



Ready PREPARING YOUR BIKE FOR AN EXTENDED TRIP For The Road?

BY BOB FEATHER

PLANNING AHEAD IS NOT MY STRONG SUIT. I'll often wait until the day before a week-long ride to throw a few things in my saddlebags, and then just hit the road. While this spontaneous approach appeals to my sense of free will and adventure, it doesn't do much to ensure that my bike is ready for the trip. And without a well-maintained machine under me, that free-spirited ride can quickly become an ordeal.

In the May issue, I told you about my cross-country trek on our long-term '03 Kawasaki Vulcan 1600 test bike. I was returning the bike to Kawasaki headquarters in Irvine, California — nearly 3,000 miles as the crow flies, though I could have easily racked up 4,500 by wandering a bit.

Until then, we'd been doing the basic maintenance ourselves, and our Vulcan hadn't yet seen the likes of a service department. Needless to say, it required some care before I embarked on my journey. Preventive maintenance was particularly important, since I'd be traveling through some very remote parts of the country.

A few weeks before my trip, I brought the

Vulcan to New Haven Power Sports in Connecticut. The service manager, Adam Tremlett, ran down a list of things that would need attention for a bike with over 6,000 miles on it.

The amount of work needed, including the number of parts that have to be replaced, depends on the condition of the bike and the length of the trip. For example, if your tires and brake pads have about 2,000 miles or fewer of service life left in them, you'd normally keep them on the bike until they were used up. In my case, since I'd be exceeding the useful life of these parts, we decided to replace them. (The last thing I wanted to do on my trip was to waste a day trying to find a dealer who stocked the right brake pads or tires.)

To help you prepare for your next big adventure, here's an overview of the steps Adam took to get the Vulcan ready for my cross-country ride. While many of you will be able to do much of this work yourselves, you can also bring it to your local dealer like I did, and have an experienced technician do the servicing.

SOURCES

NEW HAVEN POWER SPORTS
143 Whalley Ave., Dept. RB
New Haven, CT 06511
203/562-3900
www.nhpowersports.com

STAMFORD MOTORSPORTS
170 Selleck St., Dept. RB
Stamford, CT 06902
203/323-3141
www.stamfordmotorsports.com

Pre-Ride Checklist

- Check your owner's manual for service interval charts and special tips. Nobody knows your bike better than the people who manufactured it.
- Unless you very recently had your bike serviced, change the oil and filter. It's always better to set out on a 2,000-plus-mile trip with fresh oil.
- When was your last valve adjustment? Don't remember? You don't want to seek out this major service when you're far from home. And going over the recommended adjustment interval may result in poor engine performance and, in a worst-case scenario, engine damage.
- Check the wear indicators on the tires to figure out how much service life is left in them. Look for cupping in the tread block (usually caused by underinflation) and any damage such as cuts, cracks, or gouges.
- If you have a chain or belt, check the overall condition and adjust, lube, or replace it if necessary. Change the final-drive fluid if it's a shaft-driven bike.
- Test the coolant/anti-freeze for effectiveness. There are special tools designed for this purpose, conveniently called anti-freeze testers. Many are available in auto parts stores.
- Inspect the throttle and brake cables for wear, keeping an eye out for loose strands, and replace if necessary. Also check that the cables have free movement; if not, lube them thoroughly.
- Change the brake fluid and hydraulic clutch fluid if necessary. The fluid should be clear and at the proper level, as indicated on the reservoir.
- Check the brake pads and rotors. The pads should have enough meat on them to go the distance, while the rotors need to be checked for thickness and galling. Your bike's service manual will give you the specs to determine the service life left in these components.
- Check the battery electrolyte levels, if applicable. Also, check the battery terminals for dirt or corrosion and clean them if necessary.
- Make sure all the lighting equipment works. This should be part of your pre-ride walk-around everyday, but it's especially important before a long trip.
- Check all major fasteners – hardware holding the axles, steering stem, swingarm, footpegs/boards, handlebars, and fenders in place. They should all be tightened to factory spec as listed in the service manual.
- Adjust the rear suspension to accommodate any extra weight you'll be carrying, such as a passenger or luggage. Check your owner's manual for recommended specs.
- Before you set out, try doing a test ride around your neighborhood with all your gear loaded on the bike. This way, you can make adjustments and move the load around to find the safest and most comfortable way to pack.
- Finally, remember that no matter how careful you are and how well you plan, you may still have mechanical problems. So be sure to bring along a quality tool kit. Since factory-provided kits are sometimes a joke, you may want to upgrade with a top-notch motorcycle package (see this month's Product Spotlight on page 92).

You also might want to compile a list of dealerships along your route that cover your make and model. Many motorcycle manufacturers offer listings of their national network of service centers. It's a good idea to tuck one of these in with your map, just in case your roadside problem turns out to be a bit more than you can handle. **RB**

