

MARCH KAUTION KORNER - THOUGHTS OF SPRING

By: Ted 'Hogski' Makarewicz



As the weather begins to turn warmer and we have our annual February thaw, we start to think of the upcoming riding season. We immediately focus on preparing our motorcycle for that first day of warm weather to take it out for a ride. We do a quick inspection of the critical components; lights, tires and wheels, fuel and oil and cables and suspension. But just as important, we need to prepare our minds and bodies for the upcoming riding season. I came across this quote which puts this issue in perspective. “Your physical and mental preparation are as important as correct tire pressure and a good helmet.”

This is especially true preparing mentally for the three kinds of spring riding hazards. The three categories are hazards from the environment, from those around us and from within. The environmental hazards for the city would be potholes in the street as a result from the winter freeze-thaw cycle. You need to give yourself extra space between vehicles. If you are right behind a car, you would not be able to see the pothole the car’s wheels are straddling. Therefore, the additional space would allow you to see and avoid the pothole. In the country, it’s the mud and gravel that has accumulated over the winter on the road surface. The gravel that has worked its way into the curve in the road or the accumulation of mud or debris washed across the pavement by flooding. You need to anticipate these conditions and slow the speed of your motorcycle to be able to react in a timely manner.

Another springtime hazard is that drivers haven’t seen a motorcycle on the roads for months. A lot of riders will wait two or three weeks after seeing that first motorcycle on the road before they will venture out. It’s called “inattentive blindness.” Drivers of automobiles are not looking for motorcycles. The image of you and your motorcycle may hit their eyes, but it does not register in their brains because it’s not the car or truck they’re looking for. So, the best strategy to combat this condition is to ride as if you’re invisible, especially going through intersections. Always scan ahead and check your mirrors and watch the patterns of other drivers.

Finally, the last springtime hazard is ourselves. I think of the comic strip character, Pogo when he makes the statement, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Our riding skills in March are not as sharp as they are in October, but the demands of riding are the same if not higher because of the time off the bike during the winter and the springtime hazards. Maybe that first ride should be a short ride around your neighborhood to listen and feel for anything that might seem out of the ordinary. This ride will help you see if there are any sounds such as clicks or ticking noises that may be cause for further inspection. But above all, impatience is another hazard to be considered. We are impatient to go on that first ride and we neglect doing the proper inspection of the motorcycle. We don’t check the brakes or the tires and find ourselves in an emergency stopping situation because a car pulled out in front of us and we have spongy brakes and underinflated tires. We need to take the time to adjust to the demands both physically and mentally to be able to proficiently ride our motorcycles and enjoy the riding season.

