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Motorcycling Guides

number

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**PREPARING YOUR
MOTORCYCLE
FOR WINTER**

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Depending on where you live and likely weather conditions, you probably need to do some things to your motorcycle to prepare it for winter.

A lot of people ride less in the winter, but like many, you will likely want to both protect it and also keep it prepared for those days when the weather is good enough to go out for a winter ride.

Here are ten things you should consider doing to protect your bike and prepare your motorcycle for winter to have it ready to keep riding in the winter on the days when the weather is better.

More of Gary's motorcycling guides can be found at www.tour1.co.uk

1. CLEAN AND PROTECT IT.

Why: If you are going to leave your motorcycle un-ridden for long periods, storing a bike that has insects, water spots or salt will deteriorate the surfaces of your bike.

What: Thoroughly wash the bike, removing all traces of dirt, insects and road tar. Make sure the bike is completely dry, especially in the nooks and crannies. Using a leaf blower or specialist drier such as a Master Blaster will make drying much quicker. Polish all chrome and aluminium.

Treat leather or vinyl saddlebags, seats and straps with appropriate products. Wax all paint surfaces as this will protect against moisture. If you are concerned about salt and grit on the winter roads, there are ways to keep your bike protected when you do ride it. Use a corrosion protection spray such as S100 on all metal surfaces, such as the frame and engine (but not the brakes). This will give a protective coating against moisture and will help prevent rust.



2. FUEL

Why: To stop the inside of your fuel tank from rusting and to prevent old fuel from 'gumming' and becoming sticky.

What: The inside of your fuel tank will not rust if it is full, so top it up with fresh fuel. The correct level is when the fuel just touches the bottom of the filler neck. This gives enough room for the fuel to expand without overflowing the tank when temperature rises.

If you are going to leave your motorcycle for many months without riding it, before filling the tank, add a fuel stabiliser to prevent the fuel from degrading. Old fuel will start to evaporate and you lose some of the light components in the fuel. Those light components include highly important butane. As these components are lost, the fuel loses its volatility. Adding a fuel stabiliser will prevent this.

After adding the stabiliser and filling your tank, run the engine for a while to ensure the stabilised fuel runs into fuel pipes and injectors, or carburetors.



3. LUBRICATION

Why: Untreated metal surfaces will rust, especially when a motorcycle is not used during periods of a lot of moisture in the air (ie winter!)

What: Keeping moving parts lubricated during the winter will help keep moisture from building up and causing any rusting or binding.

Any part of your motorcycle that normally needs to be kept lubricated should be lubricated again just before storage. Recommended parts to check are: sprockets and the final drive chain, cables, controls such as levers, fork surfaces, and any other pivot points.



4. CHANGE THE ENGINE OIL

Why: By-products of combustion produce acids in the oil which will harm the inner metal surfaces of your engine.

What: If your oil is old and needs changing anyway, change it before you store the bike over winter. It's better for your lubrication system to have fresh oil sitting in it for several months than to have used, broken down oil in it, not to mention the last thing you'll want to do when the weather gets better is change the oil before you can go ride. Change the oil filter too.



5. TYRES (US:TIRES)

Why: If your tyres are left to sit in the same position all winter long, they could develop flat spots. Rubber cracks when frozen, so preventing the tyre from coming into contact with a very cold floor is good.

What: Check tyre pressures regularly over the winter months. The maximum pressure is shown on the tyre sidewall. If your motorcycle has a centre stand, then use it to at least get the rear tyre off the ground. It is far better to get the weight of the bike off the tyres if you can. If you don't have a centre stand, consider buying a scissor lift, which sits beneath the

The bike and lifts the whole bike off the ground. Alternatively, place plywood or carpet under the wheels. If your bike is sitting on its tyres over the winter for long periods, occasionally move the bike to prevent the same part of the tyres sitting on the ground.



6. BATTERY

Why: The battery in your motorcycle will discharge some, or all, of its power if simply left over the winter.

What: There are different schools of thought about what to do with your battery if your bike won't be used for a few months. The three options are disconnect it, pull the main fuse out from your bike, or leave it in the bike and



keep the charge topped up. This largely depends on whether your bike has an alarm or tracker in which case you will want to leave the battery in your bike. If you are going to

leave the battery connected in your bike over the winter, remove it temporarily, wipe the battery surfaces down and wire brush the terminals to clean them. Give the terminals and bolts a light coating of grease to prevent corrosion.

The best and most convenient way to care for your battery is to hook a battery tender to it. A battery tender will switch from 'charge' to 'maintain', meaning it will charge when needed and shut itself off when fully charged, so you don't have to worry about overcharging it. You just plug it in and leave it alone. Battery tenders come with a wire pigtail, which will connect directly to the battery terminals, and the connector can then be accessed without having to remove the seat.

If you want to remove the battery and store it for the winter, you should wipe the surfaces down and wire brush the terminals to clean them. Top up the cells if necessary, although many modern batteries are the sealed type that don't require topping up. Store the battery off the ground (to prevent freezing) and connect the battery to a trickle charger for at least eight hours a month, or use a battery tender (see above) permanently connected over the winter.

7. EXHAUST PIPES

Why: Mice and other rodents can set up home in them.

What: Exhausts pipes are known to rust when they are not used. Spray a light oil (such as WD40) into the pipe ends and drain holes. Place a brightly coloured plastic bag over the ends of the pipes and secure with an elastic band. This helps prevent moisture and creatures from getting inside the exhaust.



8. CHECK THE BIKES FLUIDS

Why: If your motorcycle is water-cooled, you need to add anti-freeze to stop the water from freezing and damaging the engine. Also, hydraulic brake and clutch fluids are 'hygroscopic' meaning they will absorb moisture. Fluids contaminated with water can cause corrosion inside the systems.

What: What you do here depends greatly on how well you are able to self-maintain your motorcycle, along with how well it has been maintained during the year. My motorcycle is regularly serviced, so I don't need to do anything special here before its winter storage. If you'll be storing your motorcycle somewhere that is likely to go below freezing, make sure you have adequate levels of anti-



freeze in your coolant system. This is very important, for if you use just plain water in your system you could severely damage your engine.

If the brake or clutch fluids haven't been changed for a couple of years, now is a good time to change them, or have a dealership / mechanic do it for you.

9. LOCK IT

WHY: Because there are nasty people out there who will steal your pride and joy.

WHAT: This depends where you are storing the bike. The best solution is to chain the bike to something immovable, such as a street light or a ground anchor in your garage. Never loop the chain only through the front wheel, as the wheel is easy to remove. If you can, when



locked, keep the chain off the ground as it is easier to cut or break if left resting on the ground.

If you have two motorcycles, chain them together, as it is very difficult to lift two motorcycles at the same time. Always set the motorcycle alarm.

Consider buying a burglar alarm for your garage.

10. COVER IT

Why: Because you want to keep dust, dirt, bird droppings and other stuff off your bike.

What: What you cover your motorcycle with depends on where you will store it. Ideally, you will store the machine in a garage or shed, away from windows, as direct sunlight will fade your paintwork over time.

Cover the bike with something that breathes, in order to prevent a moisture build up under the cover. Never use plastic. You can buy a purpose made bike cover or use something



like an old bed sheet. Obviously a purpose made cover that fits your motorcycle well is preferred. If are having to store your motorcycle outside, you must use a purpose-designed bike cover. Make sure you get a cover with tie-downs to prevent it from

blowing loose in wind.

One other consideration. If you keep your motorcycle in a garage, make sure it is well ventilated and consider heating it with a frost protector. A garage that is warm during the day and below freezing at night could generate condensation, which is really bad news. A frost protector heater that comes on only when the temperature is very low might help.

Finally, if you really are going to put your bike away for winter and not use it, you might want to get it professionally cleaned and protected. In the south of England, there are a few specialists that provide this service. www.cleanbikeclinic.com are worth a call.