

Winterizing your Bike

A chill hangs in the air as the winds begin to swirl around you. The leaves, long since their greener past, lie fallen beneath your feet. And then it happens - a single snowflake drifts down from above, landing gently on your nose. Another soon follows and you come to the realization that biking season is over.

The end of fall marks a crucial time for many motorcycle enthusiasts across Ontario. It's time to protect your bike to avoid corrosion while in storage and ensure that, once the flowers of Spring arrive, it's as ready to go as you are.

Storing your bike

The most important aspect of winterizing your motorcycle is determining where you are going to store it during the cold, harsh winter months. In some cases, your local bike dealer may offer a storage program. This is ideal as they will often prep and store the bike over the winter months and also get it ready again for you when winter ends.

If you'd prefer to take on the task of winterizing the bike yourself, you'll need to find a place that is dry and also out of harm's way. If possible, find a location that is away from windows, as the constant rays of ultraviolet light can fade paint and plastic parts. Direct sunlight will also raise the temperature of the storage area, causing condensation when evening arrives, so you may wish to cover plain glass with some sort of opaque material. Depending on the type of material chosen, you may also be insulating your garage, thereby saving money on your heating bills if your garage is attached to your house!

Once you've determined the location in which you will be storing your bike, you'll want to cover your bike with a specially designed bike cover rather than a sheet or tarp. These special covers are made of a mildew-resistant, breathable material and will help protect your bike in the cold winter months. Conversely, sheets and tarps tend to absorb moisture and, when draped over your bike, will hold that moisture against the metal surfaces, causing rust. Not only that, but sheets and tarps will cause mildew to grow on areas such as your seat and saddlebags.

Change the Oil

In this way, motorcycles and cars are fairly similar. If your motorcycle supports a cold winter grade oil (5w30), changing to this type of oil may also help you get going more quickly in the spring. Even if your oil is not quite due for a change, byproducts of combustion produce acids in the oil that can harm the inner metal surfaces of your bike. So take the time and change the oil and the oil filter before storing your bike away.

Stabilizing... This is the easy part. Add fuel stabilizer to the gas tank and then fill your tank with fresh fuel. This latter part is very important, as fuel changes when it ages, causing the more volatile components to turn into gummy and sludge-like substances that can plug the jets and passages inside your carburetor. Run the bike so that the gas and the fuel stabilizer reach the carburetor as well.

If your bike has a carburetor and you'll be storing it for more than four months, shut off the fuel petcock and drain your carburetor bowls and the fuel lines. Of course, this doesn't apply to fuel-injected bikes, as there isn't anything to drain.

Lube the cylinders

If you're anticipating a long winter (6 months or more), you'll also want to lube the cylinders to prevent rust and premature piston / ring wear. To do this, remove the spark plugs and pour a tablespoon of clean engine oil or spray fogging oil into each cylinder. Be sure to switch off the fuel before you crank the engine or else you may refill the drained carbs! Also, ground the ignition leads to prevent sparks igniting any fuel residue. Turn the engine over several revolutions to spread the oil around and then reinstall the plugs. Refitting the plugs before cranking the engine could result in a hydraulic lock if too much oil was used in the cylinder.

Battery Storage

At this stage, you should remove the battery from your motorcycle. Even when bikes are shut off, a small current drain is exerted on the battery (called dark current) and, over the course of the cold winter months; your battery may be drained completely. A fully drained battery will sulphate and will lose its ability to hold a charge in the future.

Depending on the type of battery in your bike, you may need to check the electrolyte level. If low, you'll want to add a small amount of distilled water to any of the cells that are low and then charge the battery. You may also want to apply a thin coat of Vaseline to the battery terminals to avoid corrosion while the battery sits on the garage shelf.

Finally, you should charge your battery every two to four weeks with a "Battery Tender" type of charger. Be sure to charge the battery away from open flame or sparks as the gas given off by a battery can be explosive. Also, you'll want to elevate the battery and keep it from freezing and, in general, exercise the proper caution appropriate to corrosive substances.

Cleaning for Storage

Your first reaction in reading this paragraph may be to skip this step altogether. After all, it doesn't appear to make sense for you to wash and wax your bike at this point, since you're just

storing it for the next few months. However, the cleaning process is quite important, as the application of wax will act as a deterrent to rust and moisture.

A light coat of WD-40 on your frame and engine doesn't hurt either, as it will also aid in the fight against corrosion. Of course, you'll want to also apply a light coat of WD-40 to your muffler ends and drain holes, as mufflers are known to rust quickly when not used. As additional protection against the effects of moisture, you may want to cover each muffler with a plastic bag during storage.

Checking the Tires

Check both your front and rear tires and ensure that they are inflated to the maximum recommended pressure. As the temperature drops, the air in your tires will condense and your tires will appear deflated. If left for too long, the rubber can be damaged from the awkward position (not to mention that the rubber can crack if it freezes).

Flush the Fluids

If your brake and/or clutch fluids haven't been changed within the past two years (or 18,000 km), it's not a bad idea to do them now. These fluids absorb moisture and, if old, will cause corrosion within the systems that will surface next spring. If you are not experienced in doing so or have a liquid cooled motorcycle, you may want to contact your dealer to assist you with proper drainage and disposal of the old fluid.

Storage

Now that you've cleaned your bike, pumped your tires, flushed your fluids, removed your battery, checked your oil, stabilized your fuel, lubricated your cylinders and bought a proper motorcycle cover, you're almost ready to put your bike away for the winter. At this point, there are only a couple things left to-do.

If the floor of the location you've selected is bare concrete, you may want to consider getting a piece of MDF or plywood and lay it down beneath the bike, as this will further insulate the bike from becoming damp. Once done, cover the bike with your cycle cover and wave goodbye until spring.
