

Ready, Set...Wait a Minute

...build up your stamina and engage those unused muscles and synapses

Spring has finally arrived! That's especially good news for those of us residing in the northern latitudes. Depending on your location, you might be lucky enough to have already started rolling; some of you may have recently returned from a week at Daytona, the signal that another season has returned to kickstart our passion. But before we swing our legs over our iron steeds, perhaps we should take a few moments to consider the risks involved with early-season riding.

I know you've been impatiently waiting for warm weather's return, but we should reflect on the condition of several things before we roll: the condition of our motorcycles, the roads to travel, and, especially, ourselves.

When it comes to looking over your two-wheeled joy machine, a good review of a pre-ride TCLOCS (Tires and wheels, Controls, Lights and electrical, Oil and fluids, Chassis, Sidestand) inspection is certainly in order. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement and overlook the basic signs that could prevent an accident. It may vary between regions and individual riders, but some of us may have had our bike in an idle condition for at least five months. Though it hasn't been rolling, things still should be checked for their condition and operation, especially tire pressure. During the cold months, tires can lose up to 10 psi (pounds per square inch) or more, and riding on flatter tires will affect handling and stopping capabilities.

The remainder of the TCLOCS process also deserves full attention, ensuring all your components are in proper operating condition. The time it takes to fully look over your ride is better than finding out that you have a problem while on the road.

Even the cost of a service visit as part of your pre-ride approach can be less costly than a breakdown—or worse—on the road.

We all have our favorite roads that have been waiting for our return, but what condition are they in? The transition from winter to spring often degrades the roadways with potholes, sand, salt residue, and other unfavorable elements. Your visual awareness should be functioning at 100 percent to allow for adjustments. Also, we can never forget about the other vehicles on the road. Drivers become accustomed to not seeing motorcycles especially during the winter, so we're at even more risk than usual.

This leads us to the next issue, easily overlooked by many of us—how are we feeling? The answer includes our mental attitude as well as our physical condition. After a long break from riding, how good are our skills? Simple operations such as clutch and brake can be far from smooth until we get a little more saddle time. Cornering may not have the efficient arc necessary for successful turns. Perhaps a visit to an empty parking lot for some practice would help shake off any rust. Better yet, how about signing up for a rider education course to work out the kinks; you might even find some other flaws in your riding habits. Putting aside any egotistical notions about your riding abilities can help curtail and even avoid risks down the road.

Ultimately, another riding season's arrival means we're another year older. It's not enjoyable to consider, but with increased age comes the greater possibility of risks that we have yet to recognize. Fatigue can easily set in due to the physicality of riding, something we haven't dealt with during the off-season. Consider shorter rides at the onset of the season to build up your stamina and engage those unused muscles and synapses. Our reflexes can easily lag, plus older age also magnifies the issue. Again, be vigilant, scanning the roads for potential hazards and providing yourself plenty of time and space to make any needed adjustments. Going slowly for smoother braking, shifting, turning is far better than sudden abrupt actions that can have serious repercussions.

Yes, this is an exciting time of year for many of us, but don't let that excitement supersede the important factors that make our rides safer. The time it takes to check our bike and the roads, and, most importantly, check ourselves can enhance the joy of riding. We have been waiting for this: planned rides, places to see. Just remember to keep sharp and keep learning to enjoy the memorable times to come on the road. **AIM**

