



Motorcycles have become so reliable it's easy to take them for granted. Back when I started riding, we were cautioned to carefully examine the clutch cable and avoid holding the clutch lever in while waiting at a light—lest the cable break and propel the bike and rider into crossing traffic. These days the recommendation is to keep the bike in gear with the clutch in to permit an immediate escape if a car veers toward you. In the bad old days fasteners routinely vibrated off bikes, spokes broke, ignition-point timing and gap had to be monitored closely, and you needed to check the oil frequently to see how much had leaked out or burned up. Tremendous strides in the quality of materials, the design of components, and manufacturing tolerances have resulted in much more reliable machines. It is tempting to assume everything is OK and nothing hangs on the brink of failure. But you know what they say about assume.

Therefore, it is prudent to pay attention to the mechanics of your motorcycle. Check the things you can see or get a wrench on, feel or measure for proper adjustment, and be sure your last ride didn't do some damage that will spoil your next one. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation has developed a simple checklist (In the T-CLOCK Inspection section below) 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 the motorcycle will be ready for your next ride because it gives you time to correct any discrepancies you may find. Discovering a nail lodged in a tire on Sunday morning will probably scrub your ride for the day. But, if you find it after riding home on Friday night, you can get it repaired on Saturday. If you find it after your ride on Sunday, you'll have time to arrange an alternate means of transportation to work the next morning.

One of the best ways to find problems is through a post-ride cleaning. Riders who routinely clean their motorcycles uncover the small problems that become bigger problems much earlier than riders who just walk around their bikes and shake a few pieces to make sure they're attached. Loose pieces, small leaks, the first signs of corrosion, and components out of whack are more obvious when you're touching every part of your bike.

One tool that makes cleaning and inspecting your cruiser less difficult is a work stand.

Avoiding Big Surprises Tires are the most vulnerable components of your bike since they are most frequently in harm's way. I have discovered nails and other objects in my tires before rides several times. Pre-ride checks—plus the fact that I often carry tire-repair gear—are why flat tires have only stranded me twice in more than a million miles of riding. I can recall two occasions when I had found sharp objects before they were able to penetrate the tire far enough to deflate it.

One time to be extra scrupulous is after maintenance has been performed. Of the hundreds of bikes I have received in a quarter of a century of testing, three arrived with loose drain plugs. All of these bikes had just left the in-house service facilities of major motorcycle manufacturers. On my own bikes, I keep an eye on things that have been removed or replaced recently. For example, I pay extra attention to the seal of a new oil filter, and double-check a recently installed fastener to be sure it isn't loosening up.

Some components may gradually slide out of spec and cause a smaller problem which the rider may not notice, because it happens over an extended period of time. A common example is throttle-cable adjustment. The rider may overlook the small, steady change, but the growing play causes a minor deterioration in throttle-control precision. Other items that may not be obvious are worn or damaged steering-head bearings. If your routine inspection includes checks and occasional measurements of the adjustments of items that gradually change over time, your motorcycle will operate with more precision.

Among the potential threats to your safety while riding, mechanical failure is fairly low on the list; wearing bright colors, staying off the bike after having a beer, or practicing your braking skills are definitely more important. But that won't matter much if the nail you failed to notice causes a tire to blow out in heavy, fast-moving traffic, or if the recently installed drain plug in your drive-shaft housing falls out and locks up the rear wheel. Motorcycles are more reliable than ever, but that doesn't mean you can ignore your bike's mechanics completely.

The T-CLOCK Inspection

T Tires & Wheels: • Tires: Pressure; condition. • Wheels: Spokes tight and intact; rims true; no free play when flexed; bearing seals intact; spin freely. • Brakes: Firm feel; sufficient pad depth.

C 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 is turned; proper adjustment. • Hoses: Check for damage or leaks. • Throttle: Snaps shut freely; no excess play.

L Lights:

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

O Oil & Fluids:

• Levels: Brake fluid, coolant, final drive, fuel, oil and transmission. • Leaks: Check all systems for leaks. • Condition: Check color of brake fluid and coolant.

C Chassis:

• Frame: Paint lifting or peeling indicates cracking. • Steering-head and swingarm bearings: Lift wheels off floor, grab lower fork legs, and pull and push to feel for play; repeat at rear. • Suspension: Smooth movement; proper adjustment; no leaks. • Chain/belt: Tension; lube; look for wear. • Fasteners: Look for missing or loose thread fasteners, clips or pins.

K Kickstand:

• Side stand: Retracts firmly; no damage; cut-out switch operates. • Center stand: Retracts firmly; no damage.

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<http://www.motorcyclecruiser.com/debriefing-your-bike-after-ride?77BuYXPvzZxDGmeX.03>