

Sidetracked

IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

Give It Time.

Text and Photography: Bill Dragoo



Murphy is alive and well, and he is nobody's fool. Patient, cunning, and devious, he will get you when you least expect it ... unless you're prepared.

We've been out here almost two weeks on the Idaho Backcountry Discovery Route. The sun is about to set and we plan to camp at Rocky Ridge Lake on the Lolo Motorway. This two-track heaven follows the old Nez Perce National Historic Trail, also used by Lewis and Clark. With a few scenic stops, it's an all-day ride on the BMW R 1200 GS LC.

My buddy, Dave, and I are riding at a good clip when, rounding a turn, we see a man and woman standing beside a Suzuki DR 650. A red nylon strap is futilely wrapped around the rear tire in a last ditch effort to make the bike mobile.

"Need anything?" I ask, slowing to assess their plight.

Hopelessly realizing I'm riding a bike with tubeless tires, our new friend asks, "I don't suppose you'd have a tube and a pump, would you ...?"

Breakdowns never come at a good time. But with a little forethought, damage control is seldom more than another chapter in the adventure. The challenge is knowing what to carry and what to leave at home. Several years ago, when purchasing my first big twin, I asked the owner about a small leather cubby attached to the bike's frame. "Is that your toolbox?"

"Sort of," he said. "It's where I keep my cell phone," as though that's all a Harley rider would ever need.

Perhaps so, but cell phones don't work most places I like to go. As an Eagle Scout I was taught to be prepared. Let's break down "breakdowns" into bite-sized parts.

Things that wear out

You can't carry spares for everything on a motorcycle and shouldn't try. Many failures can be traced back to lack of preventive maintenance. Aircraft engines, for example, have a recommended TBO or "time before overhaul." With proper maintenance, one can reasonably expect trouble-free service for the entire predetermined span. Failure is not something to be taken lightly. Nor is failure of an important motorcycle part miles from help. Inspect and, if necessary, replace such items as brake pads, cables, spokes, wheel bearings, chains, and sprockets. It's false economy to run them to failure when your iron horse is your link to civilization. You shouldn't need spares if you check and replace normal wear items well before they fail.

Things that break

Levers, shifters, tubes—these are some of the more common items to be damaged on the trail. They're easy to carry and critical to the completion of the journey. Consider your planned route. Will there be deep water crossings? If so, carry spare air and oil filters and, if traveling with friends, share responsibility for carrying a quart of oil each. Even if you run tubeless tires, carry a tube. An 18-inch will stretch to a 19 or crumple into a 17 carcass. Scrap rubber from an old tube, large tire patches, or "boots" can help fix a sidewall, as can safety wire or tough string.

Many items can be repaired trailside with just a few of the makings. I carry a bag of zip ties, epoxies, rubber cement, RTV ad-

hesive, tape, miscellaneous nuts and bolts, safety wire, and, of course, fuses. I once fixed a broken tooth with Super Glue and completed a month-long ride with my smile intact.

Things that go bump in the night

Single engine pilots know about "automatic rough." It's a term used to describe a heightened awareness that comes when flying at night or over water. We hear things and feel things ... maybe real or maybe imagined. Know your machine. If you suspect something is awry, have it checked out well before your adventure begins. Five hundred miles from home is no place to ask yourself if that tapping noise is normal. If repairs are done, they should be completed and tested before hitting the trail.

All for the want of a horseshoe nail

It's a hopeless feeling to be broken down trailside, miles from help, knowing you left that one essential tool on the bench. Keep your toolkit specific to your bike and bring tools that fit and work. Think through your trip and pack accordingly. The list might be long, but with careful selection and efficient storage, you'll be surprised at the arsenal you can bring to bear in a small package.

I nod to our hapless couple on the DR 650, slip down the sidestand, and begin unstrapping the tube from my frame. It's not exactly the right size, but it will do. An hour later, Dave and I set up camp at Rocky Ridge Lake by the light of our headlamps. Our friends have a long ride ahead of them, but at least they're riding. **RR**