



We faced an interesting dilemma. We wanted to deliver the service of an on-line retailer for BikerNet readers, but this high tech business model had to contain a magnificent array of readily available parts, steadfast service standards, and a crew of highly knowledgeable technicians to answer tech questions at a moments notice. K&G approached BikerNet and I immediately grabbed the phone.

We are extremely sensitive of the difficult relationship between longtime existing shops, suffering through hazardous economic times and the new online world of cutthroat pricing and uncertain integrity. We wanted to make absolutely sure we represented the best to BikerNet readers. I did my research and felt reasonably comfortable with the decision to give K&G a shot. Following is an interview with George Marakas, the major principle, the teacher, a motorcycle restorer, and the K&G mastermind. It will present you a solid foundation, for a relationship with K&G, but continue to support your local shop every chance you get.--Bandit

**BikerNet:** Tell us your history, where you're from, and what your parents do or did?

**K&G:** I was born in South Chicago and raised everywhere from my birthplace to Southern Ohio. As a young man, I did a stint in the music business working as a sound engineer for major acts such as Edgar Winter Group, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer and Ray Charles.

From there, I got hooked on computers and worked in the banking and real estate area. My highest position in that realm was as CEO for a real estate management company in Miami. I left that world in 1992 to pursue my doctoral degree in Information Systems. Since graduation in 1995, I have been on the faculty at University of Maryland, Indiana University, and University of Kansas where I am a Full Professor with tenure.

I met Kyle in 2006 while she worked for Harley-Davidson. She asked me out, and we had our first date the day after Valentine's Day. We were married exactly one year later to the day. She brought five children into our family: Korbin - 16, Mallory - 17, Christian - 21, Hunter - 23, and Alexis - 25. I brought one: Stephanie - 32. Now, we spend about half of our time in Lawrence, KS when I am teaching and the other half in Key Largo, FL. When Korbin graduates from high school in a couple of years, I will probably retire and we will move down to the Key Largo area permanently. We are shopping for "Casa del Forever" right now.

Kyle is a native Kansan. She has an identical twin sister plus another sister and brother. She grew up in Newton, KS where her father was president of a small bank owned by her family. She graduated from University of Kansas in 1982 and went into the children manufacturing business. Kyle began working for Topeka-Harley Davidson as manager of motor clothes in the late 1990s and retired to become a domestic goddess when we got married. She is a great rider but has become quite comfortable in the cushy seat on the back of our 2007 Screamin' Eagle Ultra Classic.





**Bikernet:** Tell us about your first bikes and rides?

**K&G:** My first bike was a 1971 Honda 450 (I think). I eventually made it into a Honda 750 and from there into a series of used Sportsters. I went for about 26 years without riding and then got back into a sound mind and starting riding again in 2000. That ride was a 2000 Road King. Today, we have (4) 1965 Panheads, a 2006 Deluxe (highly customized), a 2007 SE Ultra, a 1995 Gilroy Indian, and a custom in progress that came from Kyle's 2004 Dyna (it won't look like it when we are done, however).

Kyle's parents forbid her from riding any motorcycles during her youth except for a stolen moment on a motorcycle with her friend, Charley. Her first ride was at age 38. It was a 1992 Springer Softail with apes. Then on to a 2002 Road King which she dumped looking at Christmas ornaments in someone's front yard and the guy behind her was so happy that he didn't run over her head that he gladly helped her pick it up. His biggest mistake was telling her that the Road King was too big for her. Out of spite, she rode the bike home, then jumped in her truck and drove to the hospital. Kyle really doesn't take well to such comments.



**Bikernet:** Tell us how the K&G partnership began?

**K&G:** There are really two important partnerships. The first is with our close friend, Doc Schweinler, and me. Doc had been restoring vintage motorcycles for about 20 years. I expressed an interest and we decided to give a partnership a try with our first 1965 Panhead so we formed Viper Motors. That was, as of now, six 1965 Panheads ago and we are going strong. We also have a 1949 Pan, a 1928 Henderson, and a 1936 VL, which is an AMCA Winner's Circle winner. BTW, all of our 65's are also AMCA Winner's Circle award recipients.

The second partnership came with Kyle and me. I wanted to secure one or two dealer relations with suppliers, so we could buy our restoration parts at wholesale. Since Viper Motors was a legitimate entity, we were able to secure dealer status from VTwin and Colony. This was in 2006.

Doc and I decided to keep the parts and restoration stuff separate, so Kyle and I formed K and G Cycles. By 2007, we became MC Advantages and Mid-USA dealers. One day it dawned on me that, we represented over 70,000 motorcycles parts with those combine product lines. The information systems professor in me took over, and I mapped out a business plan and a web site that is now K and G Cycles.

I owned a CD and DVD manufacturing company in Indiana and I enlisted the services of my long-time friend and operations manager, Kevin Plummer, to help design the shopping cart. We went live on February 4, 2009. We also added Custom Chrome and Midwest Motorcycle Supply, which brought us to over 100,000 parts. Our business model allows us to bring the widest variety of parts, with a lot of one-of-a-kind unique vendors, at great prices. We never expected the great response we received from the market, and now I am working two full-time jobs until I can afford to retire from one) Between K and



**Bikernet:** Do you ride much? Tell us a good one?

**K&G:** Most of our riding stories are just like everyone else's -- fun with spectacular things to see. One story that comes to mind, however is a recent one. We were sitting around on a Saturday afternoon and decided to hop on the Ultra and ride to the mainland to look at houses. Our biggest problem was we forgot about South Florida's notorious afternoon thunderstorms in June. About halfway to the mainland all hell broke loose -- lightning, thunder, and lots of water.

Between Key Largo and the mainland is one road slicing the Everglades -- the middle of swamp nowhere. Well, long story short, the Ultra held up its end of the bargain and by the time we found a place to pull over, we were literally pouring water out of our boots. We never did see any houses and our biggest problem was getting home. We contemplated a hotel and decided we were already soaked to the bone so off we went. I never knew I could ride an 800-pound motorcycle in 1 foot of water. All's well that ends well but we're not sure we are completely dried out yet. Kyle thinks there is still some water in her riding boots.



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**Bikernet:** Tell me about your restoration process and philosophical perspective.

**K&G:** Restoration is art, history, science, and larceny all rolled into one activity. There is no question that a motorcycle design engineer considers his or her work as art. I personally think the Panhead is the greatest looking piece of art Harley has ever created. They continue to reuse its lines and features year after year. Park a Deluxe next to an early Panhead and you are looking at father and son.

The historical aspect of restoration is one of my favorite parts. To correctly restore a vintage machine, you spend hundreds of hours reviewing parts explosions, service manuals, technical bulletins, and archival documents. Just acquiring the information is a full time activity. We are constantly reading old manuals, talking to other restorers on forums and by phone, and searching for the definitive answer to the finish on a bolt that sometimes simply does not have a definitive answer. We are fortunate to have developed good relationships with archivists at Harley-Davidson so we can get their help finding the answers to some questions that are buried in a warehouse full of old documents. It's history, for sure.

The science of restoration comes with the need to develop an understanding of the finishes. Judging restorations is all about the color of the bolt. Was it cadmium, zinc, nickel, chrome, brass, or parkenized? Was the strip on the oil tank chrome or polished aluminum? Stuff like that. Once you get the answer, you then have to create that bolt or fastener, or whatever. We do our own plating - cad, chrome, copper, zinc, and parker - so a fair amount of science goes into that part of the process.

The rest is larceny and science helps with that, as well. Often the part you need is simply not available and you have to make it. Knowing how to take modern elements and make them look exactly like the original can often be a larcenous endeavor. I have parts on our bikes that look like polished aluminum but are really treated chrome. Others look like cadmium but are really zinc. I won't tell you which parts are which - that's the secret. If it looks right, then it is right. Don't ask and don't tell ;-)



**Bikernet:** Tell us how you started the on-line aspect and your philosophy.

**K&G:** I teach information systems to Master's and Ph.D.-level students every day. Electronic commerce and Internet-based activities are a large part of our work. When we decided to start K and G Cycles, it was natural for me to put into practice all of the things I teach my students and write about in my textbooks.

Our biggest philosophical perspective is that inventory will eventually kill you. We do not think that online buying is a universal way to market. There are multiple markets, defined by their needs, in the motorcycle world. Each type of vendor - retail stocking, full service bike shop, online stocking, and online non-stocking, serves a particular customer segment.

Some customers need full service on their bikes, some need liberal return policies and 24-hour technical support, still others look for availability and price. We fit in the last category. Everyone has to provide great service but service comes in many forms. We reduce our costs by warehousing every one of our products with our vendors until the product is sold. It doesn't cost us a penny to offer a product to our customers where a stocking dealer has to consider how many can be sold in a given time. We can pass our savings on to our customers and keep prices low.

Each type of online and brick-and-mortar vendor has a purpose and serves a need in our marketplace. We just think low overhead and great service is the way we want to conduct our business.

We are constantly pursuing new products from unique vendors that may be too small to interest the big wholesalers and retailers. We can form a relationship without a large investment and work together to build a customer base. This is what makes us unique in our own way and serves to differentiate K and G Cycles from its competitors. We hope to become a kind of "Amazon.com" for motorcycle parts and accessories. We probably won't grow to that level, but we will grasp a similar approach. One day we hope our customers will say something like "You might as well start at K and G because if they don't have it, it will be hard to find." A lofty goal, for sure, but we think every doable goal is lofty.



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**Bikernet:** Tell us about your goals for the on-line store and any new services you plan to provide in the future.

**K&G:** Some exciting things are happening at K and G Cycles. We are currently knee-deep in a major facelift for the web site. We're researching a new look and lots of new features to make our customers' shopping experience more comfortable and efficient. We want our customers to be able to find the exact part they are looking for in three clicks or less. This is also a lofty goal but we have accomplished it with our new design.

We are currently building a show bike out of a 2004 Dyna and parts from our catalog. We want to show the average guy, like us, that they can find all of the parts they need to do a kick ass custom right from our on-line catalog. Once completed, we will have a 360-degree walk-around on the web site, where a customer can zoom in on a part, hover their cursor over a part, and see the part number, price, and specs. One click and the part will drop into their shopping cart. We plan to do this with a vintage, a solo, and a touring bagger, as well. If a customer can see how a part looks on a bike similar to theirs, they might become more eager to have it on their bike.

The new web site will also provide a shop by model feature and an online forum in addition to all of the features like online chat that we already provide. We are also adding new customer service and technical specialists to better serve our growing customer base.



Hey, but what about Knuckleheads?