



What a difference 25 years makes. On the left is a 1981 BMW R80G/S engine. With its cast aluminum cases and jugs, it is universally recognized as one of the toughest engines to keep clean. A three-step cleaning process is required if the goal is to try to bring the aluminum back to a bright luster or prevent it from oxidizing—although there are many who prefer the patina of a well-used engine. On the right is an engine belonging to a 2006 BMW R1200GS. These are clear coated and keeping them looking new requires little more than washing with soap and water on a regular basis.

recommend applying a coat of wax, using Plexus, or Honda Spray Cleaner. Like painted surfaces, this last step will provide a protective layer against the elements, as well as hide minute imperfections in the plastic.

Caring for Leather

Leather seats, saddlebags and grips hold up amazingly well given the abuse that they receive. Wide temperature variances, friction, UV rays, sweat and rain constantly bombard them all year around. As a result, leather needs to be cleaned and conditioned regularly. In this regard, try to think of it in the same context as your own skin: If the oils are not replenished, your epidermis will eventually dry out and crack.

Taking care of the leather parts on your bike (if applicable) should be part of your standard cleaning regimen too, and is quite simple—providing you use the right products. First, use a soft cloth and water to remove any surface dirt and grime. Then use a pH-balanced cleaner to remove dirt that's imbedded into the leather which could potentially clog the pores. Lastly, apply a pH-balanced conditioner. We prefer liquid conditioners like Lexol as opposed to creams. A quality leather conditioner is easily absorbed into the leather, replenishes oils that may have been depleted over time, and keeps the leather pliable thus protecting it from drying out. Lexol products can usually be found at better automotive specialty/part retailers.

Cleaning Engines and Chrome

When it comes to cleaning motorcycle engines, there are a variety of opinions about what techniques, methods and solvents work best. Some of the information is useful and some of it is potentially detrimental. For instance, we do not advocate warming an engine to loosen/soften any oily/greasy areas or washing a hot engine. Why? Because when the adhesive forces of a liquid exceed cohesive forces, intermolecular forces act upon the liquid. This engineering/chemistry principle is referred to as capillary action or capillarity. In laymen's terms and as it relates to washing a motorcycle, water can be pulled into the engine through seals, bolts, and gaskets. If an engine was warm/hot, the internal vacuum created as the bike cools would only magnify this effect. Therefore, we advocate using a good degreaser like Foamy Engine Bright, Simple Green or Castrol Super Clean to break down the sludge and grease.

This also minimizes the time spent "hosing down" the engine to remove the grease.

It's also important to protect sensitive engine components like spark plugs, the carburetor(s), air filter/cleaner, and electrical components and connections, to name a few. One way to do this is to use cellophane, plastic bags or tin foil (for non-electrical connections) and secure them with a rubber band before applying the solvent and washing the bike.

Generally speaking, there are three different kinds of engine finishes, each requiring a specific cleaning technique. These are rough-cast engines, those with a protective or clear coat applied over the aluminum cases, and painted or powder coated engines.

CAST ENGINES—Motorcycles with engines cast from aluminum, distinctive by their rough finish like those found on older BMW "Airhead" boxers, are probably the most difficult to clean and keep looking new. In order to dissipate heat effectively, these engines are not painted or clear coated and the "porous" alloy cases seem to be a magnet for all kinds of road debris.

We've had good results using a 3-step cleaning process when washing these engines. First, wash the engine/drive train with soap and warm water, rinse, and let the engine dry. A toilet bowl brush, stiff-bristle, wooden handle brush, or a nylon toothbrush are effective in cleaning tight areas such as in-between cylinder fins. A Scotch-Brite™ pad can also be used on particularly oily or dirty parts of the engine. SOS Pads™, on the other hand, are not recommended since these tend to disintegrate and leave behind small metal filings that will rust and stain the cases.

Once thoroughly washed, we use Simple Green, Foamy Engine Bright™ (or some other engine degreaser) or S100 Engine Restorer™ to attack the really greasy areas.

Finally, carefully spray the worst areas of the engine with Eagle One Etching Mag Cleaner (designed for non-clear coated surfaces) and work it in using a stiff-bristled brush. But be careful. This highly acidic cleaner will dull the aluminum surface if left on too long. Another solution for removing old, heavy oxidation on aluminum engines is to use kitchen Lime Away™ to strip it off. But unless you're a chemist, we do not recommend combining two or more of these techniques to clean the engine at the same time.

As noted above, it is important to treat the engine before washing the bike, so you can wash any chemicals used to clean the