

# A FABLE: SUING PELICAN PARTS

by Ben Barkow  
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Not long after buying a BMW R1100S in 2004, I joined the discussion forum at Pelican Parts for what is still the only board related just to that model. Before long, I incurred the wrath of the Moderator who I am going to call "R."; perhaps I was insufficiently respectful towards the local gurus and glitz merchants. He started blocking and deleting my posts without so much as a message of "by your leave..." to me.

The last straw was this. A fellow posted, "My car mechanic said some V8s don't have a much bigger air filters than your bike." I wrote a straightforward technical explanation of why - odd as it sounds - an 1100 cc sport-tuned bike might need a *bigger* filter than a V8 (hints: high rpm red line, number of cylinders taking big fast gulps of air, cam profile, plenum size....). The moderator tossed it out peremptorily and I was vexed over wasting my time.

So I wrote to R. off-line to complain in the plainest of language. I ended with, as careful people should do, a caution that my personal beef with him was "not for publication," colorfully expressed, and with my true name signed at the bottom.

The next thing was this: R. started a thread with a provocative title like "Ben B is going to sue Pelican Parts." This led to a fierce outpouring of poison in my direction, kind of like a shark feeding-frenzy, posting my picture and details of my professional life (with lots of ignorant ridicule of my work<sup>1</sup>), and the sorts of threats you'd expect from deranged adolescents on a murder spree and who are anonymous. And the most wonderful warm group-hug towards one another: ain't we a swell bunch.

I tried to post some replies but R. blocked and trashed them all. Can you picture that? In America?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Human Factors related to safety, efficiency, and also a major part of my career, the enlargement of accessibility for people with physical or sensory disabilities; currently working with astronauts, no kidding.

<sup>2</sup> Poor R. I wonder if he had trouble in school and so seems very sensitive about some topics that touch on education or when dealing with people with degrees.

Should I be surprised that bikers, even BMW bikers, can act like mindless wolf-pack lemmings (to mix the zoology)? Funny, bikers like to pose as brave, independent-minded, and Robin-Hood-inclined. Yet not a single person posted anything like “Geez, I would like to hear Ben’s side of the story.” Some nice folks did write to me privately with their concerns. But not a single person at Pelican Parts had the courage to ask for an explanation or to challenge the fable (Sue about what??? What can you sue a stupid internet forum about???).<sup>3</sup> No one had any interest in the other side of the story.

With some concern for preserving my besmirched professional identity (at least back at that time), I took my complaint to Wayne (the Pelican Parts owner). I think he was pretty alarmed – actually, it wasn’t hard for me to explain to him just why he should be *real* alarmed over that kind of stuff!

So he took R. out to the woodshed for a little man-to-boy talk. R. was obliged to post an apology which admitted he lied about the suing fable. Well, he said something more like he had misread something and gosh was he ever sorry he said that and aw-shucks folks.

... and that is how R. nearly destroyed the board.<sup>4</sup>

Anybody see the apology? If you didn't see it, it's because in a gesture demonstrating unmanly or unwomanly cowardice, he removed his apology after just one day.<sup>5</sup>

Now, R. told Wayne I was a real bad troublemaker and on the basis of those “facts,” Wayne banned me. All my posts were then deleted. There are still a bunch of threads that quote my missing posts but don’t make a lot of sense with my posts deleted. Kind of weird.

If anybody has something to add to this discussion – particularly if they have cause to doubt the accuracy of anything I’ve said here – let them

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<sup>3</sup> *After* the feeding-frenzy with my name, face, and career “outed” and ridiculed there was lots of damage to sue about, as proven in recent court cases. But not a road I’d ever like to take.

<sup>4</sup> My correspondence with Wayne includes a plea, all in uppercase letters, not to “clobber” the list like Sodom, if I may use that comparison without seeming profane to either Sodom, PP, Wayne, or God.

<sup>5</sup> Four years later, R. had the dishonesty to say his apology was inserted into the vicious thread and he removed the two together. That isn’t true: the thread was removed promptly after my complaint to Wayne and the apology which appeared soon *after that*, was a separate thread in the form of a sticky.

post their misgivings. But one thing... I still have some of the correspondence from that incident to document what I've said.

Recently, R. accused me of changing my alias/name a few times. He keeps on knocking me off the board... and then he asks why I change my alias. You have to be a real low-life to be *that* much of a double-faced snake, eh. What a guy!

You might wonder what kind of perverse motivation has nudged me back on to the board after being tossed a few times and needing to change my alias? God-forbid you imagine I have some liking for R.'s ongoing abuse – aside from the fun in reading over-the-top abuse.

As the oldest rider (age 69 and going on) and the longest-riding on the BMW boxer twins on this board (43 years and counting), I like the idea of contributing to the discussion and to helping others. I am after all, partly a retired university teacher from an engineering faculty. I get a terrible intellectual itch when I read bad advice or learn of riders floundering around needing repair guidance. I go positively ballistic when I read some horse droppings about a new farkle that claims to raise your engine power.

Third, I like an occasional dust-up when I have an unfair disadvantage (OK, I have one arm tied behind my back by R., but he's not exactly the sharpest guy to argue with).

Frankly, I don't feel R. (or even Wayne) "owns" the medium and I am certainly not posting for their benefit. I'm grateful for their considerable efforts in promoting and hosting the board, but the board is really more a commune rather than a personal fiefdom<sup>6</sup>.

You will not see R. or anybody trying to discredit what I've said here, even at PP where he can post whatever he wants: that's because It's all true.

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<sup>6</sup> Here's a juicy tidbit. R. runs a bike repair shop and sells things like hyper-expensive shocks. Does that mean anytime you post an opinion different from his, he feels your are essentially attacking his business and his own credibility? Conflict of interest in a neutral Moderator? Recently, I posted a recommendation to rebuild stock shocks rather than buy mega-buck after-market Ohlins. What did R. do.... he turfed my posting into the trash. Would you say the word "snake" fits him?