

Parking Hazards

By Mark Caldwell

What I am about to tell you is one of those things that sounds pretty obvious one you have read it. In fact, for many of you, this is something you know all about. But for others, it's something you just don't think about until you're in the heat of the moment, and then it might be too late. What are we talking about? Parking your bike on something other than a flat, level, solid concrete slab. There are a couple of parking situations that could set you up to return to your bike only to find it lying on its side on the ground. But they are both easy to handle if you're prepared.

The first situation, is parking on soft ground. For example, after last month's meeting we went to the ACE Picnic. When we arrived, we found that the area we were going to park in was graveled and slightly sloped. It was questionable whether the gravel by itself was going to support the side-stand. The solution? Something to place under the side-stand, like a metal plate or plastic foot, to spread out the force so not all the weight is concentrated in such a small space as the tip of the side-stand. Fortunately I had just received a special delivery that morning of a metal plate designed for just such a use. Other people came up with creative solutions such as using a crushed pop can. You could also use a notepad or a variety of other flat objects. The main point to remember is that the softer the ground, the larger and firmer the parking block you need. I have heard stories of people using the crushed pop can trick on a sandy beach only to discover, as they watched their bike tip over, that it was not sufficient. Also remember that while asphalt is nice and solid when it's cold, on a hot day it can become soft, too.

The second situation is parking your bike facing downhill. It doesn't need to be much of a slope to be a problem. It could be an almost-flat parking lot, but your space has just a slight slope, like the parking spaces outside the Bothell licensing office. Or it might be more significant where you know you're going to have to use reverse or an assistant to back out of the parking spot, such as the ocean-view parking spaces at Carkeek Park. I once had my bike fall over on a slight downhill sloped driveway that was flat enough for the side-stand to hold the bike upright just long enough for me to get off and get about a 1/2 step away before it fell over. What's happening and how do you prevent it? If you park your bike in neutral as many people are in the habit of doing, and your bike is facing downhill, the bike can roll just slightly enough to collapse the side-stand and fall over. This can even happen if you park your bike in gear but don't prepare for the roll. How do you prepare? By rolling the bike yourself. That is, you stop the bike in first gear, put the side-stand down and walk your bike forward (with the clutch released) to the point that the engaged gear stops it from rolling. Now rest the bike on its side-stand and the gearing will prevent the bike from rolling any farther. If you're not sure about the slope, this might be a good habit anyway. If the bike is actually facing uphill, it might roll just slightly back, but the side-stand won't collapse that direction. So either way you're in good shape.