

WHY I AM ANAL ABOUT MY TIRES

By John Lloyd #236695

I am anal when it comes to my tires, especially on my motorcycles and will often change out tires in the spring before Florida's rainy season begins so that I am confident I have the best available tread. Oftentimes, I will retire a tire once 50% of the tread has been worn away. Is this wasteful? Perhaps, but having fresh tires gives me the confidence to ride to my limit, without worrying if I have enough traction.

In my opinion, tires are even more important than brakes. If you lose brake pressure, you may still have options. Hopefully, since the front and rear brakes are independent, you will still have some braking power from the remaining system. You may be able to coast to a stop, or even use engine braking. But, in the event of tire failure, all options are out-the-window. Maybe I have enough skill to bring the bike safely to a stop. But I don't want to test those limits. Better to avoid a bad situation through good maintenance.

Tire Pressure

The most important measure of tire readiness is pressure. Incorrect tire pressures are unforgiving on a motorcycle and can lead to a wobble and potential loss of control. Tire pressure is measured when the tires are cold, that is, before riding since tires warm while riding. On American touring bikes, the typical front and rear cold tire pressures are 36 front and 40 rear. Check your owner's manual or look for a sticker, usually on the left side of the swingarm for correct tire pressures for your bike. It is equally important to ensure that any replacement tires for your motorcycle match the original manufacturer specifications.

Tire pressures should be measured every day before you ride as part of your pre-ride inspection. However, it is a minority of riders who adhere to this strict schedule. Alternatively, a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) can be a simple and relatively inexpensive alternative to getting down on the garage floor in your clean riding gear before each ride. TPMS technology can communicate with smartphones via Bluetooth for easy pre-ride and continuous tire pressure monitoring. Remember that tires will leak some pressure over time, so checking your pressures regularly, especially during season changes is of critical importance.

Tread Depth

The purpose of tread on tires is displace water and small debris so that the tire and road maintain good contact. If you can personally guarantee that your bike will never see water, or debris, such as on a track, then tread depth may be less important. For the rest of us, tread can be critical.

New motorcycle tires have a tread depth of about 8/32nds, while the legal minimum tread depth in the U.S. is 2/32nds. By the time my tires tread depth falls below 5/32nds I am making plans for replacement because, in my experience, the wear is not linear. In fact, I find that the first 50% of tire tread lasts about 70% of the tire life, while the remaining 2 to 3 32nds will disappear quite quickly.

Tire Age

Raise your hand if you know how to check how old your tires are? On the tire sidewall you will find a Tire Identification Number (TIN). The last 4 digits of the TIN are the manufacturing date code, expressed in weeks (first 2 digits) and year (last 2 digits). For example, if the last 4 digits of the TIN are 0117, this would indicate that the tire was manufactured in the 1st week of 2017.

Personally, even if I have not ridden one of my bikes enough to warrant replacement based on tread wear, I will change out the tires if they are

more than three years old, based on the manufacture date code. This is because tires deteriorate with age. Can you ride on tires that are older than 3 years? Sure. I may be anal, but I have never experienced a situation on the road due to tire failure and would like to keep it that way.

Tire Replacement

Motorcycle tires are much softer than car tires and wear out far quicker. Unless you are running hard compound tires, which I don't recommend, you will be lucky to get more than 10,000 miles out of a bike tire. In my experience, though dependent on riding style, rear tires will wear out about twice as fast as the front tires due to the fact there are greater forces acting on the rear tire since it is the drive wheel.

It is not necessary to replace both tires at the same time, unless needed. If the tread wear on the front is still fine, but the rear is looking a little tired, you don't need to pay for both. Personally, I prefer to have matched tires front and rear, but that is just my preference.

Motorcycle tires are made with a higher level of precision than car tires. Off the shelf they have minimal irregularities, unlike the road surface. However, there may be a release agent on the skin of a new tire, which is necessary to remove the tire from the mold. This release agent has a lower coefficient of friction, and until that skin is scrubbed off, with careful riding, it can cause unexpected sliding. It is therefore important to ride with more caution during the first 50 to 100 miles after a tire has been replaced.

Reading your Tires

One can typically tell the riding style and proficiency of a motorcyclist based on the tire wear patterns. Don't make the mistake of trying to compare the wear patterns on your tires to those of another rider, since each rider's style is unique. However, you can visually inspect and compare your wear patterns from photographic records as a measure of improvement in your own riding skills. Practice is key. When the opportunity presents itself, or at least every few weeks, go to a parking lot and practice in the safety of an open space. **ON**



Reading your tires.



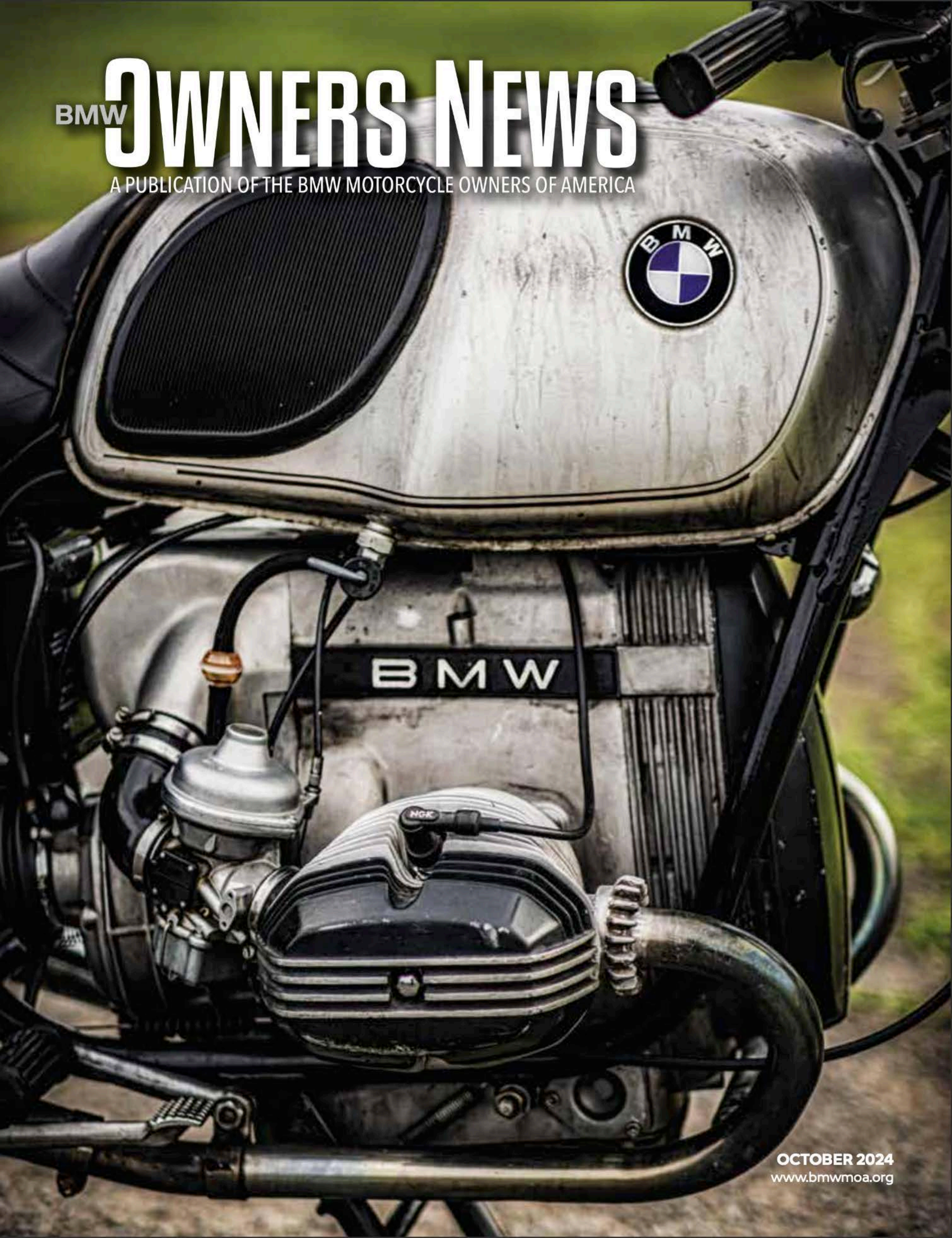
John Lloyd is a PhD researcher, whose career focused on the biomechanics of traumatic brain

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