

BDesigns Decal Products – Brian Dallner

Over many years of motorcycling history, detailing, by means of decals, has always been important to the look of the machine, whether replacing fairly new ones with OEM decals or replacing 20 year old decals on your restoration project. Decals make a statement about your bike, its history and in some ways, the owner as well. In some cases people desire unique one-off decals for their customs and we can do those as well. Here I will explain what goes into BDesigns decal products and why they represent a good value for your hard earned money.

Background

It was actually due to the restoration on my own 1982 Yamaha Seca Turbo motorcycle that I started in the business of reproducing decals. I was inquiring with one of my now, current competitors for a decal set. When I saw the graphic that was available, I was actually disappointed. True, the price was OK, but there was a blatant error on the “turbo” for the tailpiece, and the colours of the stripes were not correct either. As well, I was not able to get any of the small informational decals. I’m not sure if the error in the turbo decal was due to trying to cut corners and reproduce the decal quickly to save time (money) or just an oversight. So, armed with my disappointment and graphics background, I decided to start my own business.

I will admit that I am not the least expensive in **some**, but not all cases (further explained below). I will also emphasize, that my goal is **NOT to produce budget** priced decals that are “good enough” for “renovation” or cleanup. My goal has always been to make the distinction between renovation and proper restoration. I had my turbo featured in Cycle Canada a couple of years ago (<http://mister-t.ca/showcase.pdf>). Normally they do not feature full on restorations (only customizations), but the story behind the bike and the level of detail, impressed the editor, so they made an exception in my case. I had a similar reaction when my bike was appraised for insurance purposes. The appraiser was a Concourse Judge for the Canadian Vintage Motorcycle Association. He was stunned with the level of detail, and in particular the decals, and said it was “*one of the best Asian restorations he has seen*”. I put that same amount of effort into a Customers project as well. So, although I may not always be able to compete with the pricing of some competitors, but I have always been a strong believer in “you get what you pay for”.

Details Count

Below is a fairly detailed list and some examples of what I believe sets BDesigns decals and services apart from others;

- If I am approached to take on a new project, I will not turn anyone away, regardless of how low volume or rare the project may be.
- I do not charge artwork fees – even for low volume items. In fact, I always give a discount to the customer for coming to me on new projects. I do charge some artwork fees on custom items. If there were only one or two bikes of a particular model left standing, I may charge fees on that, but this is highly unlikely.
- The President of the Classic Katana Owners of North America came to me to see if we can do “complete sets” of the various decals on the old North American Katanas, He had a previous set from another decal manufacturer but going forward, he wanted to be as original as possible.

The issues with details I pointed out in the competitors' decals for his 1985 GS750SG Katana included:

1. The colours were noticeably off from the OEM,
2. The tank SUZUKI was a generic SUZUKI that was just stretched to similar in overall size as the OEM, but the individual letters and spacing did not match the OEM.
3. The line widths in the white fairing stripes were noticeably wider than the OEM.
4. There were also errors in the details in the top and bottom of the numbers in the "5" and "0" in the "750" rear panel decal. In the competitors, the bottom of the "5" and top and bottom of the "0" were flat, whereas the OEM was slightly arched. Making them flat certainly takes less time doing the artwork, but it is not accurate.

For items such as the tank SUZUKI, I start with a generic SUZUKI template, but I always edit each letter individually to match the OEM decals. All these details take more time, but I believe worth the effort.

- A customer who had two rare Suzuki XN85 Turbos wanted to replace the decals from one which was in need of a repaint. One does not always have access to the original OEM decals on rare bikes, and sometimes I have the opportunity to duplicate from unused OEM decals. Originally I was led to believe the Suzuki XN85 turbo decals I had borrowed from another customer, were OEM decals. I had a set available to sell to this new customer, but after checking decal locations on his unmolested turbos, I realized that what I offered did not match his OEM decals, and this prompted me to verify all the decals. My findings were quite disappointing. Stripe sizes were out up to 3mm in some areas. Colours were not accurate at all and printed all on clear. The only clear backing on the OEM was used for the front "obrut" and rear "turbo" decals. The SUZUKI tank lettering was 3mm too small in length, 2mm too small in height and spacing/characters did not match OEM. The detail "lines" on side vent turbo and front obrut were incorrect. The red tailpiece stripe was done in one piece on the competitors, instead of the 3-piece method on the OEM (there are 2 overlap joints on the OEM).
- When it comes to informational decals, some competitors just scan originals when they can and print the scanned image. This can give a grainy appearance. I start with a scan but do a significant amount of cleanup to enhance the graphics and in all cases, start with fresh text. The text is manipulated if necessary, to better match the OEM. These are NOT money makers for me, but more of a service, given the level of detail I put into these.
- Regarding graphics on decals such as ignition switch decals that had a satin aluminum backing (which is not available anymore). Competitors use a chrome material in its place which does not allow the black graphics to stand out and is made unreadable in sunlight. I developed a process (that nobody else has duplicated) for items such as this which is very close to the OEM and is quite readable, even in sunlight. I also apply a protective layer to these types of decals. So, a lot more goes into these types of decals than competitors.
- With a colour guide of about 3,800 colours, I perform colour matching in 3 different types of lighting to determine the best colour match. To match the OEM colours as close as possible, there are times I have to layer 2 to 3 colours of print film, to achieve an acceptable match to the OEM colour. From some of the competitors' product I have seen, there is often an attempt to use one standard print film colour that is deemed "close enough". However, I have had customers turn

away from competitors to come to me, looking for a better match and they do not mind paying more money for that. It is because of the goal to get a higher match, that **some** of the decals are more expensive than my competitors. That being said, I have compared pricing on some single coloured process decals to be on par, and sometimes even less than some competitors.

- Often (as with the competitors Katana decals that I have seen, and the XN85 decals), competitors will use a clear backing whenever possible, and print the colours in one layout, instead of using the correct colours of solid vinyl decals or correct metallic backing for printed decals. This lowers the cost and is less labour intensive for the competitors, and in turn the customer, but it does not reflect the OEM decals. It also means stocking fewer materials for the competitor and getting better pricing on buying volumes of clear vinyl. As well, the colours printed on clear will change (darken) with application onto a (non-white) painted surface, changing their appearance even further. I only print on clear if that is how the OEM decal was made, or in very rare cases, if a suitable backing match can not be found. The other reason I don't like using clear backing is that where it is transparent, the adhesive will yellow the clear areas of the decal over time. This does not happen with properly matched coloured vinyl.
- Due to the above issues, I stock smaller amounts, but a larger variety of vinyl, which incurs some higher pricing to me, as well as inventory costs. But the benefit of this is that the vinyl backing material is correct, and it also ensures the customer receives "fresh" decals with adhesive that is not starting to lose its tack.
- Related to the issue above, I generally don't run, and stock any decal sets, but produce to order. This also ensures that the gets decals with "fresh" adhesive backing, vs. running extra parts to capitalize on some efficiency, and still selling them many months, or years later, after the adhesive backing starts to lose its tack.
- I provide decal placement instruction sheets whenever possible, and nobody else does this. This is important to capture the correct look, by giving the decal installer something to reference. A number of decals will form on the curved fairing parts to yield a different shape then when they are flat, so if they are not placed in the correct position, they may not line up properly in another area. Capturing the measurements and creating instructions is somewhat time consuming and is another example of the service that is offered. This alone I believe is worth the extra money by saving the time of the decal installer trying to figure out the placements, or having the final result not look correct.
- I also develop paint masks and location templates in areas where fitment is critical. This is something I have not seen anyone else do either.
- For seat lettering stencils, I not only provide very clear instructions, but also provide a few sample swatches of vinyl and "test" stencils so you can experiment on the lettering application and get the technique down before you attempt this on your newly refurbished or upholstered seat. After all, you don't want to experiment with the only seat you have. Nobody else provides this type of trial system.
- I include colour swatches with the order so the customer can evaluate the colours before installing. I will also send out free swatches upon request, prior to any order. I don't believe anyone else is doing this because it is an added cost.
- Customers will state I offer excellent after sales support and advice when required.

- Although somewhat more expensive, I ship all decal product flat. Decals that are rolled up are difficult to manage, because the backing material wants to remain curled, and straightening out curled decals can buckle or ripple the vinyl.

Pricing

All this being said, there are some things I am willing to do to help reduce pricing to the customer. If it is clearly understood by the customer, that they will not necessarily get an accurate match, I am willing to print on clear vinyl with “close” colours.

I also give reduced pricing on the purchase of multiple sets. There is no one percentage figure that I can give up front. It all depends on the model of bike, the number of sets being ordered, and how the decals can be nested in multiples. If multiple people from a single Country purchase in one order, they can also share the shipping costs between themselves, making shipping more reasonable per person. Please e-mail for quotes on multiple sets and combined shipping.

Summary

Considering the quality of product, level of service, accuracy and colour matching, I believe that the prices I charge are quite reasonable. Customers are quite happy to pay a slightly higher price for the value of product. It all depends on what the Customer wants and what level of detail someone is trying to achieve on their bike. I guess you have to ask yourself, is the small additional cost for the decals and services, worth the investment when there is a large finishing cost at stake? Logically, the answer should be yes.

I will work with my customers to achieve their desired results.

Brian Dallner