

That's the Brakes

Recently at one of the North Texas Chapter Rally's, we were treated to a demonstration of the riding skills of a couple of the local Motor Cops. More impressive than their riding skills was their Stopping skills. Which got me to thinking, so here we go, "That's the Brakes". I can hear your sighs from here. My wife often tells me that it scares her when I start thinking! Anyway~~

After the demonstration one of the Officers gave us a little pep talk about the basics, and advanced techniques of stopping a 1000 lb. bike ASAP.

Though a lot of the info could not be transferred to the Gold Wing, a lot of it was something that I felt was good to know.

First and foremost is the fact that 70 % of the bikes stopping capabilities come from the front brake (and tire). But this can only be accomplished once the front end has been "loaded".

This "loading" is accomplished by light braking, which will transfer the weight to the front end, at that point you can apply more pressure to the front brake and get the full 70% out of it. I know that in an emergency that this may bring you concern about the time that you spend loading the tire when all you really are thinking about is stopping the bike. But this loading process will only take micro seconds to accomplish. Then you can get right into the serious stuff.

Fortunately for us, the Wing having an integrated brake system, can be loaded by using the Brake pedal which will also apply one of the front brakes. After which you will take hold of the brake lever on the handlebars and do the "Big Squeeze".

If you look at the front tire of the Wing you will see that it is fairly narrow, and of course round (as most good tires are). By loading the front suspension, you transfer the majority of the weight of the bike and cargo to the front tire, which will cause it to flatten out, thus giving you a larger braking surface and the added weight will increase the braking efficiency of the tire. In the flattening process of the front tire, the air pressure is critical. Check often, with a good quality air gauge.

There are always concerns of "Locking Up" the brakes on the bike. So what should we do if this should occur?

In the event of the front tire locking it is simple enough. The proper response is to release the (front) brake IMMEDIATELY, then reapply it properly. This should stop the skid, and get you back into the business of stopping the bike.

If it is the rear tire that is skidding, it becomes a little more serious. The proper reaction would be to insure that the bike is straight (in all planes) or at least as straight as possible, release the brake, and reapply it properly. The straight part is the most concerning in this situation. In the event that you release the brake before the bike has straightened up, there is a very good likelihood that things will get exciting very quickly. The two most serious things that can, and probably will happen is that the bike will either wobble like crazy until it gets itself straight or it throws you off, or it will high side on you. Either way, it is a terrible way to end a day.

Also important in the braking process is the mechanical elements of the process. You should check the following periodically:

- 1) Make sure that the bikes brake system is in good working condition. All levers and pedals work freely with no binding, or catching.

- 2) Ensure Fluid levels and Fluid Types are correct. (Type is VERY important)
- 3) Ensure that the brake pads are not beyond the wear limits, and are of the proper size and types. (yes there are different types)
- 4) Bleed the system at least every other year. (preferably annually)
- 5) Tires are in good condition and inflation is as recommended.

What is the number one thing that you can do to improve your braking skills? That is simple, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

It doesn't how great a ride you take, if you are not able to stop properly when you need to.

Until next time, Ride Safe and Have Fun

Dale