

Taking the 'Uh-oh' out of the 'Whoa'

J-SIX EXTREME BILLET ALUMINUM CALIPERS

Jaybrake

\$399.95

www.jbrake.com



Reviewed by Daniel L. Parker

If you think about it, there are two primary elements—the yin and the yang if you will—to a motorcycle's operation. Firstly, there is making the bike go (and for some of us, the faster it goes, the better). Then there is either slowing it down (like when going in a wee bit too hot into that big bender in the road ahead), or bringing the beast to a safe, complete stop at the appropriate moment (picture a big rig halted in your lane of the freeway). And, yet, if we're honest, we spend way more time and resources on the "Go" part of that equation than the "Whoa" portion. More is the pity.

Here we'll share our experience with upgrading our bagger's stock Harley-Davidson front brake calipers to Jaybrake's J-Six Extreme billet aluminum calipers (and why we did it). Once again, JP at My Evil Twin Choppers in Lodi, California, did the install and provided some sage advice about bagger braking capabilities (or lack thereof). But first, a little about how we came to this juncture; it's a story that may inspire you to make a brake move on your bike before you have a similar tale to tell.

"Whoa Nellybelle"

When the call came that afternoon from *THUNDER PRESS* World Headquarters, we knew it wasn't good news. Glad tidings from the *THUNDER PRESS* editors usually arrives by carrier pigeon. The bad news comes directly at you. In this case, the editorial brass was demanding an additional photograph that required a trip up into the Sierra Nevada foothills. Knowing they were right, we headed out and got the shot. It was the "after party" that turned out interesting.

The 2004 Harley-Davidson FLHT Electra Glide—the infamous unofficial *THUNDER PRESS* bagger test sled known as the "Geezer Glide"—frequently gets loaded down with enough photo, personal, computer and other random gear to embarrass even the *Beverly Hillbillies*. Such was the case this afternoon as we pushed the old girl into a tight right-hander. You already know that most of a modern bike's brake power is found in the front brake, right? So, to scrub a little speed off, as is our custom, we two-fingered the front brake lever. Nothing. We pulled somewhat harder; still there was very little "scrubbing" going on. Involuntarily, I issued a "Whoa Nellybelle," (the cry on the old *Roy Rogers* Show when his sidekick Pat Brady wanted to halt his 1946 Jeep; it recently sold at auction for \$116,500). Embarrassing, to say the least.

Obviously all this happened in way less time than it takes to tell it. Ultimately, using four fingers we pulled the lever all the way to the handlebar grip and managed to scrape our way around the bend. Whew! It was one of those sphincter-gripping moments that chews holes in motorcycle seats. Needless to say, we slowed down and limped to our next location, employing the vigorous but careful use of the rear brake.

Having already logged some 97,000 miles on the Geezer Glide, we probably shouldn't have been shocked. Yes, we had long ago dropped the stock rotors for floaters but besides changing the brake pads and topping off the brake fluid when necessary, we'd given scant attention to the bike's front stoppers.

JP at MET had already pointed out that this could be a mistake. His experience with fully loaded, two-up baggers of this bike's era (newer '08- '11 Harley Touring bikes have superb Brembo brakes) was that stopping was sometimes way less than precise and optimal. The two-piston stock H-D brake calipers and solid rotors, he said, were often the key culprits. A quick fluid and brake pad check confirmed that it wasn't them and that the calipers needed help. Big help.

Made right here

Faced with fatigued front stock calipers, we elected to upgrade to a set of aftermarket front binders. In this case, it was a set of the J-Six Extreme calipers from Jaybrake. Having started in 1981 as a one-man operation in a garage, Jaybrake now has an 82,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility in Springville, New York. The company's "Made Strictly in the U.S.A." line of products for American V-Twins includes grips, controls, pegs, floorboards and other items, including brake calipers that bolt up to stock H-D front ends and use stock brake lines.



Available in polished, chrome or black anodized finishes, the six-piston Jaybrake Extreme caliper has, according to the company website at www.jbrake.com, progressively-sized bores for "optimal heat distribution and pad wear." Additionally, they claim, "better lever feel and response" will be provided. We went with the black anodized version—these fit 2000 and newer H-D front forks except Softail Springer or '08 or newer FLH models—and headed over to My Evil Twin Choppers.

The first thing we noticed when removing the Jaybrake items from the packing is that they are really good-looking pieces of equipment. They were going to dress the bike up considerably, especially when compared to the stock items. As to installation, have a go at it if you are used to doing your own bike upkeep, particularly working on the brakes, and have the required tools listed on the maker's enclosed instruction sheet. Jaybrake even provides photos for its seven-step process. For the rest of us, procuring the expertise provided by a professional like JP is money well-spent and potential headaches avoided.

Nevertheless, it was impressive to see that the Jaybrake calipers did bolt right up to the FLHT's front forks. Ditto for the stock plumbing. The real art came in the bleeding process as JP made certain all the air was removed from the system and the proper amount of DOT 5 brake fluid was added to the master cylinder. Just coming off the bike lift, it was clear that the previously experienced sloppy and spongy feel at the brake lever had been banished. A test ride confirmed that the "Whoa" and desired two-finger tug was back. Wonderful.

Jaybrake recommends that one log 250 non-highway miles to properly mate the new brake pads up with the bike's rotors. To get a good head start on this process, photographer Kelli Petersen and I loaded up the Geezer Glide and headed two-up for an assignment in the foothills. We took all back roads, many of them steep, some more than a little twisty. The new Jaybrake calipers performed flawlessly. With much better "feel" at the brake lever, the improved braking performance was a real confidence builder on the back roads.

Go to the company website to view all of Jaybrake's American V-Twin products and to find a Jaybrake dealer near you. Going fast is fun; stopping safely is essential.