



STREET SKILLS by Jon DelVecchio

Always Ride a New Motorcycle

Text by: Jon DelVecchio

"Street Skills" is a feature to get you reflecting on your riding skills and habits. Each article will give you something to think about or work on to sharpen your

riding skills for more safety and enjoyment. The articles are written by Jon DelVecchio, the author of Motorcycling streetSkills Flashcards and host of the streetSkills Motorcycle Safety Podcast. Visit www.streetskills.net for more information.

Don't you just love visiting a motorcycle dealership? Walk through the shop doors and you are immediately dazzled by all the sparkling machinery. Next, you get hit by the fantastic smell of metal, plastic and rubber manufactured into one incredible object. Naturally, a motorcycle gets your attention and you zero in on its spotless components and pristine condition. Why not throw a leg over this beauty? As you assume the riding position, the handlebars effortlessly straighten to the sound of a fresh tire squeaking on the floor. Everything you squeeze and press is crisp. Soon, the indoor test ride is over and you very gently place the bike back on its side stand.

Once a new motorcycle leaves the showroom many factors conspire to wear it out. How often will it be ridden? Will it get washed? Will it see rain? Where will it be stored? Will it tip over? Get scratched? Ignored? Adored? Regardless of these circumstances, periodic maintenance can offset what I call Motorcycle Degradation Disorder (MDD). MDD is the transformation of a motorcycle from new to old. When owners actually ride their motorcycles, there is no stopping MDD. But the affliction can be delayed with upkeep.

It all starts with the pre-ride check. In addition to making your ride safer, pre-ride routines keep a motorcycle operating like new. An overlooked benefit of giving your motorcycle the attention it requires is that you will always be riding a "new" motorcycle if you lube, adjust and replace parts that wear. It's satisfying when someone tells you in amazement that the motorcycle you have ridden rain or shine for seven years and 50,000 miles still looks new. That it also rides like new is the cherry on top.

Pre-ride checks have been preached about for many years, yet riders tend to downplay their importance. Honestly, few crashes are the result of faulty maintenance, but why take unnecessary risks?

So exactly what should you be on the lookout for?

If you haven't ridden your motorcycle in over a week, you should give it a good once-over. The biggest items are

tires, lights, and controls. Check tire pressure, tread depth and look for any cracks. Take care of the tires that take care of you. The lights should all be working properly. The time to find out your brake light is broken is in your garage, not when you get rear-ended by a Volvo! The controls mostly consist of those items you operate with your hands and feet. If something doesn't feel smooth or within normal sensation as you ride out of the driveway, turn back and have a closer look.

More extensive items should be checked periodically, such as chain slack and fluid levels. Search the web for the MSF's T-CLOCS Inspection Checklist for the whole list. Consult your owner's manual for intervals and specifications.

Washing your motorcycle gives you another chance to inspect for loose bolts, worn parts and other irregularities. Dirt and grime not only hide possible problems, but they also clog up components causing potential failure. It takes less than ten minutes to wash a motorcycle, but it will look brilliant for much longer.

For those that are not real handy, it does take a bit more effort to maintain your own motorcycle. I suggest buying your model's specific service manual to show step-by-step directions for even the simplest maintenance tasks. Set up your shop to have the workspace and resources available to give your motorcycle the attention it deserves. And if you're really clumsy around machinery, ask a buddy to give you a hand in the garage occasionally.

Yes, my motorcycles have scratches and broken bits here and there. It's bound to happen to actively ridden motorcycles. But, why not strive to keep your bikes immaculate...because it is possible. Once you get in the habit of pre-ride checks and simple maintenance, you will enjoy your "new" motorcycle ride, after ride, after ride.