

Spring Prep

A dark day for nesting critters

AS I WRITE THIS, SNOW IS STILL ON THE GROUND here in Connecticut. A thick sheet of ice covers the driveway in front of my garage. But the urge to ride surpasses anything Mother Nature may dish out, so I'm preparing my bike for that glorious day when temperatures reach double digits and the ice has melted.

Spring motorcycle prep is a great way to evaluate your machine each year before that first ride of the season. Make sure everything is in working order and hopefully get your bike ready with little cost and minimal effort.

Now, if you've winterized your bike by adding stabilizer to the fuel, removed or hooked your battery up to a tender, changed the oil, gave the bike a good wash, and kept it covered all winter, you'll be on the road in no time. But not all of us are as strict when it comes to bike hibernation. If your idea of winterizing involves parking the bike and turning it off, well, a little more effort may be needed.

This may look staged, but it's not. A chipmunk family was hunkered down for the winter in my air cleaner with their harvest of acorns.

Tires

I like to start from the ground up, first with a tire inspection. Look for any cracking and make sure the tread isn't worn. Find any flat spots or uneven wear. Tires will form



New set of rubber getting scrubbed in. The manufacture date, 4517 (arrow) lets me know these tires were made the 45th day of 2117.

a flat spot in the center from long, straight-up runs on highways. Also check the date on your tire. This can usually be found on the sidewall after the DOT stamp. My tires, bought and installed just before the end of last season, are fairly new; the manufacture date stamp says 4517, meaning the 45th day of 2017. Also, check the tire pressure. Your owners manual will have an optimal psi listed. It's a good idea to do this pressure check before every ride, as I'm sure you do.

Brakes

Work your inspection up to the brakes. Check the pads to see how much meat is left. You should be able to do this without removing the caliper. Next, check for uneven wear and any warping of the rotor, plus any rust that may



Its easy to see, even without removing the caliper, there's plenty of meat left on these pads. They don't need to be replaced just yet.



Give your brake fluid, front and rear, a level check and top off if needed. Refer to your owners manual for fluid specs.

have formed from moisture over the winter. The rust can easily be removed using water and fine-grit sandpaper. Go easy when doing this, you're just removing the rust, not resurfacing the rotor. Also check the brake fluid front and back and top off if needed. Always refer to your owners manual to find out exactly what brake fluid your bike manufacturer recommends.

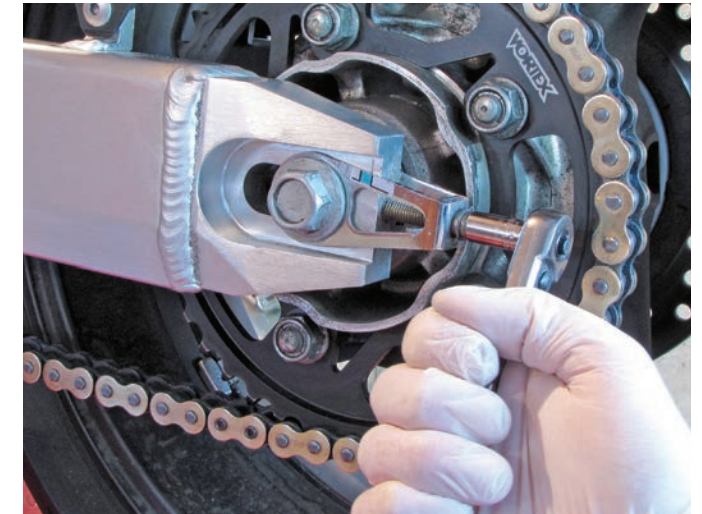


After cleaning your chain, reapply a quality lube like Spectro Z clean chain lube. O- and X-ring chains don't require as much lube as a standard chain, so if running modern links, wipe off any excess with a rag.

Drive Chain

There are a few key checkpoints with the drive chain. The first thing to check, of course, is wear. Are the links sloppy, allowing movement side to side and front to back? Chains do stretch—well, sort of. Gaps form between the links, lengthening the chain and causing unwanted horizontal and lateral movement. If you've maxed your bike's chain adjuster and the chain exhibits these issues, it's time for a replacement. Also check the front and rear sprocket for excessive wear. If the teeth start to resemble shark fins or come to a fine point, it's time to replace them as well. I run steel sprockets

and usually replace them and the chain as a set. If the chain and sprockets are in good shape, it's time to clean off the old grease. I use a degreaser from Spectro Oils that's fast drying and O-ring safe. Depending on the kind of chain you have—standard, O-ring, X-ring, etc.—you'll need to find a cleaner that removes the grime without damaging the chain. Simple kerosene works wonders at removing grease, but there are tons of available options. Finally, adjust the chain, somewhere between 1"-1.5" of slack, but again refer to your owners manual when making this adjustment.



Not too loose, but not too tight. A well-adjusted, clean, and maintained chain will make a huge impact on your bike's performance.

Air Cleaner

There are countless air cleaner sizes and shapes, but the function always remains the same: provide clean air to the motor. If a small amount of dirt or dust has built up in the fins, use an air compressor to remove the debris. If it's a substantial amount or you see any holes in the filter, it's time to replace. Also, air cleaners are a notorious go-to spot for nesting critters, so always check and evict any unwanted squatters immediately. Check for any damage they may have caused.



Critters love to find their way into air cleaners or any inviting areas that may provide shelter. Check for nesting and evict these unwanted guests as often as possible.



Engine Oil and Coolant

Oil is the life-blood of your ride. If you didn't change it when putting the bike into hibernation, now is the time. I usually change my oil before every season along with the oil filter.

Check to see if your oil fill levels are met and if the oil looks clean and fresh.

But if it looks clean and the fill levels are met, you may want to hold off until later in the season. If you do change the oil, let it drain for a while. The old oil is cold and thick, which will take longer than usual to drain. Check your machine's manual for oil and filter specs and purchase a quality brand. They'll cost a little more but keep the heart of your bike running smoothly and strongly. Also, for those of you with water-cooled bikes, check your coolant level and top off if needed. My filler and overflow tank are located under the seat and have clear fill-level markings.

Electronics

If you're one of the conscientious ones who removed the battery and hooked it up to a trickle charger in a warm, climate-controlled room, you'll only need to reinstall the battery. If you simply turned the bike off and walked away, you may have to hook it up to a charger for a while, maybe even need a jumpstart, or replace the battery. A dead battery is common if left in the cold without a trickle charger for a few

Following these simple steps, my Honda 919 (Hornet) has been cleaned and prepped for another riding season.



Tighten your battery terminals often, not just once a season. Loose terminals are a common issue, but a simple fix on both new and old bikes.

months. Been there, done that. After reinstalling or using a voltage meter to assure you have a strong charge, make sure your terminal connections are tight. Even brand-new bikes loose power or shut down seemingly out of nowhere due to loose terminal connections. It's also a good practice to check these connections often throughout the season. Now that power is plentiful, check the headlight, taillight, brake light, and turn signals.

Cleaning, Fuel & Start up

Before start up, while the bike's still cold, wash and detail to your heart's content. This also provides a great way to do a final once-over, finding any loose connections or other critter condos. This is a good time to check your fuel. Hopefully you've conditioned the fuel with an additive before putting it to bed for the winter. If not, add it now. Some additives, like Spectro's Ethanol Fuel Conditioner, suggest using this product with every fill-up. After completing the mechanical checklist, washing the bike, and conditioning your fuel, it's time for the season's first start. Keep your idle low at first, let the engine components get a fresh coat of oil before increasing rpm. While the bike warms up, grab a can of silicone spray and give a shot to all hinged components, such as the control levers, footpegs, rear brake lever, and gear shifter.

Now you're ready for another season on the road. Unless, of course, you live in a warm climate year-round, in which case you've read this story and now have a sinking feeling that a generation of chipmunks may live within your beloved scoots' breather. Either way, enjoy the ride! **GB**

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