

When will Riding Season ever get here? Am I ready for it when it does?

As I write this, it is 42 degrees and raining and it seems like the riding season will never come. Of course it will be here before we know it, so what a perfect time to get ready for it now. Remember our first ride will take place in early April.

As I think about getting ready to ride safely, I think of three things that are crucial: fitness in body, fitness in mind and fitness of the bike. Therefore, this article and the next two articles will cover these aspects so you may have an enjoyable and safer riding season.

This month I am focusing on "Fitness in Body". If you don't think you need to be strong to ride a motorcycle, consider this. When I am on my Wing with my beautiful co-rider and our gear for a weekend, the whole deal weighs in at nearly 1,200 pounds. I need to be certain you have the strength to handle the bike and its weight in a coordinated way and so should you. You may argue that when you are at speed, physics takes over and you are pretty much okay. Well my answer to that is you are right in some ways, but wrong in others. Think about the sore back and wrists you have suffered through after a particularly long ride. And what about the slow speed maneuvers you need to make?

If I have your attention, perhaps you will read on. My first recommendation probably the easiest thing you can do right now. Get enough sleep regularly. Researchers have shown those who sleep at least seven hours a night are healthier and stronger than those who don't. Riding well rested is one of the best ways to help you have a safer ride.

Now for the more complicated stuff. Start exercising using **motorcycle specific exercises** today. If you do and keep it up until riding season, you will find your rides more enjoyable and will be a better and safer rider.

The typical touring motorcyclist uses his core, arms and shoulders most when riding. Therefore, to help you focus on those areas, I have provided you with some exercises I found on the website MotorcycleLarry.com. (http://www.motorcyclelarry.com/index.php?main_page=page&id=6&chapter=0) (If you decide to do some of these exercises, please remember that it is good to go slow and warm up for a few minutes before you start.)

Motorcycle Larry's website provides an assortment of exercises that will help you focus on flexibility, core strength and shoulders and there is enough here for you to vary the exercises so you won't get bored. I think one of the best parts is that you don't have to belong to a gym to do these, you can do them right at home. Although joining fitness center and going to work out regularly would be good too. If you do these exercises three times a week, I will almost guarantee you will feel better and ride better during the season.



Knee and Wrist Openers (to keep from getting wrist sore on a long ride)

Kneel on the floor and take the hips back to the heels. Place your forearms on the floor a shoulders distance apart. Align the wrists with the elbows so the forearms look like two parallel train tracks.



Keeping the alignment of the arms turn the palms up and attempt to get both the little fingers and thumbs on the floor simultaneously. (Keep trying for 2 minutes.) This exercise will help strengthen and make your wrists more flexible. The trick here is to try and rotate your wrists until your thumbs touch the ground, BUT not until it causes excruciating pain, no macho stuff here,



Shoulder Openers

You will need a strap or a towel. Sit on a chair and place the strap or towel over one shoulder. Reach up and back with your right hand and take the top of the strap at your shoulder. Reach down and back with your left hand and hold the bottom of the strap. Gradually walk the hands together using the strap or towel as your guide. Eventually the hands may touch. If you have sore shoulders at after a ride this will help.



Hamstring Exercise

You will need a strap or a towel. Lay on your back with both knees bent. Take a towel or strap over the right foot and straighten the leg. It is very important to get the leg absolutely straight so use as much strap as you need to accommodate for tightness in the back of the leg. Tighten the front of the thigh as much as you can and receive a stretch to the back of the leg. Hold for 2 to 3 mins and change legs. This exercise will help on those long rides. Do these and after a while you won't be standing on your pegs or using those highway bars as much.



Jeni, has been at this for a while. Woman normally are much more flexible than men, don't get discouraged, ANYTHING you do will help. Even if you hate doing these exercises, I promise, do them for a month and you will be more flexible and hurt less after a ride than before you started. You don't have to like it to feel better.



Forearm Plank (More advances but a great core exercise)

This is a strengthening exercise for the shoulders. Kneel on the floor and align the forearms as in the wrist exercise but face the palms down. Press the forearms into the floor and move the legs back into a push up position. Hold the position with no movement for 3 to 9 steady breaths. Repeat 3 times. This will help your leg, shoulder, back and wrists all at the same time. The hard thing about this one is to try and keep those forearms parallel, go ahead and give it a try.



Lunge (more advanced)

With this exercise that can be done with a chair or coffee table the exercise is to lean forward as shown.

You will feel this in your hamstrings, hips and your lower back. I find this position if held for a while stretches out my hip sockets and back prior to a ride.

You will need a chair. Kneel in front of the chair, step forward with your right foot and place a folded blanket under the back knee for comfort. The front shin should be vertical keeping the front knee over the ankle and behind the toes. Place your hands on the chair for balance and stability. Move the hips forward towards the chair receiving a stretch in the back hip and thigh. Hold the stretch for 2 to 3 mins. Change legs.

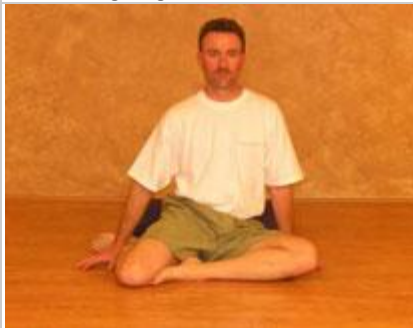


Hips. (more advanced)

People who spend a lot of time sitting in one position can experience tightness in the hips and groins the following stretches will help to relieve that tightness

Moving the right leg and bending more at the knee place the foot on the center of the right thigh. The right knee will stick out to the right. If you are very tight you will experience a buttock muscle stretch right here. To get more intensity slowly draw the left leg (the leg still on the chair) toward you. Use the chair for support so that you don't have to strain to hold the position.

Hold for 3 to 5 mins. Come out of the stretch and repeat to the other side. This stretch has helped several students that complain of sciatic pain.



Hip Openers Step 1

This exercise is one that will really help open up your hips for the long ride. It can be done anywhere even in your camp grounds at night if you are on a camping/ bike trip. Again this exercise will help stretch several muscle groups at the same time. You will notice reduced lower back, knee, and leg fatigue if you practice this one on a regular basis.



Step 2

If you are limber enough try and bring your hands, then forearms then chest down towards the ground. If this is way to much as it is for myself (MCL) put a rolled up blanket, or thick pillow in front of you like shown in step 3.



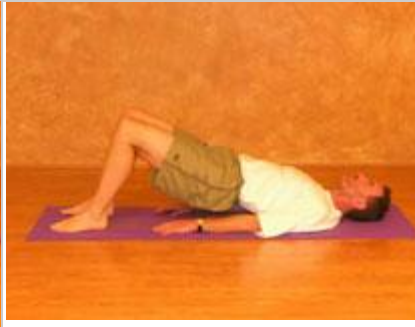
Step 3

This doesn't hurt as much as you might think the first time you do this exercise. Once you are down relaxing on your arms, chest or pillow take a deep breath, let it out, close your eyes, divorce the thoughts, problems and stress of the day and ENJOY the peace of mind you have knowing you are not only relaxing, lowering your blood pressure but getting your butt in shape for BIKING.



Bridge

Lay on your back with knees bent. Position feet hip distance apart and align the ankles under the knees as much as is reasonable. Arms by your side. Push feet into the floor and lift the hips toward the ceiling. Use the back of your legs more than your buttock muscles.



Press the arms into the floor and allow the shoulder blades to move together as they did in the last pose. To avoid overstretching the back of your neck, move the chin a little away from the chest. Hold for 3 to 9 steady breaths. If you feel pain, come out of the stretch.



This is a more advanced versions of bridge. Clasp the hands together and use more lift from the arms as the chest opens. Hold for 3 to 9 steady breaths.



Chest Opener 1

You will need a folded blanket. Place the blanket at the bottom edge of the shoulder blades so that it sticks out either side of the armpits. Lay with knees bent or legs straight. Hold for 3 to 5 mins. If your lower back is uncomfortable place another blanket of similar height under your hips



Chest Opener 2a

Sit with legs straight out in front of you and hands behind you. Fingers may point in any direction, but straight back if possible.



2b

Keep the hips and legs in the same place but gradually walk the hands back increasing the chest stretch. Hold for 1 to 2 mins. If hands begin to get pins and needles come out of the stretch and rest.

Now that you have some exercises to try, start today and after just a few weeks, you will be stronger safer rider with more endurance. . . .

Next month I will add to this discussion by talking about “Fitness of the Mind” where I will talk about how important it is to have the right “mindset” while riding.

Ride safe and ride well.