Hosting and Attending Tech Days

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Photo by Gregory Ceurvorst

Taking stock of my 27 years / 300,000+ miles on two wheels, I must say that one of my favorite aspects of motorcycling is learning from others and passing down what I've absorbed to newer riders. The perfect vehicle for this is local Tech Days, which are simply organized gatherings of motorcyclists with the express purpose of learning DIY maintenance and service.

What's Involved in Tech Days

Like planning a menu for a dinner party, a Tech Day can run the gamut from a fast food chow down to a black tie gourmet affair. Some Tech Days are loosely planned meetings of a few people who are there to teach, learn, or provide support for very basic maintenance procedures. Others are multi-day symposiums, complete with in-depth presentations which clarify complex issues. Often there is a theme to a Tech Day where an expert teaches the attendees a specific task, such as how to service a clutch properly. Sometimes it's more casual, where everybody does his/her own thing, comforted by the presence of others performing similar tasks nearby. To ensure things go well, here is a short list of general suggestions:

Hosting a Tech Day

The most important aspect of hosting a Tech Day is to foster a positive learning environment which is both entertaining and informative. Some tips:

Create a General Plan: The host should conceptualize what the purpose of the Tech Day will be. Is there a special task everyone is gathering to learn about, or is it more of an open forum? Is it a one-day event, or a weekend? Are specialized tools available, or should people bring their own?

Decide On a Venue: Most Tech Days are held at the host's house, though larger ones can take place at shops, garages, or even rented spaces. The host should decide how many people his / her space can accommodate and invite people accordingly. Obviously, open spaces with a good selection of tools and lifts are preferable to a one-bay garage in the middle of a crowded apartment complex. Are there dealers locally if parts are required? Are hotels or camping spaces nearby for overnighters?

Manage Expectations: The host must manage his/her own expectations, since he/she may be so busy running the Tech Day that any work planned for his/her own motorcycle may not fit in. The host must also firmly manage the expectations of Tech Day participants in terms of what is and what is not allowed in his/her space and the neighborhood at large. Finally, the host has a responsibility where applicable to manage his community's expectations as well. Certain neighbors may not appreciate the sound of an armada of bikes storming into the development early Saturday morning. The host should notify his neighbors of the big day ahead of time, invite them if possible, and inform the attendees as to what standards of behavior are expected.

Generate Interest: The host can advertise his plans online, in print, club newsletters, word of mouth, or by other means. The information should be detailed in terms of overall plan, venue, some expectation guidelines, and any other pertinent information.

Be Prepared: The host's space needs to have the basics readily available for any mechanical work that is going to be performed: Commonly used tools, plenty of rags, rubber floor mats or cardboard to place under bikes during fluid changes, paper towels and degreasing soap in the washroom, snacks and drinks, and extra chairs where people can rest or watch the proceedings are the bare minimum items required.

Solicit Experts: In every forum or riding group, there are some experienced hands who are eager to selflessly dispense advice and teach. Some of these experts are professional, others self-taught—but they're very useful to have around during a Tech Day. The host should prepare the event in part based upon the expertise available.

Attending a Tech Day

As the host prepares for the event, the attendees also need to be aware of their own responsibilities:

Me Casa Es Su Casa: The host is opening his/her home to you, and likely his/her tool chest as well. Show your appreciation by treating the premises with respect, working neatly, and not permanently "borrowing" that fancy wrench you see lying on the tool bench. Lend a hand where it's needed. Whenever possible, be self-sufficient—bring your own tools and your own maintenance items (fluids, parts, etc.,) so that you can work with a minimum of interruption to yourself and others. If you arrive early, always help set up, and before you leave, always help clean up. Consider taking up a donation from the group for the host to cover expenses. Be courteous to any neighbors who stop in, and don't disturb the peace of the neighborhood with boorish behavior. In other words, treat the space as if it were your own.

Manage Expectations: Arrive ready to learn how to work on your own machine, or to help others. The event is not an excuse to limp your poorly running machine to the group for free service, nor should you expect your motorcycle's problems to be the center of the universe. Be honest with yourself and others about your own mechanical ability. People are more likely to help if they have an accurate assessment of what's involved with both motorcycle and rider before beginning a project. If the host is planning an 8-hour Tech Day, don't start a two-day project. Take good notes if classes are being held, for future reference. Most of all, force yourself to learn at least one new DIY task, even if it's a simple one. That's the very point of attending a Tech Day!

In conclusion, the reasons for both hosting and attending Tech Days are as numerous and varied as the individuals who participate in them. Whether for camaraderie, a serious desire to learn, a yearning to teach, or even just to hang out and put faces to screen names, Tech Days are a fantastic means to build community and interpersonal relationships between like-minded riders. Scan your favorite forums for a Tech Day near you, and if there are none planned, consider hosting one yourself. The new friends and skills you acquire will be well worth the efforts!