



Store your bike right this winter

For many motorcyclists, the arrival of winter means nothing more than layering-up before a ride. But ice, snow and cold weather often force those who live in the northern reaches to park their bikes until spring.

Unfortunately, many riders discover later that their trusted mounts weren't too happy about being abandoned over the winter months. Dead batteries, gummed-up carbs, and internal corrosion can all plague improperly stored bikes.

If you know you're not going to ride your motorcycle for more than a month, you can help it get through the frigid weather by taking a few precautionary steps.

If at all possible, store the bike inside a garage. It's amazing how much damage can be done by exposure to the elements, even in a few months.

But before you put it away, take a little time to check the following:

Gas: Top off the tank and add the recommended amount of a fuel stabilizer such as Sta-Bil. This additive will keep your gas from breaking down and leaving a gunky brown "varnish" on your carb's parts. Then start the engine and run it for several minutes to make sure you get the treated gas into the carbs.

Oil: Oil starts out golden and clean, and winds up black and dirty. This is bad. The contaminants in the oil can be corrosive, and you don't want your engine parts sitting in a corrosive bath all winter. So do yourself a favor and change your oil just before the bike goes into storage.

Coolant: Since most motorcycles don't get a lot of use in sub-freezing temperatures, many riders overlook the importance of checking their coolant for protection against winter freeze-up. Use one of those floating-ball testers to make sure your coolant will resist freezing in the temperatures you experience. If you need to add any, make sure you use the type of coolant recommended by your manufacturer.

Battery: Some modern motorcycles can put a slight drain on a battery to run a clock, maintain radio presets or operate an alarm system. If you're in this situation, make sure you have a charger system in place to keep your battery alive. Otherwise, at least make sure it starts the winter with a full charge, and give it a recharge every month or so.

Other stuff: Purists will tell you to store your bike with the tires off the ground. This is a great idea, if you can arrange it. If not, inflate both tires properly, and every few weeks rotate the bike to avoid flat spots on the tires. Also, a good coating of wax will help preserve your paint and chrome, and a breathable cloth cover can keep off dirt, dust and other garage effluvia.

Do it right, and all you'll have to do come spring is turn the key, press the starter button and start racking up the miles again.