

Fellow RAMS and RAMISSES,

I have recently engaged in such motorcycling activity to have something of interest for you to peruse, should you desire, at your leisure.

During the middle of July, as most of you know, there was a streak of very hot weather. I had been working doing farm chores, mowing, working on roads, digging and hauling gravel and other miscellaneous things that needed repair. I seemingly was in the heat constantly for a couple of weeks. I was taking daily rides in the late afternoon only to dry the sweat in my clothes, then return home. I was not getting my motorcycle riding itch, scratched. I have been wanting to just hop on and go for a weekend trip since I went to the East mountains during the July 4th holiday, where I experienced a flat tire on the way, but that's another story. All the heat was getting to me and I didn't need much of an excuse to ride anywhere cooler. I have a friend that lives within 2 miles of Wisconsin that I haven't seen lately, so I looked at the weekend weather in that area. It was forecast to be nearly 10 degrees cooler than KY. I called on Wednesday evening to ask if they were busy and whether they could stand a visit from their "ole southern boy" friend over the weekend?

They were accommodating to accept my request and I asked for a night's sleep for myself to think about it and make a final decision. Sometimes, just hopping onto the bike and going somewhere unplanned can be delightful, sometimes not. This time, I was sure, I wanted to get out of the heat! Thursday morning I arose at my usual time without an alarm at around 6:30. I didn't possess the usual excitement level for leaving on a trip, but I attributed it to my lack of confidence that I was doing the right thing. After all, those farm chores hadn't been completely caught up, but never really are. I decided, Oh well, no one on their deathbed says they wished they'd worked more! I sent a text that I was on my way.

The day trip would take almost 8 hours by Interstate and 10 hours by back roads. I had not packed nor prepared in any way. I just made up my mind that morning I was going. I usually stay prepared keeping my basic travel necessities at hand on top of my dresser. For those of you who are Marines, you can appreciate the way I sometimes operate. I decide to take off for a day, I am packed and out the door in 10 minutes. However, it did take another 15 minutes for me to check tire pressures, check oil and get rolling. By the time I had those tasks complete, I was saturated with sweat, confirming my "off the cuff" decision was the right one. Then, I tried pairing my helmet with my phone for the GPS and music and I would finally be able to get that wind therapy that I had long awaited for. My helmet would not boot up and connect with my phone. I had ridden in rain a couple of days before and it must've gotten wet and refused to work. I immediately had thoughts of, maybe this is not the best idea. I am not a superstitious guy at all, so I shrugged that off immediately. I wasn't going to let a small thing like not being able to listen to music and hear the directions being given from the GPS stop me. I would just observe the visual display and read the directional instruction on the screen. Big bubbles, no troubles!

I was off and running. I had been working a couple of bugs out of my RT over the recent weeks, having purchased a GS-911, so that was the bike I chose for this ride. The tires were good for one last trip, the oil was good for one more ride and the RT was in great shape. I trusted my steed, so off I went. The mid morning air feeling quite refreshing as I allowed all the thoughts of what I could have been doing melt away from my thought process. I focused on the ride and was truly having a fantastic experience, zooming down the road. I decided interstate would be the best way to get to my destination 500 miles away from home as I would be saving two hours at least. I set the cruise on 79 and nestled into my saddle for a pleasant ride north. All was hunky dory until I reached the intersection of I-75 and I-39 north. There was a two or three mile stretch of road construction just before reaching the intersection. The type of surface that has had old surface removal and left the grooved underlying surface deeply pitted. We've all ridden on that type surface at one time or another where the signs are posted that motorcycles should be wary. There were no signs alerting motorcyclist of this surface. It was as rough as any I'd ever encountered. I was feeling the bike begin to weave a bit and thinking, "Man, this is the worst grooved surface I've ever felt"! However, the weave became more and more pronounced. I quickly surmised that there is more to this weave happening than just a bad surface! I began thinking, flat tire. I was actually on the ramp and experiencing an immediate reaction to what a flat rear tire feels like as well as very difficult to steer. Under normal circumstances, the tire going flat would have been noticeable right away, but not with the camouflaging caused by the grooves. Therefore, it happened dangerously fast! I was barely able to get the bike slowed enough and off the road before something bad happened. Thankfully, I was safely on the shoulder of the road with only a flat tire to worry about. I keep a tool kit prepared for nearly any emergency. I unloaded everything attached to the bike so I could access my 12v plug attached to the battery. I searched the tire for the invading intrusive object to no avail. No sign of a nail or screw. Using my handy dandy little compressor, I attempted to inflate the tire only to reach 20 lbs psi. I began to worry that I had broken the bead from the rim as I fought to get the bike stopped. I had no means of soaping the tire to find the leak and couldn't hear myself think with traffic going past me at 75 mph, so I used my hand to rotate the wheel and feel for a leak. The tire was so hot, I could not touch it, plus shards of rubber were being eaten off it. I discovered the puncture fairly quickly and retrieved my handy dandy tire plug kit.

(I know, some of you would never ride on a plugged tire, but my desire to be on the side of the road for two or three hours waiting for assistance was a deciding factor to repair and get moving.) I have had 100% success rate of plugging tires during my driving lifetime and getting back on the road. The only issue with my confidence in success this time was, no rubber cement in my kit. I plugged the tire with the gooey plug only, but another dash to my confidence in the holdability of the plug was realized when I pierced the plug tool into the tire to discover the puncture was huge. The tool went in with no resistance! I quickly placed blame on the terrible surface that I had just crossed and must've caught a piece of concrete just right. My tire was on it's last leg and thinner in the middle than I would have liked. Nevertheless, I was having to deal with my choices and do an emergency repair. I plugged the tire as deeply as I could and trimmed the remainder off. I loaded the bike up again after putting everything away and proceed on my way. As I said, I have never had a plug failure and my confidence level falsely tempted me to get up to speed right away. I did reach 70 mph within about a 6 mile stretch before I felt the rear end become squirrely once again. I pulled over and inspected the tire to find that my plug was gone. I blamed it on not having rubber cement with me, but I had to deal with a repeat process within minutes of the first repair. With the second plug, I decided to leave the excess rubber of the plug and use duct tape to help hold the plug in. I know, someone is laughing about now, but it worked for a further stretch than the original attempt. I stopped every ten miles and inspected the condition of the repair. I could see that the heat build up was breaking down the adhesive along with the torque of the wheel pulling the patch off slowly. I had 134 miles to go and one plug left. I continued to nurse the repair every 10 miles traveling with my flashers on and never exceeding 50 mph. I was pleasantly surprised that the duct tape was holding up fairly well to the rigors of the conditions. I finally reached a place in the journey where I'd be exiting the freeway in 23 miles and onto rural roads before making my destination, which would still be some 35 more miles. I had begun to place enough trust in my Jury rig to tell myself I could make the exit in 23 miles and would do another inspection after the exit. Guess what? I had my third flat looking up at the exit sign! The plug had been pulled out from the road friction again. I only had about 15 seconds to get off the highway. I made my final plug repair with 35 miles to go. I sensed the last plug didn't seem as tight as the two previous ones, so I stopped every 5 miles to inspect. The road conditions became more detrimental and abrasive to my repair on the secondary roads which gave me reason for more anxiety. I could tell the plug and duct tape repair was not holding as well as previous attempts, so I slowed down to 30 mph and checked it at every stop sign and sometimes in between. I was counting down the miles and keeping my fingers crossed that the final plug would hold for just a few more miles. On my final stop for inspection, someone pulled up beside me and asked about me. During the previous 100 miles with flashers on and stopped multiple times, no one had stopped to inquire. (I suppose these days, everyone thinks the cell phone is going to rescue a stranded motorist, so there is no need to check on a stranded motorist.) While on the interstate, there must have been some Harley event going on to the East as I saw dozens of motorcycles and motorcyclist groups headed that direction. I am sad to report this, but they didn't even look at me being stranded on the other side of the road. Not even a head turn from 98% of them as I stood gazing at multiple Harley riders passing me by! On with my story. The GPS said I had 3.5 miles to go, but the roads were newly sealed chat gravel roads which wreaked havoc on my rig. I held my breath, slowed to 15 mph and rode it out. I reached my destination intact two and a half hours later than planned. I was just extremely relieved to be home free and breathed a sigh of relief and a pray of thanks to God for the protection.



The end of the story concludes with the purchase of a new tire the following day and riding back in safety on the back roads all the way home. The trip back was at least 2- 3 hour longer, but beautiful and much more relaxing than the ride up to visit my friends.