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Our Tires - How Well Do We Really Inspect?



As Motorcyclists, we understand the importance of keeping our motorcycles in tip-top shape for safety and optimal performance. We also know one of the most important things to do is checking our tires. Tire pressure is very important and should be checked every time you're going to ride your bike and preferably checked in the morning when your tires are cool.

In addition to pressure, a regular visual inspection of your tires for signs of wear, damage, or potential problems should be performed. Doing a tire inspection can help identify potential problems and prevent accidents caused by tire failure. We may feel we do a good job at inspecting our tires, **but how well do we really inspect?** With most bikes it's difficult to see much of the tire surface, especially on baggers or any large bike with saddle bags.

Checking tire sidewalls is probably the easy part of the tire to inspect so there should be no excuse for us not to do a complete and thorough job. But what are we looking for? You want to check for sidewall cracking, cuts, bulges or bumps. These can be signs of internal damage or sidewall weakness. You should also look at the age of the tire. This can be found on the sidewall



with the DOT info. At the end of that info, you will see four numbers (for example 2316), sometimes in a recessed oval. This is your tire's birth date (manufacture date). The birth date above (2316) is the 23rd week of 2016. All manufactures use this coding of two numbers for the week and two numbers for the year. Manufactures vary on the longevity of a tire, but it seems to fall between 6-11 years. Therefore, as an example, a tire that looks good with maybe only 200 miles on it, but manufactured in the year 2009, should be replaced because of its excessive age.

Adequate tread depth is essential for maintaining traction and stability on the road. To perform a tread depth check, you can use a tread depth gauge. Many tire pressure gauges have tread depth gauges attached. If a depth gauge is not available, a Lincoln head penny will do. Place the

penny into the grooves with Lincoln's head facing down. If the tread depth is below the recommended minimum or if you can see the top of Lincoln's head on the coin, it's time to replace the tire. The middle of your tire will always have the most wear. All tire depth checks



should be taken as close to the middle of the tire as possible. Your tire also has Tread Wear Indicators (TWI). You have little arrows placed around the tire on the sidewalls identifying the approximate TWI locations. If your tread is worn down to the TWI you need to replace your tire.

Check the entire running surface of your tire. This is the surface where the rubber meets the road. On a bagger the circumference of the rear tire is around 78-80 inches, however at any one time we can only see about 8 to 10 inches. That leaves approximately 70 inches not inspected. That's a lot of tire surface being ignored. We can continue to inspect the surface by moving the bike about 8 inches each time so we inspect the entire tire. But how often have you performed this type of thorough inspection? In this surface inspection you should be looking for imperfections, embedded objects like nails or screws, punctures, uneven wear patterns, bald or flat spots, and exposed belts. We have all heard of someone who happened to spot a nail or screw in their tire. Or maybe someone who happened to see a bare spot with belts showing. When asking them when did it happen or how long has it been like that, they have no idea.

That's why doing a thorough tire inspection regularly on your motorcycle is essential for rider safety and optimal bike performance. You should consistently monitor tire pressure, check tread depth, examine sidewalls, check the surface for embedded objects, and for flaws and uneven wear patterns around the entire tire. By following this plan, you can confidently identify any tire related problem, ensuring your tires are in excellent condition for your next open road adventure. Enjoy the Ride!

