

What-Ifs Part II: Mechanical Issues

CONTINUING WITH OUR SERIES OF POSSIBLE solutions to those infamous what-ifs that sometimes develop while on the road, this time we're going to take a look at mechanical problems.

Although many of us are aware that a preride

inspection is our best defense in preventing mechanical failures, some of us are not that vigilant, and even if we are, things can still happen. One of the biggest concerns of riders is what to do in the event of a tire blowout. This one question even tops the list from nonriders.

We're fortunate to live in times when tire technology is advanced. Blowouts, a common problem in the early days, are a rarity now. And though it can still happen, having to deal with a fast leak is a much more likely scenario. I'm just going by my own experience, but it seems the rear tire is more likely to go flat. (This may be because the front one kicked up the puncturing device?) This doesn't mean that front tires don't go flat: they do. But either one can cause some issues that can lead to a bad outcome if mishandled. First and foremost, if either tire goes flat, you'll recognize the fact by the sluggish movement in handling. However, this is not a time to panic. Sudden reactions can have bad repercussions.

In the event a tire goes flat — be it a blowout or a fast or slow deflation — do not go heavy on the brakes or even decelerate quickly. If you know which tire is deflated, minimize the use of that tire's brake system. If you cannot tell which tire is flat, use minimal braking action on both wheels while slowly decelerating. Put on your flashers, downshift where needed for a smooth transition into gear, and pull over to a safe place as soon as possible. Don't do what some folks do with a flat car tire: ride on the rim to an exit. Only travel on the flat if you have no safe spot to pull over, but only do this for a short distance. Once on the side of the road, assess the issue or damage. If you have tubeless tires and a repair kit available, do your re-

pairs if the tire looks within safe limits. Don't consider the plugged tire as a permanent repair; replace that tire ASAP. If you have a tire with a tube, you'll more than likely need a tow. Not many of us carry tube repair kits and tire irons with us. Be calm through the situation and restrict your movements to a slow steady response.

What about a busted cable? If you have a fly-by-wire throttle system, you more than likely will have to deal with

a snapped clutch cable. Can you still ride a bike safely with a broken clutch cable? As always this is an assessment you need to make. A bike can still shift gears up and down by keeping pressure on the peg and decelerating enough for the shift. A snapped cable just makes starting, stopping, and slow speed maneuvers nearly impossible to do. If you're on an interstate, you may want to contemplate going as far as you can or even off the exit before pulling over. When you do pull over, just flick your engine cut off switch to stop the motor. Depending on the speed, be prepared for a sudden stop and adjust accordingly. If you're in congested traffic, pull off the road sooner than later. Keep in mind that you'll have limited control for smooth stops and speed adjustments in traffic. You may also be able to start your bike if you have enough of a downgrade to get rolling for a jump start. Just remember to start off in neutral and pop the bike into second gear to start things up. As always, take into account if you're comfortable doing this, or even if you've done it before. The last thing you want to do is something that could cause more damage to the bike — such as dropping it by doing



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something wrong.

Though we only covered two possible mechanical failures, they, along with others, have the same suggested approach. Things happen to the best-prepared riders, how they handle the problem is what separates them from those who do more damage to the bike or get hurt themselves. Keep your cool, think about what you're doing, quickly review all the risks, and work with that uncommonly used common sense to get yourself through the situation. Keep it safe out there. **AIM**