



Buying a second-hand motorcycle

By Full Throttle

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Buying a second-hand motorbike

So you've decided for one reason or another to grab yourself a bargain and buy a second-hand motorbike. If you looking for the best deal, you should make sure you ask the important questions. Don't expect any owner to give you information that's not in their best interest. Prepare what you are going to say beforehand and to help you, use the form at the end of this report.

Questions to ask:-

Why are you selling the motorbike?

The answer may-be straightforward, like they just want a larger capacity bike, newer bike or just fancy a different bike altogether. On the other hand, they may have a dishonest reason for wanting to sell it. It may have been crashed, stolen or might have serious mechanical problems. Obviously if they are trying to hide something then they are not going to be honest and just tell you, so try to look for clues in their body language. See if they are acting nervous or trying to skirt around the issue. If they say they just fancy a newer motorbike, then ask them which one they want next.

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How long have they owned the bike?

If it's only a short period of time, perhaps less than a year then the owner maybe one of these people who likes to change their bike as often as they're clothes, or it could simply be due to other circumstances like the loss of a job. It could also indicate some sort of problem with the bike. If is less than a year, follow up their answer with "*didn't you like it then?*"

How many previous owners has the bike had?

Hopefully the answer will be a small number, but this depends on the age of the bike. If you base it on 4000-6000 miles a year on average and that each previous owner had it a year, then you can expect 2-3 previous owners for a bike that's travelled approximately 13500 miles. This is only a general figure and is by no means set in stone, but if there has been an extra-ordinary amount of owners, perhaps 6 or more for a 13500 mile bike then there may-be a reason why so many others sold this machine on.

This rule of thumb goes out the window with a small capacity machine, say 125cc or less because previous owners may have just used it to pass they're test on, and moved up to a larger bike.

Is the bikes mileage genuine?

The ideal answer is yes, but it's still worth asking because it's something even an honest owner might not admit too until you ask. It might of had a faulty set of clocks that he changed, or the speedo cable might have snapped at some point (if it's not electronic), or even worse may have the clocks replaced after a crash.

Is the bike reliable and has it ever let you down?

It's always worth asking this question, even though I doubt the answer will ever be "*yes, it breaks down all the time*", but more for the fact they may say it's just been serviced or repaired, in which case ask to see the receipt.

When was the bike last serviced?

If you didn't get an answer from the last question, then nows your chance. Check to see what items were serviced, and that it wasn't just for an oil change and oil filter. There are lots of items that should be on your list, like brake fluids, cables, tires, brake pads or shoes, chain and sprockets.

How many spare keys are there?

Most bikes are sold new with spare sets, just make sure you get all those keys when you buy it including any other keys if they are different from the ignition key, like the fuel tank, helmet lock and maybe seat key.

Has the bike been modified and have any aftermarket parts been fitted?

Most aftermarket parts do not increase the value of the machine, in fact most of the time they decrease the value. Having said that a lot of owners prefer the sound of an aftermarket exhaust for example, so if it's already got one fitted, then this maybe a bonus in your eyes. If it has got an aftermarket exhaust, check to see its road legal, it should be stamped with a BS number (although not all do), but it should definitely not be stamped "*not for road use*". Ask the owner if he still has the original parts, so you could refit them in the event of a problem.

Ask about any damage you can see on the bike?

Ask how each bit of damage was caused separately whilst you examine the bike. Listen for stories that don't quite add up, and don't let the owner fob you off with incomplete or vague answers.

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Does it have a current M.O.T. certificate and TAX disc?

If the tax has run out, then this isn't a major problem, but if it's got no M.O.T. then you've got to ask yourself why?

Items to look out for and check:-

- Before you listen to the motorbike running, put your hand over the engine to check if it's warm. If it is, then it might be a difficult starter from cold and the owner has pre-warmed it so you don't notice. There could also be a legitimate reason for it being warm so just ask why it's warm.
- If the bike has rubber footrest's check to see any wear corresponds to the mileage of the bike, likewise for the handlebar grips.
- Check the chain is at the correct tension and pay special attention to the wheel alignment adjustment marks on the rear spindle to see if there's more life left in the chain. Also check the teeth on the rear sprocket for wear.

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- Look at the tyres for wear, the minimum tread depth for motorbikes in the UK is 1mm. Most tyres have wear indicators built in, look on the side of the tyre for a small triangle and then look over the tread pattern at that point. You should see blocks in the grooves of the tread and these are the indicators.
- With the front brake held on, turn the steering to full lock and try and push the bike forwards and backwards. The suspension will move but try and feel for any other movement which would suggest worn head bearings.
- If the bike has a centre stand, then with the rear wheel lifted off the floor, hold the top of the wheel with one hand and the bottom with the other hand. Try to push the top and pull the bottom, then push the bottom and pull the top. If you feel any movement then the wheel bearings probably need replacing. You can do the same with the front wheel but it's a little bit more tricky to lift it off the floor. With the bike still on the centre stand ask the owner to push down on the rear of the bike and this should lift the front.
- At the same time as your checking the wheel bearings, try spinning the wheel by hand to see there is free movement and the brakes are not binding.

- Check the oil level, and then unscrew the oil the cap. Put some of the oil between two of your fingers and rub them together. Your checking to see its not gritty.
- Look for signs of damage to the frame. If it's an aluminium frame look for where the handle bars would touch if it was in a crash and see if there are any dints.
- Start the engine and listen for any unwelcome sounds. The best way to understand what your listening for is to listen to other similar bikes first.

Hints and tips:-

Never buy the first bike you look at. You need to see more than one bike so you can compare the bike you're looking at and then make a final decision. Even though the first bike you see maybe perfect, don't worry there will always be plenty of others.

Check the log book engine and frame numbers match the ones on the bike, including the registration number.

HPI the bike (www.hpicheck.com) to make sure there is no outstanding finance or that the bike hasn't been stolen.

Ask for a test ride, and if the owner refuses, then ask if he'll take you pillion.

If the owner doesn't have a log book, then walk away no matter what excuse he gives you. There will always be plenty of other bikes for sale that do have a log book. The problems it can cause is just not worth it.

Conclusion

Buying a motorbike can be a costly investment, and parting with your hard earned cash with someone you've never met before could be problematic. So it's vital you get all the information that you need to make your final decision, and hopefully come away smiling. There is a checklist on the next page to help you obtain all the necessary information.

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Question	Notes
Why are you selling the motorbike?	
How long have you owned the bike?	
How many previous owners has the bike had?	
Is the bikes mileage genuine?	
Mileage of bike	
Is the bike reliable?	
When was the last service?	
Are there any spare keys?	
Has the bike been modified, and have they got the original parts?	
Is there any cosmetic damage?	
Does it have a current M.O.T. and is there any road tax left?	M.O.T _____ months left T.A.X. _____ months left
Are the chain & sprockets in good	

condition?	
Have the tyres got plenty of tread left?	
Are the wheel and head bearings okay?	
Is there any damage to the frame?	
Does the engine sound okay?	