

SAFETY CHECKS

Prepping Bike And Mind To Ride

Now that the riding season is well underway, it is a good idea to remind ourselves about strategies to enjoying safe motorcycling. This of course starts with getting our bikes ready after being stored for the winter. If you are fortunate enough to have remembered to winterize your bike, this process should be relatively painless.

If you aren't so fortunate, you may find yourself needing to replace your battery and possibly needing to clean out your fuel system due to the ill effects of allowing untreated fuel with too much ethanol to sit for months in the system. None of this is pleasant and there has been more than a season or two where I wished I had spent the time in the fall winterizing rather than spending the time in the spring paying, both literally and figuratively, for my mistakes.

As part of its training curriculum, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation offers their T-CLOCS inspection checklist of items that should be checked before every ride. It is particularly critical to check these items at the start of the season. T-CLOCS is an acronym that stands for **T**ires and wheels, **C**ontrols, **L**ights and electrics, **O**il and other fluids, **C**hassis and **S**tands.

The air pressure and condition of tires are often overlooked when trying to get back out on the road after a long winter. Be sure that the tires are in good shape and are inflated properly. Check your wheels for loose, bent or broken spokes or dents or cracks in cast rims. Don't forget your bearings and seals and be sure that your brakes function properly.

Make sure your handlebars are straight and adjusted correctly and your levers and pedals work properly. Check the condition of all cables and hoses and ensure proper operation of the throttle.

A dead battery is usually pretty obvious but don't forget to check the function of your headlight, tail and brake lights, turn signals, switches and wiring. Also remember to adjust your mirrors.

It is a good idea to change your oil and at least check other fluids including gear oil, hydraulic fluid, coolant and of course, fuel. Be sure to check for leaks from gaskets, seals or cracked lines.

Check your forks, rear shocks and steering head to ensure proper operation and make sure that your chain or belt has the correct tension and the chain is properly lubricated.

Finally, inspect the condition of your side and/or center stand. Ensure that they are in good condition and are retained properly when in the up position.



By Rob Dingman

In addition to ensuring that your bike is in proper riding order, it is also essential that the rider be in proper order as well. Remember that you may not have ridden for a few months and some of your skills may be a little rusty. It is a good idea to re-familiarize yourself with your bike with some short rides when you are not in a hurry to get anywhere in particular.

For any of you who may not have a proper motorcycle endorsement on your license, be sure to get it. Unlicensed riders are over-represented in motorcycle crash and fatality statistics. Also over-represented in these statistics are impaired riders. This means that you should never ride a motorcycle after having too much to drink.

Many states have approved rider training courses that offer a road test waiver to those who complete the course. Even if you have been riding for many years, rider training is always a good idea, especially if you have been riding for many years without a license.

When I first got my motorcycle endorsement, nearly 30-years ago, I did so by taking an MSF course. Since that time, a number of other course providers have had their courses approved for the road

test waiver in various states. Check with your state's licensing agency, typically the department of motor vehicles, to determine what course leads to a motorcycle endorsement in your state.

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As an off-road rider as well, I find that there is definitely a skills crossover and riding off-road has helped me improve my on-road riding skills. This is especially true in emergency situations. Knowing what happens when you lock up your rear wheel or how your bike will respond if you need to turn suddenly to avoid an obstacle or not panicking if you have no choice but to ride over the obstacle are all things you can learn from riding off-road motorcycles.

Being in the right frame of mind when you throw your leg over a motorcycle is essential to safe riding. Although riding a motorcycle goes a long way toward putting us in the right frame of mind, it is critical that you not be so stressed or agitated that you can't focus completely on the safe operation of your motorcycle.

I have written about this before, but there is no doubt that any type of motorcycle riding is good for your overall wellbeing. It helps to clear our minds and the concentration required helps to improve mental acuity, not to mention that it's just plain fun.

Whatever kind of riding you do, here's wishing you a safe and enjoyable riding season!

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