

# POWER CHECK

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This month we're kicking off a new regular spot for every motorcyclist, young and old. Whether you're an old hand or new to the game of two-wheels, you'll find our 'Motorcycling 101' section interesting and informative. We're starting off the series as you should start every ride, by checking over your bike.

So you've checked with the other half, you've checked the map and even checked the weather but have you checked your bike? Many things can go unnoticed and left that way can have you calling the recovery service or pushing it home.

Let's look at daily checks. In the bike world we love acronyms, so we'll use P.O.W.E.R. - easy to remember.

## P = PETROL

Are you filling up with the correct grade of fuel? Your owner's manual or your local dealer will be able to tell you which grade is right for your bike. Most modern machines have been designed to run on a minimum of 95 and some specifically state 98.

Personally, I always use the highest grade in my bike. I've found that with the 98 I get better range by almost 40km per tank compared to 95.

Have a quick look around the fuel tap and on top of the engine, can you see any gold watermarks? This is the first sign of a fuel leak. Two-stroke riders, make sure you've got enough two-stroke oil in the bike too!



## O = OIL

Checking the lifeblood of your bike is vital. You wouldn't believe the amount of bikes that don't have even the minimum recommended amount in them.

If your bike is fitted with a sight glass, you'll notice two marks. Make sure you have the bike in a vertical position and on level ground, NOT on the side-stand, as this will give a false reading. Take a peek and check the level falls between the marks, top up if needed. If your machine is fitted with a dipstick, having your bike upright on level ground is just as important. Unscrew the dipstick and wipe clean with a clean rag/jeans/dog. Put the dipstick in and either screw it home or not (varies from bike to bike) according to your bike's manual.



## W = WATER

Check your coolant level. If your bike is low on coolant then you run the risk of overheating and cooking the motor. Coolant header tanks are hidden really well on most bikes and seeing the level in an opaque bottle is sometimes difficult. Once you've located the little bugger, have a look at the side and you should see high and low marks. Shine a bright torch in the top and this can help show a level through the side, or use a cable tie as a dipstick then measure it against the marks on the side.

Make sure that you get the Antifreeze quantity checked at least once a year, especially important if during the summer you have topped up a few times, meaning come winter you are down on the antifreeze ratio.



## E = ELECTRICS

Checking the function of the electrical systems is a quick and easy operation. Firstly, turn the key on and see if the dash does its thing, i.e. neutral light and oil pressure light.

Check your lights. You wouldn't believe the amount of bikes I see riding around with no taillight. Some bikes have twin bulbs in the taillight in case one bulb blows. Remember, you don't have fog lights on bikes so if you're in the fog with a blown taillight, that truck just won't see you! Checking that your brake lights work is equally important and equally as easy.

Don't forget to flick the headlight from low to high beam for a quick test. Blip the horn and check the indicators.

It's a good idea to carry a spare taillight and headlight bulb with you if you are travelling around a lot, especially at night. A couple of spare fuses are a wise idea too as some failures are just that...a blown fuse.

## R = RUBBER

Checking the wheels is a biggy, things you need to look at are tyres, rim or spokes and pressures.

NZ law states that the tyre must have a minimum of 1.5mm of tread across the width, not just on the edges. Tyre pressures need checking regularly, a 5psi drop will have the bike handling like a lump of lard. Check the spec for your bike, often a sticker on the swingarm has recommended pressures.

Check the rims for dents that could cause your tyre to deflate or cause a high speed wobble. If your bike is fitted with spoked wheels, run a screwdriver over the spokes and listen for the tune, a dull thud means a loose spoke. Give it a tweak with a spoke spanner or if you have more than one, take it to the shop.



## WEEKLY CHECKS

All of the above plus...



## CHAIN TENSION & LUBRICATION

On most bikes there is a sticker on the swingarm or under the seat with the correct measurements on it, as a general rule 25-35mm of free-play is about right. The free-play should be checked halfway between the front and rear sprockets. If the chain is too loose, gear changes will become sloppy and you run the risk of the chain coming off. If it's too tight, damage to the gearbox is easily caused due to the loading on the output shaft bearing and could also cause a chain to snap and exit through the crankcases!

As for lube, a basic rule of thumb is when the centre rollers turn from grey to silver then it's time to lube to avoid stiff-chain-itis. Make sure the lube you use is safe for O-ring chains that are fitted to most modern machines.



## BRAKES

Check the fluid level in the master cylinders. If it's getting low, before you top it up, check the pads. Most brake pad manufacturers say 2mm is the recommended minimum. If they are low then get them changed. Check for any abrasions, cuts, nicks in the brake hoses and for any signs of weeping from the caliper. If you have drum brakes, you may see a wear arrow on the arm attached to the drum. Pull in the lever and if the arrow runs off the mark it's time to change the shoes.

A regular check-over of your bike, including a clean, will reveal anything that may put a crimp on your riding enjoyment and you'll get more proficient at it the more often you do it.

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