

Spinning Wheels

WHEN IT COMES TO RIDING, ONE OF THE MOST important physical properties we may sometimes take for granted is traction. Although our tires come in various sizes and tread patterns, the contact patch area that gives us traction to move,

turn, and stop is about equal to the size of our palms — certainly doesn't seem like much does it?

With a recent move from a rural setting to a busy suburban location and a commute to New York City on a daily basis, I've become more aware of spots where traction can be lost, which could result in an unwanted scenario.

Granted, a lot of these points are also found in a rural setting, but in a congested area they are more prevalent. So, if you've become a bit complacent about some of these spots for traction loss, or never considered them, maybe this will work as a wake-up reminder, hopefully before you encounter them in the wrong way.

Manhole covers and drainage grates seem to be a staple of road and highway construction, and are certainly in abundance within crowded areas.

These pieces are normally made of solid steel, and though some manhole covers may have a traction pattern incorporated in their casting, it doesn't help much. These large sections of ore can quickly reduce the grip of your tires. When you add other elements such as rain and fluids from other vehicles (oils, antifreeze, etc.), manhole covers can simulate the slickness of an ice skating rink.

Tollbooths are another location where the buildup of slippery snot can ruin your day. With traffic being slow and heavy in these spots, the increase of traction-reducing elements can make things challenging. Most are covered with a canopy that makes it hard for rain to wash away the slime, which means you've got a location where the chance of spinning your wheels can easily lead to you getting a closer look at the crap. Another hazard to keep in mind with tollbooths: if you're not using an electronic payment device and stop to pay your toll, you're probably close to the booth itself. With motorcycles being narrow in profile and stopped in a spot that may not be well lit, it's easy for a driver not to see you. So besides using caution for road

conditions, also remember to keep an eye on your rearview mirrors.

Painted crosswalks, railroad crossings, and other road "art" are other easily overlooked spots for us to slip and slide. These painted places on the roadway are typically large swatches of paint and sometimes the Department of Transportation uses a peel and stick method in lieu of paint; which is just as slick. When you see those infamous grip

stealers, remember to use caution when crossing them. Some safety presenters even recommend that you address them in a similar fashion to passing through an area of water: just before you cross the point, squeeze in your clutch to eliminate the chance of a "power" spin and losing that valuable traction. If there is no power being transferred to the rear wheel, you lessen the chance of dealing with an undesirable condition. Keep in mind, when you see railroad crossing signs painted in the roadways, shortly after them will be a set of steel rails that are smooth and polished from wear that you will have to cross over. Whenever possible, consider approaching them at a 90-degree angle to reduce the risk.

As with the tollbooths mentioned before, other covered areas should raise a flag of caution. While we may just enter a gas station for more of the

precious fluid that will keep us rolling, we could be entering a playground for spinning wheels. Keep in mind that gasoline or diesel is a petroleum product and is slippery. People at times accidentally overfill their gas tanks and spill fuel on the pavement, vehicles sit there dripping greasy stuff while they're fueling, and the fact that all this takes place under a covered surface might just turn that oasis of motor juice into a nightmare.

There are tons of risky items that are related to riding motorcycles; some we can control, some not. It only takes a moment for things to become bad, yet it also only takes a moment to consider the risks we encounter and plan for them accordingly. There are enough circumstances out there that can make our ride have a negative outcome; besides it being easily avoided, telling someone you wiped out in one of these spots could also be a bit embarrassing. So, to continue enjoying your rides without problems that can have damaging results, keep the simple things in mind as well. Don't become complacent, use something that can easily be part of your defense when riding — common sense. **AIM**



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