

(1) **Attitude.** As fun and as relaxing as riding a motorcycle is, never, ever go for a ride to blow off steam when you're angry. You're not thinking rationally, and the odds of making a costly mistake are much higher. Instead, give yourself a chance to cool down a bit before you turn that ignition key. Then enjoy a nice, calming ride.

(2) **Helmets.** Who hasn't accidentally ridden off with their helmet unstrapped? Go ahead and fess up. If your helmet isn't firmly attached to your head, it's not going to do its job when you need it the most. Your ritual when pulling out of the garage should include a quick check of the strap for tightness. Do it enough and muscle memory will take over. Don't believe me? Watch how men instinctively check their zipper every time they walk out of the bathroom.

(3) **Lights.** Anyone who's ever had the bulb fail on a single headlight motorcycle, on a moonless night, in the remotest wilds of the countryside, can tell you that the initial instant of pitch black is terrifying. Making sure all your bulbs are working before you ride will lessen the chance that you'll get a goodly distance from home and discover your headlight is dead, just as the sun dips below the horizon. Turn signals and brake lights are also pretty dang important if you ride your bike anywhere near other road users. Checking your lights is as simple as flipping both your turn signals and looking for the lights reflected off the walls of your garage. Use your mirrors and do the same thing with both the front and rear brakes.

(4) **Tires** rank right up there with your bike's brakes. A tire's air pressure determines its profile, which, in turn, affects a motorcycle's handling. If you regularly check your tire's air pressure, you don't need to check it every ride, but you should check the tread for foreign objects every time you walk to your bike to ride it. Ideally you'd roll the bike to check the entire circumference of the tire before every ride; realistically, it won't happen that often. However, if you look at your tires every time you walk up to your bike, you'll check the bulk of the tire's surface after two or three stops. You'll be surprised how frequently you notice something stuck in the tread, and when you do, don't immediately pull the object out – especially if you're in a remote location and don't have a tire repair kit.

(5) **Brakes** are the most important system on your motorcycle. Your bike can stop a hell of a lot faster than the engine can accelerate it. Having brakes functioning at their very best is vital for your safety – and your riding enjoyment on a twisty road. Check brake-line junctions from the levers to the calipers, and give your brake lever a couple of squeezes before you start your bike's engine. You're looking for the same level of firmness as on the previous time you rode your bike. If it is softer or the lever pulls back further than on previous tests, you may have a leak or air in your lines

(6) **Control cables** are another item that rarely fail suddenly. Instead, they fray over time. So, if you check your cables' movement without the engine running – on a regular basis – you stand a pretty good chance of noticing a subtle grinding sensation, somewhat akin to feeling like sand has worked its way into the cable. This is the first sign that the cable is beginning to fray, with individual strands beginning to break. If you don't notice the problem, eventually the cable will either break or get jammed. Either of these can have disastrous consequences. Nobody likes a stuck throttle, and while you *can* ride a long way without a clutch, why would you want to subject your transmission to the abuse of clutch less downshifts?

(7) **Belt/Chains.** Your motorcycle's belt/chain plays a supremely important role in propelling you and your bike down the road. A poorly adjusted belt will hamper the quality of your ride when loose by increasing driveline lash, making it hard to manage throttle inputs without abrupt snatches. A belt that is too tight can interfere with the suspension's ability to compress fully. Also, an improperly adjusted or worn belt can become a safety hazard. When belts/chains fail, they can do some pretty dramatic things – aside from ceasing to direct your engine's power to the rear wheel. The worst-case scenario is having it wrap around the rear sprocket and lock the rear wheel, which nobody wants to experience. In rarer cases, the

belt/chain may merely be jettisoned creating an interesting moment as the 3' belt goes flying towards the rider behind you.

(8) **Check Oil Level.** Some bikes make it easy. Just hold your bike upright and glance at the sight glass on its engine to check the level. If not, make it part of your routine to physically check the oil level at least once a week. That way you'll know if your bike is starting to consume oil and require that you check the level more frequently. Even on those times when you're not checking the dipstick, you can make a quick once over of your engine, looking for new leaks, part of your visual assessment. Unless an oil leak is created by the engine's internal parts suddenly deciding they want to be on the outside, leaks typically begin slowly and build over time – something you can catch just by looking at the engine.

(9) **Fuel Level/Tank Range.** File this under “Duh,” but you're not getting anywhere without gas. If you're religious about resetting your bike's trip meter at the beginning of every tankful, you'll have a pretty good idea of what your fuel status is before you ride, even if your bike doesn't have a fuel gauge. Also, most gauges are inaccurate at some point on their scale. By tracking your mileage, you'll know if you're really at the bottom of the tank or if you've got another 30 miles left. The real reason you want to check your fuel, though, is to plan your ride. Know where along your route you're going to stop for gas – or if you need to stop at all. It's all part of getting your head in the game before you've even turned a wheel.

(10) **Visual Assessment.** When your bike was new, you couldn't help casting a loving gaze over it every time you walked up to it. You probably even gave it a caress or two. There's no shame in admitting it. We've all done it. What's different about this look-over is that you're actively checking for problems. Does anything look loose or out of sorts. You'll want to give your bike a once over before moving on to specific components. The more familiar you are with the daily condition of your bike, the better chance you have of noticing something amiss. For example, a fork seal will usually cry a tear or two before it turns into a full-fledged leak that threatens to contaminate your front brake pads.