

A 'TYRESOME' PC By Robert Morris, Shrewsbury

There are some people to whom troubles seem to attract themselves as a magnet draws iron filings. When it comes to motorcycle tyres I seem to be one such individual.

Although I have only covered 20,000 miles on my Pacific Coast in a little over two years of ownership, the wheel removal and replacement procedure is now a practiced art. The bike had less than 500 miles under its wheels when I bought it in 1999, but the present rear tyre is the third and although I have only replaced the front cover once I'm already on valve number 3 on the second tyre.

Rear tyre no. 1 expired after only 3000 miles through collecting a self-tapping screw and a nail, both dangerously close to the sidewall. Recovery vehicle to the rescue. The tyre fitter asked with some amusement whether I'd been riding through a scrapyard. It was ok for him to be amused, he wasn't footing the bill for replacing a nearly new tyre.....

The next event was front tyre no. 2, valve no. 2. This was necessitated by lost air through a dislocated valve when on holiday in Dumfries and Galloway in the summer of 2000. The cause was a short-lived but spectacular departure from outside the cinema in Newton Stewart on the last evening of the holiday when, having neglected to remove the shackle lock from the front wheel, I deposited the PC, myself and my wife in an embarrassing and undignified heap in the main street, to the amusement of the local populace, for whom such antics were evidently a welcome diversion from the otherwise humdrum entertainment afforded by the remote Scottish town.

In fact, the front tyre did not deflate immediately. Naturally, for me that would have been too straightforward. Instead it waited until I had the PC fully laden the following morning with our week's luggage, top box and extra bags, us in full riding kit and about to make a grand exit from our holiday cottage. We traveled ten yards across the courtyard before it became painfully evident that the first stage of our journey would have to be by courtesy of National Breakdown.

Whit-Monday Bank Holiday 2001 saw my wife and I heading north on the M6 in a Spring drizzle to visit relatives on Belle Isle in Windermere. Our ETA was mid-day, and we were on target until a sickening weaving movement from the PC's rear end signaled the end of forward progress for the time being. Fortunately for us the tyre started to go down in earnest just as we were on the slip road leaving the motorway at J35 to relieve the boredom by taking to the more relaxing A6. Candida was decanted to lighten the weight on the deflating tyre so that I could nurse the snaking war-horse up the slip road and on to a convenient patch of waste ground off the roundabout and safely out of harm's way.

Britannia Rescue, to whom I had changed allegiance that year, was summoned and the wait began. The helpful control centre rang back soon afterwards, having established that in Morecambe there was a tyre depot with motorcycle expertise where the tyre could be repaired, and giving us an accurate estimate of the arrival time of the breakdown vehicle. Sitting on the Armco in the Cumbrian drizzle, we were well into a game of "I-spy" when the cavalry appeared. The driver was as Lancastrian as a cotton mill and had an accent you could cut with a Swiss army knife. I have a fondness for the distinctness of regional dialects, and it was almost worth enduring the inconvenience of the puncture to hear the man's comment as he alighted from his cab. He might have been expected to make a comment about the traffic, the weather, having to work on a Bank Holiday, or the difficulties associated with recovering a quarter-ton of motorcycle encased in very expensive and easily-damaged Japanese plastic, in fact anything except what he actually did say. In pure Lancs his opening gambit was "Ooooh, what a loovely baaike". He said it again, with feeling. Turned out he was the owner of a Super Dream, so it must have had something to do with kindred spirits and all that.

Front tyre no.2, valve no.3 succumbed more recently but in rather more mundane circumstances than the earlier episode in Scotland. I discovered at home when making my customary regular tyre pressure check (by now this had become almost obsessive), a significant drop in pressure at the front. A local tyre depot in Shrewsbury specializes in motorcycle tyres and provides an excellent service - thank you, chaps at Frankwell Tyres, - and they identified the cause as not a puncture but a leak from the rim through corrosion of the alloy. This was evidently my reward for being so crass as to do what is to me the obvious thing, but to some motorcyclists the unthinkable, which is to use the bike all year round in all weather conditions. This winter will see the wheels plastered in Waxoyl, and I've already placed an order for the next replacement K555...