

“Rain”

Is A Four-Letter Word

by Robert Vaughan

One word that can raise the hackles on the neck of any rider is “rain.”

Though no one goes out riding just because it's raining, you do get stuck in the rain at times. What can you do to improve your riding in the rain?

The first things you can do are done well ahead of the first few drops of rain. Much as you hate to think about it, selecting and purchasing a rainsuit is something that must be done. A rainsuit should serve two purposes. First, it should keep you dry. Second, and equally important, it should increase your visibility. When your evasive maneuverability is reduced by lack of traction, you want to be sure other drivers see you.

Maintaining all your lights also helps you to be seen in the rain. Of course, you keep your lights clean, but have you checked all your lights lately to see if any have burned out? Do you carry any spares with you? Next time you take your bike in for service, why not restock any spare bulbs you might be missing? You should stock spare fuses as well.

The other important part that needs maintaining ahead of time is your tires. Have you looked at them lately? If any of the wear bands are showing, it's time to replace the tire. One of the major causes of hydroplaning is a worn tire. It's too late to check them after the rain starts falling. The sole purpose of the tread design on a tire is to carry off the water, but it can't do its job if you don't allow it enough tread depth to work with.

Hydroplaning occurs when the tires are not in full contact with the road. They ride on a thin layer of water, and sometimes oil, on the road. Hydroplaning occurs frequently in light mist or drizzle. Proper tread depth and tire pressures, slowing down, and riding in the tracks of other vehicles all help reduce the chance of hydroplaning. The cessation of a slushing sound, or any decrease in steering or braking may indicate hydroplaning. If this happens, slow down without braking and avoid any sudden moves.

Plan alternate routes in case of rain. Scenic, twisty asphalt roads are a lot of fun when it's dry. When the rain starts to pour, the scenery turns gray, the turns aren't nearly as much fun, and the asphalt doesn't provide the traction you really need. It's time to look for an alternate route along a duller, but straighter, concrete road.

Once it starts raining, there are still things you can do to increase your safety, if not your comfort. Pull off the road as soon as you find a place to get out of the rain. This gives you a dry place to put on your high-visibility rainsuit, and more important, it puts you off the road during the most dangerous first fifteen minutes of rain. When the water first enters the pores of the road, it forces up the oil that has been collecting there. A few more minutes of rain will wash this oil off the road.

Though the main danger of rain is hydroplaning, increasing your following distance, taking curves more slowly, and increasing your scanning distance all help your rain riding.

Riding in the rain may never be pleasant, but it can be safer.