

Four easy steps to idiot-proof your motorcycle

By Wes Fleming #87301



PEOPLE MAKE MISTAKES ALL THE TIME.

Regular mistakes won't cost you your life, but when it comes to motorcycling, a tiny mistake in the wrong place could end with you in the back of an ambulance—or worse, the back of a hearse.

To help keep you alive and out of harm's way, I've com-

plied a four-item list of things that will idiot-proof your motorcycle. By the way, you'll notice a non-BMW motorcycle in some of these photos. That's okay, it's a KTM—still three letters, still made in Austria, still Germanic.

#1: Use the right part (or tool)

This poor KTM was severely neglected and left outdoors under a cover for well over two years. It needed a lot of TLC, and I had neither the time nor the expertise to offer it, so I took it to my nearest KTM dealer and asked them to get it running again. They let me know that it needed a new fuel pump and all new fuel lines, as the stock ones had begun to rot. "We have a good supplier," they told me, "so we can save you some money on the fuel lines."

I hesitated and thought quickly about what it feels like when people question my expertise on something I have a lot of knowledge about. They're a KTM shop, I thought, so they must know what they were doing.

Five miles into my first ride on this bike, one of those fuel lines burst. Had I been on the freeway instead of on a rural road, I could easily have been hit by another vehicle; as it was, I was able to signal and get safely off the main road without inconveniencing any car drivers.

It turned out that the shop had used the wrong type of fuel

lines for my motorcycle. There are fuel lines for bikes with carburetors and fuel lines for bikes with fuel injection. Lines for FI are thicker and often reinforced with strands of fiber or metal so they can withstand the high pressure of fuel pumps. Carburetor fuel lines only have to deal with gravity or a light vacuum, so they are thin and not reinforced. To complicate things, it is possible to use unreinforced fuel lines on a bike with FI, but only for low pressure applications like crossovers. Putting a fuel line rated for carbs on a fuel pump is obviously a recipe for being stranded on the side of the road, just like I was.

This led me to two important lessons. First was to always listen to that nagging voice in my head that caused me to hesitate when they told me they were going to save me some money. Second was to always use the proper part for the application at hand. That means using properly reinforced fuel lines for fuel injected bikes, but it also means using the right bolt, washer and/or nut. It's easy to grab any old screw to secure your body panels, but the manufacturer specifies a screw with a certain length and thread pitch for a reason. Using the wrong bolt on your swing arm or rear shock could result in a catastrophic failure that earns you one of those "It went earth-sky-earth-sky-ambulance" t-shirts.

#2: Get rid of cheap, crappy parts

When I sat down to go over my KTM's fuel system and make sure the rest of the

work was done properly, I couldn't help but notice that KTM, like BMW, uses cheap, crappy quick disconnects on their fuel lines. I suppose I understand why they do this; if they were to put high quality QDs on every bike, it would raise the overall cost of production, which would raise the cost of the bikes, which could have a negative effect on sales.

Come on, though. The plastic QDs BMW, KTM and other manufacturers use have an exposed rubber O-ring. I can tell you from experience it's easy to nick this O-ring and create a fuel leak. Every BMW I've ever owned (and now every KTM, too) has seen me removing



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KTM uses the same cheap fuel line quick disconnects (**above**) that BMW uses. With an all-plastic design and an o-ring exposed to shearing forces any time the two parts are connected, it's easy to damage or break these units. Replacing them with Jiffy-Tite quick disconnects (**below**) puts machined aluminum where plastic used to be and ups not only the design quotient, but also the security of knowing you won't wreck the part simply by using it.



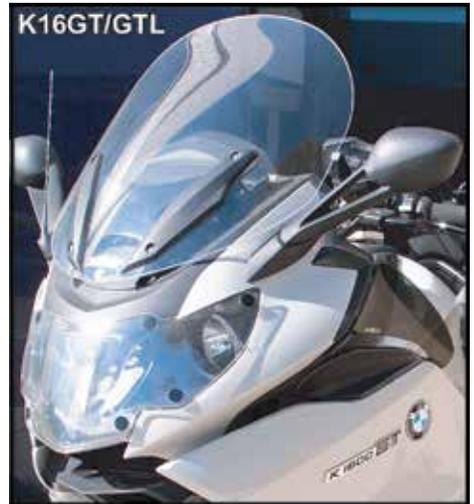
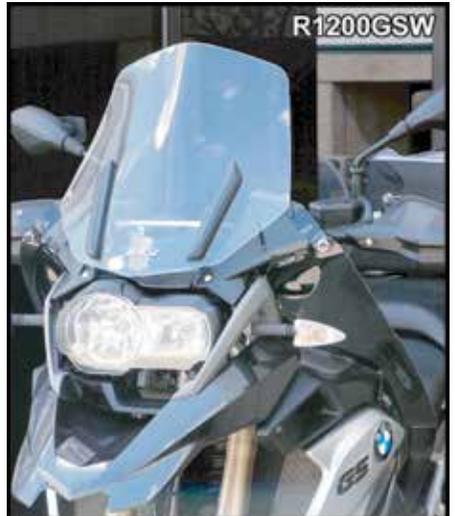
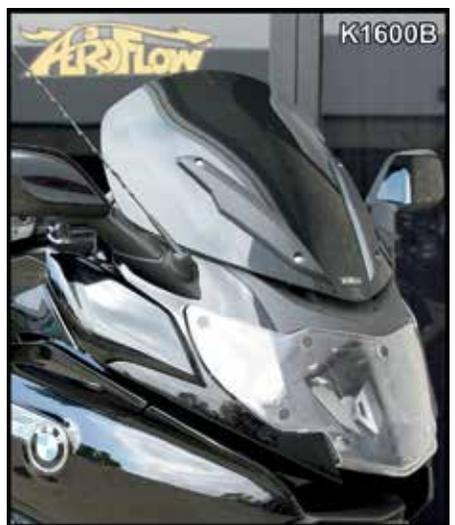
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these cheap, plastic bits and replacing them with high quality units instead. I use QDs made by Jiffy-Tite (part of Oetiker). These quick disconnects are made in the USA of aircraft-grade aluminum, and there are no exposed O-rings that shear off or need to be replaced. They also look great, which is of minimal importance since they're almost always hidden under body panels. I just feel safer and more confident knowing I've eliminated a weak point in my fuel system.

When it comes to your motorcycle, don't skimp and go cheap on parts. If an aftermarket part is both less expensive and of better quality than the OEM part, you've won. If it only costs less, skip it. The old adage "Take care of your motorcycle and it will take care of you" applies here. Buy your parts from a BMW shop; not only are you guaranteed to be getting the parts the manufacturer intended to be used on your motorcycle, but also you're building a relationship with the shop and helping keep a business in operation. The quickest way to kill a motorcycle dealership is to assume they make a ton of money off motorcycle sales. The truth is, like a gas station, they make most of their money off everything that isn't the brand-new motorcycles for sale on the showroom floor.

Speaking of accessories, you're going to get the safest, most thoroughly tested accessories by buying from reputable companies. Buying the cheapest kickstand plate off eBay might save you some money, but it's unlikely to have the same quality as one made by Touratech, Wunderlich, Twisted Throttle or another company with years of manufacturing experience and skin in the game when it comes to their reputation.

#3: Proper maintenance saves money in the long run

One of the complaints I hear the most often is about how much an oil change costs. A proper full maintenance cycle on a BMW motorcycle can take several hours. On my K 1200 RS, even changing the air filter is a long job, and not because there's a

sidecar attached to it. Even without the sidecar, there are body panels, a fuel tank, an air box, a battery box, and all sorts of things that have to be removed, moved, tilted, squeezed past and cursed at just to do a simple thing like install a fresh air filter. I owned two different R 1100 GS bikes and changing the fuel filter on those required removing the tank, inverting it, and removing the entire fuel pump assembly.

When it comes to time, if you're not willing to do the work yourself, pay the tech who does it at the going shop rate, and be glad there's somebody out there willing to work on your motorcycle. If you feel like the shop fees to change your oil are too high, buy a manual and tackle the job yourself. I guarantee most of the people reading this are fully capable of doing the job.

Buy the oil the manufacturer specifies and an appropriate filter as well. If your motorcycle cost \$20,000, stop trying to save a few bucks by putting a cheap oil filter on it. Same goes for the oil. Without oil, your bike is useless. If the oil costs \$16 a quart, buy it. If you can find it for \$9 a quart, do that instead, but make sure it's the right oil.

Spending money for good parts and proper supplies during your maintenance cycles will cost more up front, but your motorcycle will last longer and run better, ultimately saving you money in the long run, not to mention keeping you safe.

#4: Don't be an idiot

When it comes right down to brass tacks, it's up to you to make the best decisions

regarding your motorcycle. That bike you ride and the gear you wear are the only things between you and an extensive series of painful reconstructive surgeries. I know it's offensive in some circles to insist on people wearing a motorcycle helmet, but they are proven lifesavers. Gloves, jackets, pants, and boots, those things might not save your life outright, but after a crash, having worn the right gear will certainly cut down on the amount of pain you feel and skin grafts you need.

Make informed decisions about gear and your motorcycle. When in doubt, ask. Even asking Google "What are the best motorcycle gloves" and putting in a little time clicking around is going to benefit you in the long run, as you'll be exposed to lots of different experiences, opinions and products. Somewhere in there is your perfect glove, front sprocket, brake pad, oil filter, tire, digital volt-ohm meter, helmet, torque wrench, chain tool or zinc-coated bolt. ☺

