

Preparing your bike for an MOT

This is a small article on how to maximise the chances of your motorcycle passing its MOT. It's not a repair manual. I wrote it because my bike will be having its first MOT soon and I wanted to check things out myself.

The full list of what is checked is here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mot-inspection-manual-for-motorcycles>

The items to check

Lights

Make sure all your lights are working. The list is:

- Dipped beam. It must be working and also pointing downwards a bit. If it has an asymmetric beam, the side that 'kicks up' must be on the left – so a European headlight will fail unless you have fitted a conversion kit.
- Main Beam. It must work and point straight ahead.
- Side lights. If you have them, they must work.
- Indicators. Check left and right that they work and flash between 1 and 2 times per second. If you have a hazard switch, it must work.
- Rear light. Check it is on. If it's an LED one, check that all the bulbs are lit up. If it's a twin bulb display, check both bulbs are lit.
- Brake lights. Check they work when you put the front brake on and when you put the back brake on.
- Any fog lights or other added illumination must be working.
- You must have a rear reflector on the bike.
- The number plate illumination light must be working.

You must also make sure that the lights are secure (so, not hanging off by a piece of ductape) and are not obscured by anything.

Headlights must emit a white or yellow light, so if you have coloured headlight covers, remove them before the MOT.

Horn

Make sure it works when you press the horn button. If you have a two tone horn which emits notes one after another (and not together) it will fail. The regs say "it has to be loud enough to be heard by another vehicle", so a push bike bell will fail!!!

Forks and headstock

Check for any play in the head bearings. To do this, raise the front wheel off the ground and slowly rotate the bars from left to right. Can you feel any notchiness as the bars rotate? If so, your head bearings will need to be replaced. [While you are doing that, check that any additional cables or witches don't foul the movement and that the grips don't touch the tank on full lock].

Next, grab the forks by the front wheel spindle and try and move them back and forwards. Can you feel any movement? [Don't mistake form movement for centre stand movement though]. If you can, the bearings may just need to be tightened up a bit – or they may need to be replaced.

Have you added hand guards to a faired bike? If so, do the guards hit the fairing on full lock? That's an MOT failure.

Are the forks leaking oil? If so, that's an MOT failure.

Brakes

The MOT tester will put the front and then back wheel on a rolling tester and measure the braking force. He will not test ABS or the combined braking.

Things to check:

- Does the brake lever go back to the bar when you put the brakes on? If so, the bike will probably fail the MOT.
- Are the pads worn down to the wear markers? You can see this by shining a torch into the callipers and seeing if there is a few mm of brake pad showing. If so, you are probably OK. If in doubt, change them first. Note that the MOT tester doesn't look for this, but can probably guess at it from the way the bike brakes.
- Are the brake disks warped at all? Check it by raising the wheel off the ground and spinning it. You can generally hear if the disks are not true. Once again, the MOT tester can get this from the machine as he will see the gauge 'pulsing' as he puts the brakes on.
- Do the brakes actually stop the bike? The front should – the rear one will be less effective. But rolling slowly, they should both stop the bike.

Wheels and tyres

Any play in the wheel bearings are an MOT failure. So check them out.

The front and rear wheels must be aligned properly. [Personally, I've never seen an MOT inspector check this, but if your bike looks tatty, they could do so].

Tyres must have the legal tread depth and not have slits and cuts in it. Note that 'legal' means 2mm over a continuous $\frac{3}{4}$ of the width of the tyre – so a bald spot in the middle will be a fail, even if the sides are well over the limit.

They do not have to have the correct pressure for an MOT, but if they are badly underinflated, the MOT inspector could refuse to do the brake test – so check the pressure anyway.

If a tyre is on the wrong way round, that's also an MOT failure – check it by finding the arrow on the tyre and ensure that it's on right.

The chain can also fail the MOT if it's excessively loose or tight or completely knackered.

Rear suspension and swinging arm

Any play in the swinging arm bushes is an MOT failure. Check it by putting the bike on the centre stand (assuming you have one) and trying to move the swinging arm from left to right. Any play will be felt easily.

You can have some play (left to right) in the rear suspension mounting points, but that will probably get you an 'advisory'.

Make sure there are no leaks from the rear suspension and that the damping works (bounce down on the seat and check the suspension comes up just once and doesn't 'bounce').

Miscellaneous

The number plate must be legal – so tiny ones or with the letters re-arranged or additional bolts added to make a name could be an MOT failure.

The VIN number (Vehicle Identification Number) must be there somewhere – either stamped on the frame or on a plate attached to the frame.

Silencers must work and be effective (to the ear of the MOT tester – very subjective) and must not display things like “not for road use”.

The fuel cap must not leak.

Check all bolts and fixings for tightness. Make sure there is nothing hanging off (e.g. you have a screw missing on the chain guard).

Lastly - Clean it.

The MOT tester will not fail your bike if it's dirty, but he will probably look a little deeper to find faults. Make sure the bike is nice and clean.