PRE-RIDE Inspection

Tremendous strides in the quality of materials, the design of components, and manufacturing tolerances have given us much more reliable machines. It is tempting to simply assume that everything is right and nothing hangs on the brink of failure. But as the service tech at a shop said to me recently after double-checking something and finding that a near disaster would have occurred otherwise, "You know what they say about assume."

It is therefore prudent to pay attention to the mechanics of your motorcycle. Check those things that you can see or get a wrench on. Feel or measure for proper adjustment. And, most of all, be sure that your last ride didn't do some damage that will spoil your next one. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation has developed a simple checklist, outlined in the accompanying list, summarized with the acronym T-CLOCK, for the headings of each section.

After, Not Before

Although this is usually described as a "pre-ride" inspection, the best and most convenient time to perform it is shortly after your last ride. This helps to ensure that the motorcycle will be ready for your next ride because it gives time to correct any discrepancies you find. A nail lodged in a tire will, if discovered on Sunday morning, probably scrub your ride that day. But if you find it after riding home on Friday night, you can get it repaired on Saturday. If you discovered in after your ride on Sunday, you'll have time to arrange an alternate means of getting to work the next morning.

One of the best ways to find problems is through the post-ride cleaning many riders give their bikes. I have no doubt that riders who routinely clean their motorcycles do uncover the small problems that would become big problems much earlier than riders who simply walk around their bikes, look them over and shake a few pieces to make sure they are attached. Loose pieces, small leaks, the first signs of corrosion and components out of whack are much more obvious when you are touching every external part of your bike.

THE T-CLOCK INSPECTION

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation created the T-CLOCK mnemonic as a memory and orgaization ad for a pre-ride safety check of a typical motorcycle. Each letter represent a particular inspection category, as follows:

- T - Tires & Wheels
- C - Controls
- L - Lights & Electrics
- O - Oil
- C - Chassis
- K - Kickstand

TIRES AND WHEELS
Tires: Pressure correct (cold), tread condition. No cuts, bulges, punctures of foreign objects.
Wheels: Spokes tight and intact; rims true; no free play when flexed; bearing seals intact; spin freely.
Brakes: Firm feel; sufficient pad depth, no leaks or links in hoses or cables.

CONTROLS
Levers: Pivot bolt and nut; action and position correct; pivots lubed.
Cables: Ends and shafts lubed; no fraying or kinks; no binding when handlebar turned; proper adjustment.
Hoses: Check for damage or leaks, proper routing.
Throttle: Snaps closed freely when released; no excess play.

LIGHTS
Brake and Tailight(s): All filaments work; both levers actuate brake light.
Headlight: All filaments work; properly aimed; no damage.
Lenses: Clean; no condensation; tight.
Reflectors: Clean; intact.
Battery: Fluid level; terminals clean and tight; held down securely; vent tube not kinked or mis-routed.
Wiring: Check for pinching or fraying; properly routed; no corrosion.

OIL AND FLUIDS
Levels: Brake fluid, oil, final drive, transmission, coolant, fuel.
Leaks: Check all systems for leaks.
Condition: Check color of brake fluid & coolant.

CHASSIS
Frame: Paint lifting or peeling may indicate cracking.
Steering head & swingarm bearings: Lift wheels off floor, grab lower fork legs and pull and push to feel for play; repeat at rear. Turn fork to feel for detents in bearings.
Suspension: Smooth movement; proper adjustment; no leaks.**
Chain or belt: Tension; lube, look for wear.
Fasteners: Look for missing or loose threaded fasteners, clips, pins.

KICKSTAND
Sidestand: Retracts firmly; no bending or damage; cut-out switch operates; springintact.
Centerstand: Retracts firmly, no damage.

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