



Area 51 Project: "Old man to Renegade"

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Life is all about choices, some decisions come easy while others are fraught with distress. This can be a really cumbersome issue for an avid sledder when choosing to purchase a new sled or investing a few more dollars into the one sitting in the garage that's long paid off! My choice was clear. As much as I would love to be seated on a new REV chassis sled this winter my sensible side prevailed and I knew that saving for a new house had a higher priority than riding a new sled for a few months per season.

Of course this compromise didn't change my desire for something new to ride so I concocted a plan that better suite my sledding needs and my budget. I decided to transform my boring 500 Grand Touring sled to what I'm sure Bombardier would have called a 500 Renegade if they had dreamed of such a machine. This project also makes for a much better Area 51 story than the tall tale of a trip to a dealership to purchase a dream machine (which usually turns into a nightmare as negotiations over purchase price and included accessories commence!) This project is all about achieving the best value for the dollar spent. Some parts I wanted new, some were found used to remain practical and on budget.

If you look at the guts and glory of what separates a touring sled from a play sled, you will find more similarities than you'd think. Within the same model year, most of the s-2000 chassis frames are identical. My Grand Touring and a 1997 Summit are both outfitted with a 136" track, similar suspension set ups, identical engines, and aside from clutching and gearing differences the rest is merely cosmetic. Driven with this new information my plan was set and the work began.

The first project on my list was to strip off all the bits that defined this sled as a Grand Touring sled. First to go was the tall windshield followed by the low handlebars, rear view mirrors, rear rack, back rest, passenger foot rests, the 2-up seat, and of course the Grand Touring decals on the hood.

I removed the rear slide suspension for a thorough cleaning, painting and replacing of worn parts. I replaced and/or painted all the outside wheels black, replaced any inside wheels having worn or missing rubber with new wheels and replaced all bearings in the skid as well as the drive shaft bearing opposite the chain case. New hyfax were installed along with new bushings for the rear scissors springs and dual limiter straps.

Next I disassembled the chain case in anticipation of installing a new track. The track I chose was a 136 x 15 x 1.25" Camoplast Rip Saw unit. From my research, this was the tallest profile that my chassis could fit without interference, and would provide an exceptional hook up in a myriad of conditions (especially when compared to my well-used Camoplast 0.88 profile track!) While this was disassembled, I also sourced a used 22 tooth top gear to replace my stock 23 tooth top gear. This was understood to provide a better launch and low end grunt, especially useful when combined with a more aggressive track. As mentioned earlier, with the drive shaft removed for the changeover of the track the bearing opposite the chain case was replaced.

With the track replaced and the rear slide and chain case reassembled, it was on to the handle bars. Keeping my budget in mind I sourced a set of used mountain handlebars which had a 5" rise to replace the stock straight bar, also included was a factory bar pad and mountain strap. Since the factory hand grips had seen their day, I splurged and bought a pair of new factory REV hand grips/warmers. Luckily the bars installed with little difficulty, careful re routing of some control cables was all that was necessary on this machine to match the rise.

Next on the list was to fabricate a new windshield. With previous success in fabricating one for Project Invader, buying one was left as a last resort. I wanted a sleek low windshield to replace the ugly factory tall windshield. I made several templates out of Bristol Board before I had a pattern that I was happy with. After purchasing some flexible black plastic I cut the windshield following my template, secured it with the factory push clips and trimmed the edge with self adhesive automotive door trim.

The last major hurdle was to secure a one-up seat. I quickly realised that finding one was equivalent to finding a needle in a hay stack. None of the used parts

dealers had one and a search of the local online message boards came up empty handed. One day I went to the local dealership to purchase a set of factory running board edge grips and sitting on the clearance rack was a brand new (old stock) one-up seat and it was right in my price range! I purchased the seat and edge grips on the spot and had it installed within the hour. The front mounting points lined up perfectly and two new holes were drilled out back for the rear mounting points. Aside from a few minor cosmetic details such as the installation of sled-sooley and sled-headz decals, changing the amber reflectors out for white ones and the installation of my custom LED tail light, this project was done and ready for testing.

My first ride impression was outstanding. Riding this sled was like finding a new best friend. All of the swapped and upgraded parts came together in a symphony to the senses. The new handlebars created a much improved riding position. Coupled with the running board edge grips my feet stayed planted and allowed much more control over the machine when boondocking. The new track combined with the one tooth smaller top gear provided outstanding hook up and power output from stop especially compared to the old set up. To top it off, I was extremely happy with the new sporty appearance of the sled with the one up seat, low windshield and so on. The exposed section of the tunnel out back even allowed me to strap on an extra fuel can for longer rides. At the end of the project I met and exceeded my goals of creating a sled that feels completely new while staying within a practical budget. More pictures of this project can be found at www.shed-headz.com on the Area51 page.

Cheers, MIKE