with an international brand having high position – mainly owing to its recognition. It is important for users that the oil protects from heat, prevents clutch slippage and has high quality packaging.

Conclusions

Some very interesting results came out of the questions that examined how users discriminate between different brands of oil. 27 attributes were ranked by the users and the workshops and the results highlighted huge differences in the key factors. The highest ranking product related attribute in almost every case was protection against heat.

While there are a number of similarities across the countries surveyed we can also detect from the results distinct differences. Most countries prefer one major leading brand, with some other regional or international brands being popular region by region. However, Indonesia seems to be more receptive to different brands. Although customers are price sensitive, they are very loyal to the brands they use and, when all factors are considered, the discriminant factors between brands are vastly different from country to country.

We have also found that when it comes to tradeoffs between engine protection and fuel economy, the majority of those questioned would not compromise on protection. This is not necessarily equally the case when we

tested the tradeoffs between long drain and oil cost.

However, the considerations taken into account when buying any oil are very consistent with quality followed by price and fuel saving being ranked higher than long drain, point of sale materials, current promotions and packaging by both the owners and the workshops.

A similar research project, which examines North American motorcycle users, will be the focus of a future *Insight* feature. If you would like to review and discuss the results of this Asia Pacific study in more detail please contact insight@infineum.com.



image courtesy Yamaha

