



Riding To Gillette

I received an e-mail a while back from a rider who was contemplating riding to the BMW MOA Rally in Gillette next month. He said he had a 1990s BMW, something or other—the model wasn't really important and I've forgotten it, but his question was—did I think he could make it all the way to Gillette and back without mechanical problems. As I recall, he lived somewhere in the upper Midwest, about 1,200 miles from the rally site.

I responded to his e-mail with a short list of things he should do or check before the trip. His question did get me to thinking about maintenance from a different perspective. In the past, most of my riding and much of Voni's has been on road trips, whether across the country or only across several states. So having the bikes ready for a trip on a moment's notice has just become second nature to me. Many riders use their bikes primarily to commute, for short weekend rides, or for trips to nearby rallies. For many riders, a trip halfway across the country is a long trip and doesn't fit neatly into their normal motorcycle maintenance routine. For owners who use their bikes primarily for local riding, maintenance needs come up more routinely, and can be planned for locally as it arises.

Getting your bike ready for a road trip means two things: first, making sure that routine things don't come due at inopportune times during the trip; and second, doing what you can to ensure that repairs won't be needed during the trip.

Routine Maintenance

Your BMW motorcycle has a routine maintenance schedule: a minor service and a major service alternating every 5,000 or every 6,000 miles, typically. Some items are specified to be done once every year regardless of mileage, and on some models there are items to do once

every two years.

Consider the length of your trip. Add some miles because trips—mine at least—always wind up being more miles than anticipated. If a scheduled maintenance interval will come due during the trip you need to decide how to handle it. You can do the maintenance or have the maintenance done early. You can defer some things until you get back if the excess miles beyond the maintenance schedule are not too many. I usually start a long trip of several thousand miles with a fresh service on the bike, even if I have to do it early. Then, if I am riding 7,000 miles instead of 6,000 or fewer miles on that trip, I usually wait until I get back home for the next service. Some things, however, should not be deferred. Oil changes, Airhead valve adjustments, and tire replacements come to mind.

Sometimes I change oil at the scheduled interval while on a trip. Most fast oil change places will lend you an oil pan and take the oil if you buy your oil from them. Many auto parts stores will accept used oil to recycle. So do many Wal-Mart stores. Buy a flimsy aluminum turkey roasting pan for less than \$2. Drain your oil. Refill the engine. Pour the old oil in the recycling barrel. Throw away the used turkey pan.

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Check the tread on your tires. How many miles do you usually get on a set? How many miles are on the tires on the bike? How long is the trip? Will the tires last the entire trip? If not, I usually mount new tires before the trip. Then I sometimes remount the old tires to finish wearing them out the next time I need tires. Or, you can prearrange to get tires from a dealer or tire shop while on the road. If you mount your own tires, having new ones installed while on a trip will seem very expensive. If your valve stems are over one year old, replace them.

If you are going to the BMW MOA Rally, you might expect to get a good deal on tires at the rally. Sometimes this works. Sometimes it doesn't. That depends on which vendors are at the rally and whether or not they are equipped to mount tires. They may or may not have the brand, model, and size you need. I recommend you have enough rubber on your bike to finish the trip and get back home before you start the trip. I personally don't like interrupting a good trip for maintenance if I can avoid it.

Repairs

Nothing will guarantee that something unexpected won't break while on a trip. However, starting a trip without taking care of problems will almost guarantee that something will break. Riders who usually use their bike to commute short distances, or for mostly local rides, can often put a repair off until later, knowing that if something does go wrong they will still be close to home. That is not so for long trips across several states or across the country. If you know something is going wrong, fix it or get it fixed before you leave home.

My list of things to check before a trip includes:

Leaks: BMW motorcycles are not