



Do It Yourself Service Part 2 by Rick Kallmayer

Every rider needs to be able to check out his or her bike before setting off on a ride to ensure that the bike does not fail to function in some way during the ride. Before you do anything, get out your owners and service booklets and read them over carefully so you know where everything is on your bike and what quantities and types of fluids it needs.

The first categories of things to check are fluids. Your bike cannot live without an adequate supply of several vital fluids. Get in the habit of checking your fuel level before you start the bike. Don't laugh! It is no joke to run out of gas several miles from a gas station. You really learn a lot about basic physics and just how heavy your bike is when you have to push it a couple of miles. (Don't ask me how I know ...) On most of the newer models, you can just switch on the ignition and read the fuel gauge, on others, take the time to open the filler cap and take a look at the fuel level in the tank.

Next, check the engine oil level. Always check oil level before starting the engine. Do this with the bike upright and level, preferably parked on the center stand on level pavement. On the newer bikes, all you have to do is look at the sight glass on the side of the crankcase to see the oil level. Some oilhead twins retain enough oil in the heads if the bike is parked on the center stand immediately after the engine stops to fool you by showing less than the total amount of oil in the sight glass. These models need to be parked on the side stand for five minutes to allow the heads to drain, and then re-parked on the center stand to ensure that the oil level in the crankcase shows the true level. It is important not to overfill the crankcase. The proper oil level is shown on the sight glass when the oil is between the center dot and the top of the outside red ring painted on the glass. If you need to add oil, do so slowly, a couple of ounces at a time, checking the sight glass a minute after each addition. On older airhead twins, unscrew the dipstick, wipe it off, reinsert the stick without screwing it in, then pull out the stick and read the oil level. Most airhead crankcases are full of oil when the oil is just below the full line on the dipstick.

If your bike is liquid cooled find the coolant overflow tank cleverly hidden away somewhere on your bike and check the level. If it is a BMW, there will be a way to see the level without peeling off body work. If you need to add coolant, use a 50/50 mix of antifreeze designed for aluminum engines and distilled water. If you don't have any antifreeze, you can use plain distilled water, but you will be diluting the coolant protection level slightly.

Check the level of fluid in the brake reservoirs. The reservoirs have either translucent plastic walls or have sight windows which show the fluid level. Ensure that you have the handle bars in the correct position before checking front brake and clutch reservoirs, (see your manual). The reservoir for the rear brake will also be cleverly hidden.

Next, check the air pressure in both tires and adjust for the load and speeds of your intended ride. Your owner's manual has suggested inflation values, or you can experiment and find the perfect pressure for your bike, the load, and your riding style by checking cold and hot pressures. You want an eight percent increase in pressure between cold and hot checks. While you are down there, rotate each tire and look over the tread and sidewalls for defects. If you find a nail or a deep cut anywhere on the tire, do not ride the bike! Repair or replace the tire! It's your life you're gambling with to ride on a damaged tire.

OK, next, make sure the suspension is properly adjusted for the load you will have on the bike. The most important is the rear suspension spring preload, because that end carries most of the weight when you ride the bike. If you will be carrying a passenger, it should be set near the "heavy load" end of the adjustment range.

Now it is time to turn on the ignition and check your lights all the way around, including your turn signals and brake lights. If a light does not work, the most likely culprit is a bad bulb. Turn signals and tail lights are simple to replace on all models. The headlamps can be a little harder to access, and the fog lamps on R1150 RT models are really tough to get at. You will find instructions in your owner's manual for replacing the bulbs on your model, along with the exact bulbs to use.

Finally, give the bike a good overall look-see. You are looking for things out of place or visible fluids on the outside of the bike, cracks in metal parts, and loose or missing fasteners. If you note anything amiss that you cannot fix, take the bike to your dealer and have them check it out and fix it for you.

At first, doing all these checks will take a little while. If you make a habit of it, however, you will find that you can check everything in less than ten minutes. Now, before you finally get to go on your ride, be sure you are wearing protective riding gear that covers you from head to foot!