

Keep your bike in good shape

Routine maintenance is a must for all motorcycles and you can do some of it yourself. As with anything, a motorcycle is only as good as the care you give it. You should do regular maintenance checkups pre-ride, monthly and annually.

Before a ride or at least once a week, check your tires for conditions that could cause a blowout, like cuts or scrapes. Follow the recommendations in the owner's manual for tire pressure. Keep in mind that these recommendations may change depending on the number of riders. If you have air shocks, remember the pressure will also be different for one or two riders. Do not overinflate your tires, especially in hot conditions. Check the rims for any dents and tighten any loose spokes. Spin your wheels to check for looseness and wear and tighten and repair where needed. Check the drive chain for signs of wear and tear, and replace it as needed.

The kind of drive you have will determine the maintenance you must do. You should check your belt drive for cracks and replace it at the first sign of trouble. If you have a chain drive, make sure the sprocket teeth are in good condition and oiled. Check your owner's manual for the proper tension. If you have a shaft drive, check the primary and secondary oil levels and make sure the bolts are tight. Inspect the primary gearbox by removing the bolt. If there is oil at the neck, it's ok. If not, fill it to the neck. The secondary gearbox is on the rear wheel. If you see oil dripping when the bolt is opened, it's ok. If not, fill it until you can see the oil.

Brakes are the most important things on a motorcycle, so it is essential that they work correctly. When your brakes are fully applied, the wheel should be locked. Make sure there is clean brake fluid in the master cylinder and that the fluid levels are

where they are supposed to be. Check the pads and liners for wear and replace them if needed. Jerky or irregular stopping may be a sign of a warped rotor or drum.

Without proper engine maintenance, your motorcycle will not run. About every 500 miles, check the nuts, bolts and screws for looseness. Check the levels of all engine fluids. If the oil is black or very dark and there is a burnt smell, change it and the filter. Look at the fuel lines for signs of dry rot and check the anti-freeze level. If the air filter is dirty, either replace or clean it. Inspect the oil lines for cracks or chafing, sure signs of an oil leak. Replace spark plugs if they are black, a sign of burning too much oil, or light gray or white, a sign of an intake leak. Check the manifold for leaks and the mounting brackets and the primary drive chain or belt. If your motorcycle is slipping or dragging, adjust the clutch and replace the plates.

Inspect the electrical system wiring for signs of chafing or wear. Run a check on the headlights' high and low beams, brake lights, turn signals, instrument lights and driving lights. Secure any loose wires and test the kill switch. Using WD-40 on the switches and locks will help keep them working and prevent them from freezing in the cold weather. If your battery terminals show signs of corrosion, use baking soda and water to clean them, being careful not to get any in the battery, and make sure the battery is properly charged. Putting oil or petroleum on the terminals will help prevent corrosion in the future. Check the starter connections, mounting bolts, shaft and the fuse box, if your motorcycle has one. It is a good idea to keep spare fuses and headlight bulbs with you in case of emergencies.

—By Ronda Addy, special

Bob (Boomer) MacDonald

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