

Biker Information Guide

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"Biker Billy Cooks with Fire"



Shifting Gears

Unless you have an automatic, a rare bird in motorcycling, shifting gears is a constant part of riding. Shift up, shift down, row those gears and keep the motor in the power band—then you are always ready to respond to changes in traffic. Being prepared to respond to changing conditions is part of both the challenge and excitement of riding a motorcycle, and it is in the ability to effectively respond to change that our greatest advantage is found. As any experienced rider knows, traffic is only one of many shifting challenges that we must contend with—there's also road surfaces, speed zones, unexpected debris, contours of the land, and fickle weather. Then there are the changes that occur on a longer cyclical basis; while these are more predictable than, say, finding a retread carcass in your path, they can still surprise you if you let them.

Seasons come and seasons go, and each has its own unique requirements in terms of riding gear. If you ride beyond the peak warm season, you will probably need to make changes of gear during the course of any long day's ride. While it is true that summer (or, for that matter, winter) rides can call for changes of gear, fall and spring days are truly the gear-shifting seasons. Turn that day ride into a weekend excursion, and the potential changes of gear can become dramatic. Over the past few weeks this has become very apparent to me again. One would think that with a few decades of riding under my saddle, I would have made the shift automatically. No such luck.

Years ago, living in the snow belt of New Jersey, it always seemed that the cooler weather came on like throwing a light switch. One day you walked outside and—ouch—it was markedly cooler and you got the very clear message that things had changed. However, where I live in the southern Appalachian Mountains, the shifting seasons are much more subtle, more like a constant-velocity transmission than a standard shift. While it may feel just fine to walk the dog in shorts and a t-shirt, enjoying the sunshine and gentle mountain breezes, it is another thing entirely to go riding. Last week my three-season perforated-leather jacket was still hot riding all day in it; the other day it felt great when I started, but by the time I got home it was feeling a little too air-conditioned. (OK, it was actually cold.) Along the way I stopped to add a layer, only to find that my cool-weather gear was not in the saddlebags. Standing at a scenic mountaintop pullout, I remembered removing all that stuff a few weekends ago for some early Christmas shopping at some of our favorite little touristy shops.

What had been good planning for a late-summer ride through the mountains, with lunch and shopping as a destination, had shifted into poor planning for an early-fall ride into higher elevations. Luckily, a refolded

map placed between the jacket perforations and me cut the cold breeze enough to get home—old-fashioned paper maps can't give you turn-by-turn directions or instantly reroute you if you miss a street the way GPS units do, but they cover a lot more frozen biker than a three-inch LCD screen will. That day it seemed as if the seasons had short-shifted on me, but then the next day was 80 degrees and shorts weather again. Well, that is nature after all: she is a fickle woman and you are wise to not fool with her.

Now the bike is repacked with the correct gear to handle any seasonal shift in the weather. Of course, this means I couldn't bring home much of anything from the store if I wanted to. There is maybe just enough room for a container of broccoli in spicy garlic sauce, but I will tell you another time why I will never put that in my saddlebags again. As 2007 slowly shifts from prime riding season into fall foliage, then downshifts again into winter, I am ready to respond to the changes in temperature. Gear-wise at least. But I also have to shift my riding technique and my hazard alertness. The ranks of lumbering RVs and spandex-clad bicyclists are thinning, but wet leaves and the dreaded black ice will soon replace them. And somewhere in between that shift will be the leaf lookers, driving around with their eyes, and minds, in the trees. So as the seasons and the hazards shift, keep your eyes on the road and traffic and your bike in the power band.

Cranberry Suicide Sauce

For a hothead biker like me, cranberry sauce never really did much for my taste buds, but it still evoked the Thanksgiving mood. I created this recipe to make cranberry sauce a truly fiery part of the holiday meal. Try it and you are sure to get a blast from the contrast of sweet and fire. It may even make your holiday memories that much warmer.

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1 fresh habanero pepper, stemmed, seeded, and halved
- 1 (10-ounce) package fresh cranberries

In a medium saucepan, dissolve the sugar in the water over medium heat. Add the habanero and bring to a boil. Stir in the cranberries and boil for 1 minute. Reduce the heat to low and simmer uncovered, stirring often, for 10 minutes, or until the cranberry sauce thickens. Remove the habanero halves and discard. Serve warm or chilled.

Makes 3 to 4 cups