

(Photos are at the bottom of this page. Click on any of the images for a larger view.)

## Here's a summary of my recent experience buying a 4-stroke "Superbike" with an EZ Motorbikes Q-Matic drivetrain from Kyle Crow, doing business as Helio Motorized Bicycles in Temecula, California:

When I first discovered Helio online, I was very taken with the look of the 4-stroke "Superbike." **I decided to buy a bike that was already assembled and tested** (rather than a kit) because, although I've got the skills and the tools, I really didn't want to spend the time doing a build myself when the cost of having an experienced motorized bicycle builder get it set up and ready-to-ride for me was fairly reasonable. And, the Helio site said that shipping was free for a limited time.

I clicked to Helio's PayPal shopping cart to place my order. In addition to the \$1,299.99 price for the bike, the cart showed charges of \$39.00 for "sales tax" and \$80.00 for "shipping." So I didn't complete the transaction, and I emailed Crow telling him that he didn't need to collect sales tax from me (because he's in California and I'm in a different state), and I said that I thought that there was free shipping. I asked him to phone me about this, and a short while later he did. You told me that the \$39.00 was a "shopping cart fee" and that the "limited time" free shipping period had expired. I told him that the "shopping cart fee" (whatever that is) is certainly something that should be borne by Helio, but that I found an \$80.00 cross-country shipping fee acceptable. Then, eventually, I told him that I wasn't going to worry about the \$39.00 either, *but* that I expected you to treat me right and impress me with the rest of our transaction. **I added, truthfully, that if I was happy with my experience with him and with the bike, I planned to immediately buy another bike from you for my wife who is equally interested in this type of machine.** I had a pretty good impression of Crow from our phone conversations. He seemed like a well-spoken, sincere guy who was excited about his business. I'm an entrepreneur myself, and I felt an adequate level of comfort in getting involved in this transaction.

My bike arrived 25 days after the order was placed (19 business days). Crow had said that it would ship 5–7 business days after the order was placed; it shipped 15 business days after. But it wasn't a big deal to me that it took quite a few days longer than quoted. I realized that this was a lot different than placing an order with Amazon.com or L.L. Bean, and I kind of expected to wait longer. *But*, I didn't appreciate it when, on the seventh day after placing my order, I emailed him for an update and got a terse email, reading: "We're waiting for some parts. When they come in, we'll finish your bike and ship it. Good things take time." *GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME?! I'm simply emailing for an update on the seventh day after being quoted a shipping date of 5–7 days, and he condescendingly writes, "Good things take time"?! OK, so if good things take time, and a Helio bike is a "good thing," then that "time" should be 5–7 days (as quoted), right? Apparently not.*

**But the real problem was the way that the bike was packed and shipped.** Crow had told me that he ships via FedEx, and he extolled the benefits of FedEx over UPS. Then, when I finally got my notice that the two packages had shipped, the carrier was listed as *UPS!* When my two boxes arrived, the engine was in a separate box with the throttle grip and cable attached, and the EZM Q-Matic drivetrain mounted. This stuff was basically dumped into a medium-duty cardboard box wrapped with thin bubblewrap sheet and loosely filled with what looked like *used* styrofoam packaging material. When I received that box, I knew from the rounded look of it that it hadn't traveled well. It hadn't: **the engine's plastic pull-start plate was cracked** adjacent to one of its three mounting screws. **The very heavy-duty black plastic cover that encloses the Q-Matic gearbox was missing one of its four mounting screws, and there was a three-inch crack radiating from the empty screw hole. And, the plastic cover on the front of the engine (which was originally red, but was spray-painted flat black by Helio) had obviously had gasoline spilled on it** when Crow fired up the engine in California. There were long streaks of the red plastic showing through and some corrosion of the plastic, eaten by the gasoline. I can't fathom how he could pack an engine looking like that! What was he thinking? That I wouldn't notice?! I had to clean, sand and repaint the plastic cover with high-temp flat black spray paint.

The rest of the bike was shipped in its original bicycle shipping box (marked: "firthbikes.com"). The rear wheel was attached (with its hub-mounted, 56-tooth sprocket), and the new suspension forks were mounted, having replaced the bike's original solid forks. But nothing else was assembled. And remember: this bike was purchased "fully-assembled and tested" (but with the understanding that he'd have to ship the engine and drive-train in a separate carton). The front tire was just placed in the carton next to the right side of the bike. This **scratched the frame and the anodized black rim badly, and as I soon found out, knocked the front wheel out of round.** That stuff had been banging and bouncing around in that bike carton all the way across the country. I had to pay a bike shop to true the wheel. And I had to buy white touch-up paint and spend about an hour with that. So much for the nice pearlescent-white paint job on the frame. The touch-up doesn't quite cut it, esthetically. Especially in bright sunlight.

I also discovered that **the left-side pedal on the bike wouldn't clear the protruding Q-Matic gearbox.** So I had to search for and buy "pedal extenders." I found a pair that would extend my pedals out from the crank arms by 19mm (and while I was at it, I ordered some alloy pedals to replace the bike's cheap plastic ones).

**I expected the motor mounts on the frame to be adjusted to exactly the correct position for engine mounting and chain alignment,** but they were facing outwards, and fully tightened! I loosened the mounts and put them in place, and then discovered that **the adjustable-length holes in the mounting plate on the bottom of the engine wouldn't match up with the threaded holes in the frame-mounted motor mounts. So I had to drill new holes. When I attempted to install the chain, I found that it was about 3" too short.** So I had to drive a 1.5-hour round trip to a Tractor Supply Company store and buy a 10-foot piece of #41 chain, *and* a \$36.00 chain breaker tool.

**The gas tank had two large, thick drips in its gloss black paint job.** It was obviously sprayed in a non-quality-controlled plant in China, but I'm pissed that Crow would send *that* tank to me. Before my purchase of the bike, I asked him what he would charge to put an extra tank in with my order because I wanted to eventually paint another tank white to match the bike's white frame. He said that he'd throw in another tank for free. Unfortunately, it was a smaller-capacity tank, and I got to work on prepping and painting the larger tank white sooner than I expected to.

**The front V-brakes weren't anywhere near adjusted, and the cable end was a frayed mess.** When professional bicycle mechanics trim a brake cable, they crimp an aluminum retainer onto its tip.

**The throttle and kill-switch cables were wrapped around each other from the handlebar back; this is a common practice. But on the section of these cables adjacent to the engine, Craw joined them by loosely and sloppily wrapping them with electrical tape. I removed the tape and found that the copper strands of the ground wire for the kill-switch were exposed and very loosely joined to another section of ground wire (apparently he originally cut this wire too short and had to make an extension to reach the engine's electrics).** I pulled off all of the electrical tape, used Goo Gone to remove the sticky mess of adhesive left by the tape, fixed the electrical connections, and then used a section of heat-shrink wire wrap sleeve to neatly join and protect the throttle and kill-switch cables.

On the Helio web site, Craw says that the front suspension forks match the color of the bike's frame. And the site's pictures of the Superbike show white forks on a white-frame bike. **But the forks I received are black.** I guess this is better because, seeing the way Craw handled the rest of preparing the bike for shipping, I surely wouldn't want to see what his spraypainting efforts look like.

**On the Helio web site, and in a phone conversation that I had with Craw, he refers to the Superbike's frame as "aluminum."** After I pulled it out of the box and felt its hefty weight, I took a refrigerator magnet to the frame and confirmed that it is, in fact, steel. And I verified on the bike manufacturer's web site that they specify that the frame is "hi-ten steel." Deception aside though, I'm not too concerned about having a steel frame versus a Chinese aluminum frame.

Finally, **my bike wasn't shipped with a pedal-side chainguard.** The Helio site shows a chainguard on the Superbike, and the bike manufacturer's site does too. And because I saw what was apparently an early prototype of the Superbike in a Helio site video *without* the chainguard, I asked Craw, before placing my order, about this. He assured me that I'd receive a white, stock chainguard with my bike. (Nope.) I emailed him on a Friday asking him to please ship me my chainguard ASAP and to email me the tracking number for this shipment; he said it would ship on Monday. I emailed a reply to him asking him to send me the package's tracking number once the chainguard had shipped. He didn't send me a tracking number on Monday, and three email reminders later, I finally received an email from him -- on the following *Sunday!* Finally, I received the chainguard on Thursday of the following week -- 11 days after Craw said he would ship it. And once I unpacked the chainguard, **I found that there were no fasteners included with it.** This was a small annoyance, but I didn't mind having to buy two screws, nuts, flatwashers and lockwashers to finally finish assembling my bike. But when checking the bike, I found that the two chainguard attachment tabs on the bike's frame were tapped with threading. So I had to ride the bike to a local hardware store and ask them if I could bring a selection of their metric screws out to their parking lot so that I could find the right size and thread pitch for my bike. This was pretty annoying, especially while thinking that my "assembled and tested" bike should have arrived with the chainguard attached.

So, bottom line: my experience with Kyle Craw and Helio has been EXCRUCIATINGLY BAD. **Craw basically bought a Firmstrong cruiser bike, put front suspension forks on it, bought an engine and drivetrain kit from EZ Motorbikes (the instructions sent with my bike were those that EZ Motorbikes had sent to him) and loosely dumped it all in a couple of boxes.** Yet, on Helio's Facebook page, Craw recently commented: *We have built hundreds of bikes and actually put them together as opposed to just selling them.* And Craw has made the same kind of statement in several other places. *Outrageous!*

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**Click on any photo for a larger view:**





Condition of engine when removed from packing carton: Wires sloppily and loosely gathered with electrical tape, a large crack in the pull-starter housing, and the large plastic magneto cover stripped and corroded by gasoline.



The adjustable-length holes in the mounting plate on the bottom of the engine wouldn't match up with the threaded holes in the frame-mounted motor mounts. So I had to drill two new holes on each side of the mounting plate, and then extend the adjustment holes to the new holes with a Dremel.



The very heavy-duty black plastic housing that encloses the Q-Matic gearbox is missing one of its four mounting fasteners, and there is a crack radiating the full width of the housing.



The black-anodized alloy front rim and tire were placed loosely in their shipping carton, so they badly scratched and scuffed the white finish on the bike's frame. And the rim itself is badly scratched on one side. The wheel was badly out-of-round from its rough journey, and I had to pay my local bicycle shop to true it.





Here are just a few photos of the scratched frame.



The left-side pedal wouldn't clear the underside of the gearbox housing (and the end of the crank arm just clears it). So I had to research this problem for a solution, seek out a source for pedal extenders, and purchase them online.



The motor mounts on the frame should have been adjusted to exactly the correct position to accept the engine's mounting plate, but the engine had apparently never been mounted for testing of the bike before shipping. This photo shows the motor mounts as they looked when the bike was unpacked: angled outwards to the left and fully tightened!



This gas tank was most likely painted in a Chinese factory with no quality control. But why was it sent to *me* by Helio?!

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The nearly-finished machine, once I had spent quite a few weeks and dollars (and frustration) putting it together -- the bike that I bought as "assembled and tested."

