



BY MISTI HURST

LIFE ON THE FAST TRACK JUST FOR KICKS...

I was recently gabbing away with a bunch of female riders who had gathered for the BMW All Women's test ride day in Vancouver, BC. We were sharing silly stories relating to being short and "tipping over" on various bikes we had owned in the past. This topic was started after I hopped on the BMW R1200GS, heaved it off the side stand and nearly toppled right over the other side because my feet didn't touch the ground. I took it out for the test ride anyway, because "I can manage!", even though my attention throughout the entire 40 minute ride was more focused on how I was going to stop the bike than the actual ride itself. The girls giggled as they watched me carefully pull back into the parking lot, shift my butt to one side, scan the ground for depressions in the pavement, put one foot down, struggle to get the kickstand kicked out, shift to the other side, carefully lean the bike onto the stand and simultaneously slide off with a huge grin on my face.

Every rider I know of has at some point in his or her riding career simply tipped over on a motorcycle for various reasons; forgetting to put their foot down, putting their foot in a pothole, getting their shoelace caught on the footpeg, etc. The four of us however, being an unusually vertically challenged group of riders (all under 5'3") had an exceptionally large collection of interesting stories to share.

We were laughing about the stories, grinning and boasting to each other about crazy reasons we had tipped over when I remembered one particularly goofy time I had fallen over. I was riding home in the dark along an extremely narrow and twisty section of road, when my 2001 Kawasaki ZX6-R began to lurch and chug in its familiar "running out of gas" way. No big deal I thought as I reached down to switch the tank to reserve (something I had done a hundred times before in the light of day).

Suddenly, I realized with a growing panic that I couldn't find the petcock in the dark. As the bike coughed and sputtered I pulled off to the side and, with it being so shadowy and so narrow, parked extremely close to the edge of the road. When I put my foot out to reach the ground I felt only air and the sensation that I was suddenly falling. Slowly, slowly the bike began to tip over. Helplessly I fell sideways along into the muddy and wet ditch on the side of the Sea to Sky highway.

To make matters worse, the bike landed on top of me and pinned me underneath. I felt pretty helpless as I struggled to push 400+ lbs of dead weight up off of me. Luckily for me, I wasn't alone and my riding partner who had been in front of me, turned around after witnessing the peculiar scene of a bike headlight weaving back and forth, drastically slowing and then tilting off to the side and pointing at the rock face, in his mirrors. He heaved the bike off me and we laughed about how silly it was that I couldn't locate the switch in the dark. It was something small and overlooked, something I had taken for granted.

Which led me to tell the girls an entirely different story, about taking certain things for granted.

Take a kickstand for example. A small, straight, basic bit

of metal attached to the bike that holds it up. We kick it down, we kick it up, and we curse at it when it sticks but we never actually realize how important it really is. That is, until it's gone.

A few years ago I was riding with a close friend of mine along the Duffy Lake Road in BC, on our way to the famed Sportbike West Rally. It was a gorgeous sunny day and our bikes were loaded with camping gear, cameras, snacks and water bottles. We blasted along the curvy and scenic road for about an hour, he on his Suzuki GSX-R600 and me on my old 1989 Honda CBR600, when we decided to stop for a picture opportunity at a lovely lookout point just north of Lilloett. We pulled in to park, I put my tippy toes down to touch the ground, reached my leg out to flick the kickstand down and realized, with an odd sensation, that it was not there.

Not there? Somewhere along the tight and twisty section of road the kickstand had apparently fallen off!

Now what? What do you do? I couldn't get off the bike, I could barely even hold it steady balanced on my tiptoes and I was stuck. Stuck not only for the moment, I realized with sudden clarity, but for the entire long weekend. What the hell was I going to do?

After my riding partner Simon finished laughing his guts out at me and teasing me by holding out snacks and bottles of water towards me and then pulling them away cruelly, he offered to hold the bike while I went to the restroom and stretched my legs. We decided we were going to have to try to find a bike shop and buy a new kickstand for the bike because how in the world are you supposed to go on a three-day long motorcycling trip without a kickstand?

At the next gas station we stopped to fill up and I began to realize just what a big pain in the posterior this was going to be. We were still miles outside of the next big town on a fairly desolate piece of road, so finding a motorcycle shop was not going to be easy, and it was already beginning to get frustrating sitting and waiting on a motorcycle for someone to fill it up with gas, and to hold it for me

while I went to the freakin' bathroom!

Just as we were about to pull out of the station, an old run down pick-up truck pulled in honking the horn while the two occupants frantically waved their arms at us. The driver jumped out holding a vaguely familiar looking piece of rusty metal. "Is this somethin' off one of yer bikes?" he asked, incredibly, holding up my lost kickstand.

"Unbelievable," I thought to myself as I took the hunk of metal from his hands. "How did you find it?" He explained that shortly after two bikes had passed him he saw something bouncing and tumbling off one of the motorcycles so he stopped to pick it up. When he saw us in the gas station he pulled in to see if it was ours.

Crazy. So now I had my kickstand back, but it was missing the bolt and the spring that held it onto the bike. I tucked it safely into the pocket of my tail bag, thanked him, and off we rode, still in search of a motorcycle shop.

A few hours later we pulled up around the back of a dealership and I sat and waited on my bike while Simon went to get a mechanic to see if anyone could fix the damn thing. After much deliberation, and giggling from the guys at the shop, they were able to thankfully provide me with a bolt that would hold the kickstand in place, but they did not have a spring or anything they could rig it up with to get it to work properly. After some more thought, the mechanic went back into the shop and quickly came back out with a handful of elastic bands. "This is the best we can do." He said, "Good luck."

So, we assembled the kickstand with an old bolt and an elastic band and headed on our way. For the remainder of the three day trip, every time we stopped for gas, to take a pee break, to grab a bite to eat or to stop for the day, I had to wait for someone in the group to come over to my bike, unwrap the kickstand from the elastic band and lower it so that I could get off the motorcycle. Sometimes my friends would forget and start wandering off, leaving me calling after them. Sometimes they did it on purpose just to razz me a little bit. One time, after a fellow rider had endured a minor crash on the side of the road, I was left to sit on my machine, on a steep downhill section of road as the rest of the gang helped the fallen rider. There was nothing I could do, no way to get off and help. I felt pretty helpless and pretty silly every single time I wanted to dismount my machine.

So, what's the moral of this story? Sometimes the most overlooked pieces of equipment have the most important functions of all. Don't take things for granted, and check your kickstand every once in a while to make sure it's secure and not MIA! **MMM**

Cheers, Misti

Misti Hurst is a motorcycle racer, an instructor with the California Superbike School, and a freelance writer. More information about her can be found on her website at www.mistihurst.com

(also see www.sportbikewest.com).