BMMC RIDER TRAINING

"Bring Me Your Tire[d] Your Poor…"

August's safety meeting was opened up to cover riding topics that were of interest and concern to the membership. While several areas were covered the main topic kept returning to tires and tire safety stemming from a couple of recent BMMC incidents. Chris enlightened us all in several areas regarding what should be done in various circumstances to minimize a tire problem/incident and, hopefully, prevent it from growing into an accident.

As a starting point we'd like to refresh your memories on tire care basics.

I. Motorcycle Tire Tips…an ounce of prevention:

How are your tires now? Have looked recently? If not, then you're probably doing damage to your tires every time you ride by running them under inflated. Take ten minutes and check your tires from time to time. At a minimum, this will save you money from premature tire wear, and it just might prevent an unpleasant and unexpected slide down the road.

There are three simple things to check: pressure, tread wear, and tire damage. You'll need a good quality air gauge, a flashlight or other light source, and something to measure tread depth (a penny will work for this, as explained later). You'll also need the ability to roll your bike to rotate the tires so you can see all around them.

Begin by checking your tire pressure. This should be done before you ride since the pressure should be measured when the tire is cold. Your owner's manual will provide a recommended pressure for both front and rear. There will probably be a separate set of pressures if you are riding two-up. Pressures outside the manufacturer's recommendations can cause vibration, excessive wear, handling and turning problems, and damage to your tires. If you find that you frequently have to add air to keep the correct pressure, it is likely that you have some sort of damage that needs repair or replacement of your tire.

Next check for tread wear. Most wear on a motorcycle tire will occur in the middle of the tread, so that's where you want to check the amount of tread remaining. There are a couple of easy ways you can do this. The first is to look for the "wear bars" in the groove of the tire. These are small bars of rubber in the groove of the tire. If they are getting close to showing wear you are due for a tire change. Another way is to use the penny method. Just put your thumb on Abe's face and stick the coin head down into the tire's tread. If you can see all of his head above the tread; you got it - you're overdue for a new tire.

Once you've determined you have sufficient tread remaining, have a look at the wear patterns. Ideally you should see a fairly even amount of wear across the footprint of the tire. If the wear appears excessive in the middle of the tire, your tire pressure is probably too high (or you're overloading your bike). Likewise, if the wear is excessive towards the outer edges you're either running too low a tire pressure, or you're taking way too many

corners for normal riding. Also look for signs of uneven wear. This can appear as a cupping in the tread, a raised edge of the tread, or any other evidence of abnormal contact with the road bed.

Finally, check for tire damage. Look for nails or other objects stuck in the tread that would indicate a puncture. Look for cuts and splits in the rubber over all the tire. Bulges and any evidence of a broken belt under the tread or the tread separating from the fabric are all cause for immediate tire replacement. Also check the sidewalls for cracks. Cleaning solutions, oil and gasoline, ozone, and sunlight can all damage the rubber and cause a failure. Remember, time is a culprit in shortening tire life, too. That three year old tire with only 2000 miles on it may be due for a change.

If you find anything questionable when doing your inspection, stop by the shop and have a mechanic take a look. With tires, "better safe than sorry" is the only way to go. You only have two of them and they are all that is between you and the road.

II. Tire Blow-Outs…what to do?

We're not talking about a tire that slowly goes flat with that "hey, something doesn't feel right" feeling as the bike settles down onto the flat tire, we're talking about the "HOLY CRAP, WHAT WAS THAT!, I hope I can keep this thing upright" feeling of an instantaneous full to zero psi experience at highway speeds. Should you be unfortunate enough to experience one here are a couple of tips to safely get you to the side of the road.

If it's the rear tire, tighten your grip on the hand grips trying to "track" the bike as straight as you can, come off the throttle as much as possible, gently apply the front brake and come to a stop (the rear of the bike will fishtail back and forth, but the bike should go straight and stay up).

If it's the front tire (the worst case of the two), tighten your grip on the hand grips, again trying to "track" the bike as straight as you can, come off the throttle as much as possible, shift your weight backwards and gently apply the rear brake and come to a stop (assuming you don't fall down, which is a distinct possibility). Obviously, don't make any attempts to turn sharply, and try not to turn at all until most of your speed is bled away. Just edge to the side of the road.

In both instances, should a tire blow while in a turn, attempt to straighten up as soon as possible, try to keep from shifting your (and your passenger's) weight from side to side (which only exacerbates the bike's unsteadiness), and drift to the side. Do not leave the road surface until you're almost stopped.

III. Flat Tire…can you safely fix a flat tire while you're on the road?

There are a couple of schools of thought here. Obviously, the most desirable (read that as safest) fix is to have the tire changed to new by a professional, and be on your way. However, that's not always practical, or possible. What is most common, as a temporary fix, is to plug the tire, pump it up, and ride it to the next tire dealer for replacement. Not all

flats can be fixed by plugging them. The culprit hole must be through the tread (no sidewall hole, rip or tear should ever be plugged due to several factors, the most obvious being the constant sidewall flexing). A couple of cautions should be noted here, however, when dealing with plugs. First, nobody can safely put more than one tire plug within the same tire quadrant. And secondly, nobody can put more than two plugs into a tire.

One of the best plug kits on the market can be found locally or on line (http://www.cabelas.com/prod-1/0005999520414a.shtml).

Tubed tires present a special challenge to "on the road" fixes. Without actually taking off the tire and getting to the tube to patch it you're left with very few options. We're sure that you're familiar with "fix-a-flat" type tire injection products where you affix the connector hose to your valve stem and inject the contents into your tire/tube. These work well for some problems but can't fix tears or rips in tubing. Of course, this is, at best, a very temporary fix, and they all carry the "Use at your own risk" caveat.

So, you've "fixed" your flat tire, but it's still flat. If you don't have some means to re-inflate the tire you're still stuck on the side of the road. There are several cycle pumps on the market that are designed to be carried on the motorcycle. One of the best is CyclePump (http://www.bestrestproducts.com/celestia/products/cyclepump/).

If you find that you simply don't have room on your bike for tire plugs, Slime, or an air pump, our best advice is to follow someone on a Harley Ultra or Honda Goldwing. Rumor has it they carry everything. ;-)

IV. Tar Snakes…man-made gotchas:

A Tar Snake results from when the DOT uses tar to fill cracks in the roadway surface. They are supposed to just fill the crack, but most of the time they lay the tar in a manner that covers up to 3-inches on each side, making a 2 to 6 inch slick surface.

The problem with this is that during the summer these "snakes" create momentary loss of traction. That loss of traction increases the speed of the tire in the direction that it was headed and at the other side when the tire regains traction it, completely unsettles the bike. If one catches you by surprise, the "pucker factor" can easily reach 10 out of a possible 10. What to do when (not if) you encounter them?

1. Be aware they are present, and present a problem.
2. Try and avoid them altogether by varying your tire tracking.
3. Keep your speed to a point where you have enough margin for error to deal with the unpredictable surface.
4. If they are unavoidable, cross as close to perpendicular as you can, resulting in minimizing your exposure.

Hope this helps. Enjoy the ride.