

Restoring a Red Cross Bike

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by Bob Lonergan

Having restored several 51/3 and 67/2 motorcycles all black with white stripes I decided to try a different color scheme.

I had recently purchased, sight unseen, a 1952 R51/3 motorcycle from a friend's estate. We often rode together was good with a wrench and his bike ran well. When I picked up the bike I noticed problems I hadn't seen when riding with him: wrong headlight, circuit board, wheels, incorrect gas tank, rear fender welded at the hinge, and other issues both small and large.

I sent the serial number to Mobile Tradition for information and found it was originally a police bike. Again, checking with them, police bikes were generally a dark green, but some German Municipalities used a RAL 9001 White for their bikes. This is a true white. I selected the Red Cross, Rotes Kreuz, to be my semi-government agency.

While discussing this with Rick Huemmerich, a good friend, he told me his father had been active in the German Red Cross in the early 1950s and sent me his dad's ID card. Another month or so later a package arrived from Germany. It contained his father's German Red Cross uniform, vest, sweatshirt, hat and several other items relating to his service. All he asked was I send his mother a photograph of the finished bike with the accessories.

With the Red Cross as my target, the motorcycle was restored with its correct front end. Mark Huggett helped me get a rear fender in prime as it was going to be painted RAL 9001 Municipal White. Rims and hubs were also painted white and laced with chrome spokes. I designed and screen printed a Red Cross Logo with the name of Rick's home town. As promised, I sent Rick's mother photographs of the finished motorcycle with myself in Red Cross attire, along with my sincerest appreciation for having this piece of history to display with this very special bike.

This was a challenging restoration as the following items had to be replaced: front end (wrong year), front fender (hidden rust), headlight including speedometer, handle bars and controls, gas tank, hubs, wheels, spokes, rear fender, mufflers and exhaust pipes, tail light along with air cleaner and rack, both of which had been chrome plated. While all of the above parts functioned they were not correct for the year of the motorcycle.

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Bob Lonergan, Staten Island, NY with his 1952 R51/2 Rotes Kreuz

There is quite a difference between a restoration and a motorcycle refurbished to ride. Restoring the bike as a Red Cross municipal motorcycle was truly challenging. With Rick's input it was a memorable and rewarding experience.

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