

3) Preparing to ride

Your chances of getting to your destination in one piece are influenced by the things you do before starting out. Good riders always begin a trip with:

- proper clothing
- a check of the motorcycle
- a test of the motorcycle's operation

Proper clothing

Proper clothing includes:

- an approved helmet
- eye and face protection
- protective clothing

An approved helmet

An approved motorcycle helmet can protect you from serious head injury. When a motorcycle falls, the rider's head often hits something hard, like pavement or a curb. A poor helmet will not provide adequate protection.

The human head is fragile and head injuries are often fatal or crippling. Saskatchewan law says that riders and passengers must wear approved helmets and have them properly fastened. A surprising number of motorcyclists killed in crashes were not wearing their helmets. Wear your helmet every time you ride.



A helmet must:

- meet Saskatchewan standards (see page 58)
- have a strong chin strap and fastener
- be free of defects such as cracks, loose padding, frayed straps or exposed metal

A full face helmet is recommended. It's a good idea to have a helmet that is a bright colour such as red, white, yellow or orange. It should also have reflective material on the back and the sides. However, check the manufacturer's specifications before using any adhesive on your helmet.

When selecting a helmet, make sure it fits properly. When you put it on, make sure it is snug and the strap is securely fastened. Studies of motorcycle crashes show that loose helmets are ineffective because they come off in collisions.

Eye and face protection

Your eyes need protection from wind, dust, rain, insects and small pebbles thrown up from vehicles ahead. If the motorcycle is not equipped with a windshield that deflects the airstream away from the driver's face, the operator must wear goggles, glasses or a face shield. A face shield is best; it protects your whole face.

Eyeglasses are not made to protect riders. They will shatter if hit by a flying object. If you wear glasses, also use a face shield.

To be effective, eye or face protection must:

- be free of scratches
- be made of material that doesn't shatter
- give a clear view to either side
- fasten securely so that it can't be blown off
- allow some air to pass through so it won't fog
- allow enough room for eyeglasses or sunglasses, if needed

Tinted goggles or face shields should not be worn at night.

Protective clothing

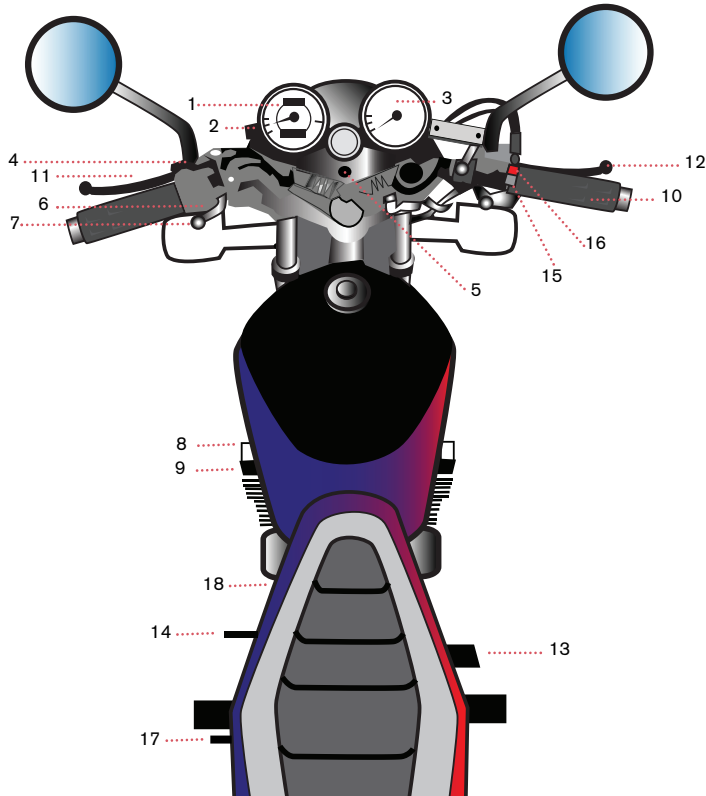
Clothing can help protect you against injury in case of a fall and is required for proper visibility – wear bright clothing and a vest.

Jacket and pants should cover your arms and legs completely. They should fit snugly enough so they don't flap and yet let you move freely. Wear a jacket even in warm weather. Leather is best. Nylon, vinyl and other sturdy synthetic materials offer some protection against wind and bugs. However, in a crash, synthetic materials will stick to the skin when skidding on grass or pavement.

In cold or wet weather, your clothes should keep you warm and dry, as well as protect you against injury. You can't properly control a motorcycle if you are numb. Riding for long periods in cold weather can cause severe chill and fatigue. A winter jacket should resist wind and fit snugly at the neck, wrists and waist. Rain suits should be of good quality, and be designed for riding. Those that are not designed for motorcyclists may balloon up or tear apart at highway speeds.

Boots or shoes should be sturdy and high enough to protect the ankles. Soles should be made of hard, durable material. Heels should be low so they don't catch on rough surfaces. Don't wear shoes with rings or loose laces that may catch on controls.

Gloves are also important. They give you a better hold on the handlegrips and controls. Gauntlet gloves are recommended because they provide protection not only to fingers and knuckles, but also to wrists in case of a collision.



Know your motorcycle controls

The beauty of motorcycle design is that all controls and other important devices are within quick reach of the rider's hands and feet. All drivers should know where the controls are and will be tested on their knowledge on the exam. For example, 18 key controls and devices are visible from the saddle of a typical motorcycle:

- 1) Speedometer and odometer
- 2) Tripmeter
- 3) Tachometer
- 4) Light switches
- 5) Ignition switch
- 6) Turn signal switch
- 7) Horn button
- 8) Fuel supply valve
- 9) Choke control
- 10) Throttle
- 11) Clutch lever
- 12) Front brake lever
- 13) Rear brake pedal
- 14) Gear selector pedal
- 15) Starter
- 16) Engine kill switch
- 17) Stand
- 18) Oil level window or dip stick

It is important to become familiar with the motorcycle's controls, whether you're learning to ride or you're an experienced rider driving an unfamiliar motorcycle. In fact, you should first check that the motorcycle isn't too heavy or too large for you to operate comfortably. When sitting on the seat, you should be able to place your feet flat on the ground.

The same controls may not be found in the same places on all motorcycles. Check your owner's manual for the exact location and precise way to operate all controls and devices. The first step in learning to ride a motorcycle is to learn the controls used to operate the machine. You must be able to reach any control without looking for it. With practice, you will be able to operate all controls by reflex. Automatic response is required before you can venture out into traffic.

Instruments

The following instruments are grouped in the centre of the handlebars on most motorcycles:

- The speedometer indicates riding speed in kilometres per hour or miles per hour.
- The odometer indicates total kilometres or miles accumulated on the motorcycle.
- The tripmeter indicates kilometres or miles accumulated since the last time it was set at zero.
- The tachometer indicates engine speed in revolutions per minute (RPM) and shows with a red line the maximum RPM the engine can safely attain.

- The high beam indicator light appears red or blue when the headlight is on high beam.
- The neutral indicator light appears green when the transmission is in neutral.
- The turn signal indicator light flashes amber when either left or right signals are operating.

Ignition switch

The ignition key goes into the ignition switch located near the centre of the handlebars or below one side of the fuel tank. ON and OFF positions are standard. Some switches also have LIGHTS and PARK positions. When the ignition is on, the engine can be started in either the ON or LIGHTS position. The LIGHTS position turns on the headlight and the taillight. The PARK position turns on only the taillight. The key can be removed only in the OFF or PARK position.

Light switches

If the ignition switch does not have a LIGHTS position, your motorcycle will have a separate switch with which to turn on the headlight and taillight. On all newer motorcycles, the headlight and taillight come on automatically when the ignition is switched ON and the engine is running.

A dimmer switch, generally located on the left handlebar and operated by the left thumb, can be used to set the headlight on low or high beam.

Turn signal switch

The switch to control turn signals is usually located on the left handlebar and is controlled with the left thumb. Move the switch right to 'R' to flash the right turn signal lights. Move it left to 'L' to flash the left signal lights.

Most motorcycle turn signals do not self-cancel after a turn, as an automobile's do. So, you must cancel the signal after each turn or lane change. Failure to cancel a turn signal is as dangerous as not signalling in the first place.

Brakelight

The brakelight is located on the rear fender and is activated when either the front or rear brake is applied.

Horn button

Sound the horn by pushing the horn button located on the left handlebar with your left thumb.

Fuel supply valve

The fuel supply valve is a petcock located below the fuel tank. It controls the flow of gasoline to the engine. When the motorcycle is not in use, the valve should always be turned to the OFF position to eliminate the possibility of fuel leaking into the crankcases or creating a fire hazard.

The valve must be turned to the ON position on many bikes for fuel to flow to the engine and for it to start and run. The fuel tank has a reserve section in case the main section runs dry. To release the reserve supply, you must turn the valve to RESERVE or RES, something which you should be able to do while you are riding your motorcycle.

Choke control

The choke adjusts the mixture of gasoline and air supplied to the engine and usually is used only when starting a cold engine. The choke control is located on the engine or at the handlebars. To start a cold engine, move the choke control to the ON position and start the motorcycle. When the engine is warm, return the choke control to the OFF position.

Throttle

The right handlegrip is the throttle that controls the flow of gasoline to the engine and thus the speed of the engine and, ultimately, the speed of the motorcycle. To increase speed, rotate the throttle toward you with your right hand. To reduce speed, twist the throttle away from you. The throttle must spring back to the idle position if you remove your hand.

Clutch lever

The clutch lever is located in front of the left handlebar and is operated when squeezed toward the handlegrip with the fingers of the left hand. Squeezing the lever disengages the clutch and disconnects the engine power from the rear wheel. Releasing the

lever engages the clutch and provides power to the rear wheel. Whenever you change gears, either up or down, you must first disengage the clutch.

Front brake lever

Apply the front wheel brake by squeezing the lever on the right handlebar toward the handlegrip with the fingers of your right hand.

Rear brake pedal

Activate the rear wheel brake by pressing your right foot on the pedal located in front of the right footrest (on most bikes). Remember that the right hand controls the front brake while the right foot controls the rear brake. They should be used together. The engine of your motorcycle will also act as a brake when you gear down or reduce throttle.

Gear shift

The gear selector pedal is located on the left side on most motorcycles just ahead of the footrest. You shift gears by lifting or depressing the pedal with your left toe.

Most motorcycles have four or five gears and a neutral position. In neutral, the transmission is out of gear and power will not reach the rear wheel.

The gear selector pedal should only be operated while the clutch is disengaged. After you have squeezed the clutch lever with your left hand, you can select the gear you need by lifting or depressing the gear selector pedal with your left toe.

Starter

Most motorcycles have an electric starter operated by pushing the starter button on the right handlebar.

Many bikes still have a kick starter, usually located above the right footrest. It must be unfolded before it can be used to start the motorcycle with a vigorous kick.

Engine-kill switch

The engine-kill switch is located on the right handlebar and is usually red. It is used in an emergency to stop the engine quickly. It may also be used to turn off the engine after a normal stop, but be sure to turn off the ignition switch as well after using the kill switch.

The engine will not start when the kill switch is in the OFF position.

Stands

When motorcycles are parked, they are supported by either a side stand or a centre stand. Larger models have both.

A side stand extends downward from its position underneath the motorcycle to support the motorcycle in a leaned position.

A centre stand is a sturdy, two-legged stand attached underneath the centre of the motorcycle frame. It can support the motorcycle in an upright position.

Stands are held in their retracted position by spring mechanisms and lowered for use by the rider's foot.

Make sure your side stand is retracted before you start off.

Daily motorcycle check

With a little experience, you will become familiar with the motorcycle controls. If there's anything wrong with the motorcycle, the time to find out about it is before you are in traffic.

Here are the things you should check before every ride. Take a look at the critical parts of your bike before starting out.

Tires

You have only two tires so you must keep them in good condition. Check for:

a) Inflation

The motorcycle does not handle properly if the air pressure is too low or too high. Check the owner's manual for the right amount of air.

b) Tread

Worn or uneven tread can make the motorcycle skid, particularly on wet pavement. Once the centre wear bar is exposed, you have only 1 mm of tread left. The tire must be replaced.

c) Damage

Check for cuts or nails stuck in the tread. Also, check the sidewalls for cracks. A blowout on a motorcycle can be extremely dangerous.

Controls

The controls are mounted on the handlebars. The steering is done in conjunction with your body by leaning. Make sure your controls work before you start out.

Brakes

Try the front and rear brakes one at a time. Make sure each one holds the motorcycle when it is fully applied.

Clutch and throttle

Make sure the controls work smoothly. The throttle should snap back when you let go.

Cables

Check the cables for kinks or broken strands. If a cable breaks while you are riding, it could cause an accident.

Lights

Don't put your faith in lights that may not work. Keep them clean and check them regularly.

Turn signals

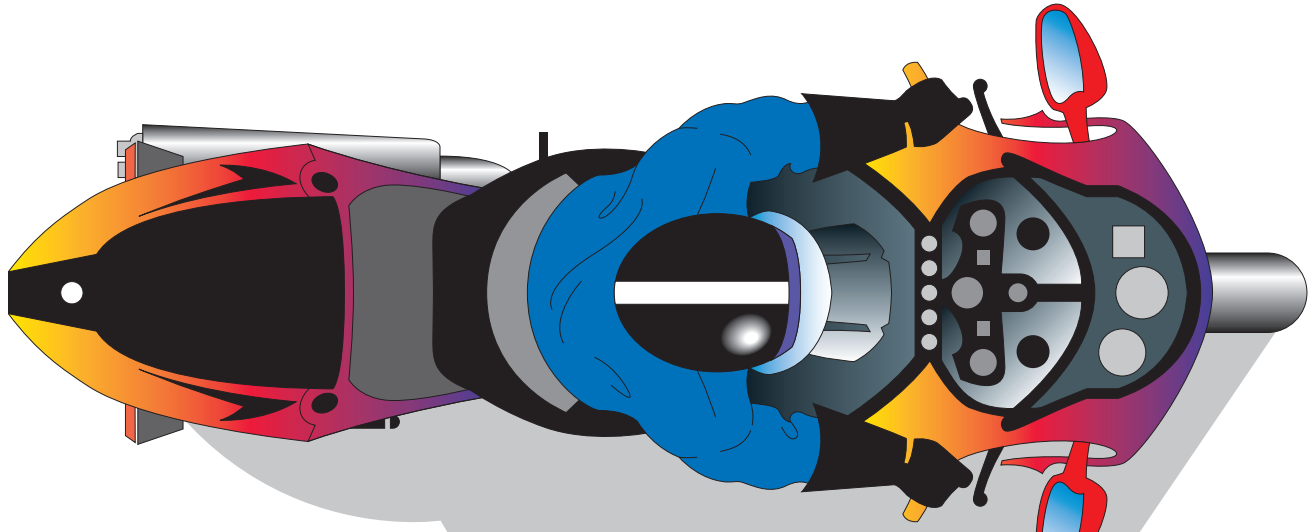
Check all four turn signal lights. Make sure they flash when they are turned on and are bright enough to be seen.

Headlight

Check your headlight. In daytime, pass your hand in front of the beam to make sure the headlight is really on. Try your dimmer switch to make sure both high and low beams work.

Tail and brakelight

Try each of your brake controls and make sure that each one activates your brakelight.



Horn

Try the horn to be sure it will work if you need it.

Gas and oil

Check gas and oil levels before you start. Running out of gas is inconvenient, and can also be dangerous if it happens where you cannot get off the road quickly. You can check the oil through the oil level window or on your dip stick.

Lack of oil can cause your engine to “seize.” This could lock the rear wheel and make you lose control.

Mirrors

Clean and adjust both mirrors before you start. It is difficult – and dangerous – to ride with one hand while you adjust a mirror.

Swing your mirrors out far enough to see around your body. Adjust each mirror to show half the lane behind you and as much as possible of the lane beside you.