



We were amazed to discover that heaps of supermoto riders and racers hightail it to the dealership when it's time to flip some rubber. Twenty bucks per wheel later, plus the cost of gas to get there and back, makes us ask the question—"Why?" Are you intimidated at the prospect of bloody knuckles, afraid to pinch a tube or just plain lazy? For the cost of taking your wheels to the shop, you could've paid for all the tools needed to change your own rubber donuts. Like most things in life, you'll probably suck at it the first time you try it but don't you give up—jump right back in there cowboy and git-r-done! The key to flipping meat is learning to manipulate and control that bead. Show it who's boss. When you learn to work the bead, everybody is happy. If you fight it, that's when the cussing begins and the blood starts to flow. After almost five years and probably 100 supermoto tire changes, we've mastered it and now it's like taking candy from a baby. We got a little help from our friends at Motion Pro and K&L Supply too.

SUPERMOTO TIRE CHANGING

CONTROL THE BEAD AND CONTROL THE TIRE

PHOTOS: SCOTT HOFFMAN; PHOTO MODEL: DONNIE BALES



1 The basic tools for changing a tire: tire spoons, Motion Pro Bead Buddy, MP rim savers, MP super-accurate oil air gauge and gloves, if you wish. To make the job easier, we recommend finding an old 30-gallon oil drum and placing a rubber hose around the rim.



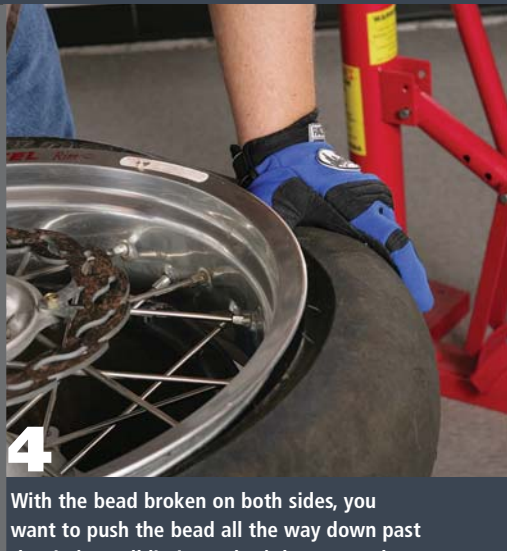
3 Bead breakers are a necessity for supermoto wheels. For years we used a vise and a 1x4 chunk of wood. We picked up this bead breaker from Harbor Freight. It was on sale for \$30 at the time. K&L Supply also carries a bead breaker.



2 Once you have your tools set out, the first step is to remove the valve stem. If your tube didn't come with a valve stem remover, you can pick one up at any auto parts store.



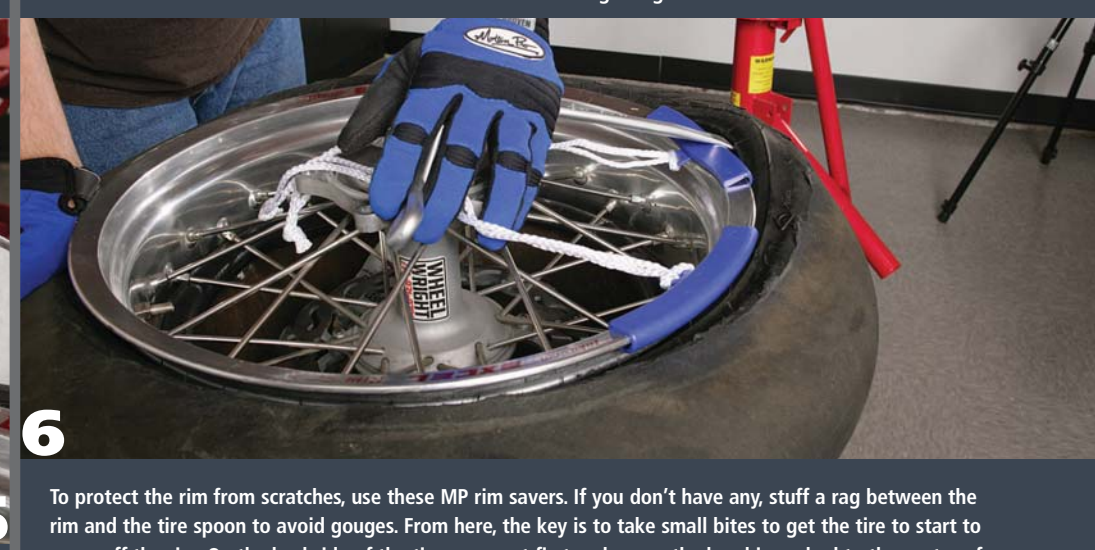
3a With the bead broken on both sides, you want to push the bead all the way down past the rim's small lip into what's known as the "drop-center" of the rim. If the bead isn't fully released on both sides, you'll fight with getting the tire off the entire time.



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5 To make life a little easier, use a soapy water solution and spray it around both sides of the tire between the rim and tire. This way the bead can easily slip to the center of the rim while you're negotiating the tire spoons.



6 To protect the rim from scratches, use these MP rim savers. If you don't have any, stuff a rag between the rim and the tire spoon to avoid gouges. From here, the key is to take small bites to get the tire to start to come off the rim. On the backside of the tire you must first make sure the bead is pushed to the center of the rim on both sides. If you have to use a lot of brute force to start the removal, odds are you don't have the bead/lip of the tire pushed past the flat part of the rim on the inside. With the first bite taken, hold that spoon in place and take the next bite with another spoon. From there, hold the first spoon in place and take small bites and start to work your way around the tire. During this step, you'll want to push your upper leg against the tire for leverage. Push it, push it real good.



7

Once you have half of the tire off one side of the rim, you can usually just pull the rest of the bead over the rim by hand. From there, if you're running tubes, remove the tube from the tire as shown. Make sure to inspect the tube for damage or wear if you plan to reuse it.



8

With one side over the rim edge, flip the entire wheel over and place it back on the drum. With a little push, most supermoto tires can be pushed off by hand. If not, use your tire spoon and wedge it between the tire and the rim and push down to get the first edge over the rim. Once it starts to come off, it should just flop down on the ground.



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With the tire removed, always inspect the rim for nicks, cracks and anything that might damage the tire or puncture the tube. If you use tape to cover spoke nipples, make sure it hasn't worn through. If it has, you'll either want to replace it or run a few more layers over the existing tape.

Most tires are directional, meaning they like to go one way. An arrow will indicate the direction of the tire; make sure you're aware which side your wheel is facing. You always want to install a tire with the rear sprocket facing down on the drum. This way you can help avoid bloody knuckles if your hand slips during installation.



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In most cases, it doesn't take any tools to get the tire on the rim initially. Place a little lube on the bottom side of the bead and push the tire onto the rim at a slight angle. A few shoves and it's on. If the tire is used, it might take a little tire spoon persuasion. For tube rims, we like to install the tube in the tire before we push it onto the rim. It just makes life a lot easier.



12

Before you even think of peeling the tire over the final edge, stop. Position the valve stem in the valve stem hole by sliding the tire back and forth to center it. Thread a nut on the tip of the valve stem so it doesn't get sucked back into the wheel. Also, most tires have a yellow dot located on them. This yellow dot indicates the lightest side of the tire. Line the dot up with the valve stem, which is the heaviest side of the wheel.



13

Now we're ready to finish the job. Again, controlling the bead on both sides is the hot ticket. If the edge of the tire isn't in the drop-center and on the edge of the rim, you'll fight the tire and it will win. First, push the edge of the tire over the rim by hand as far as possible. From there, snap in a Motion Pro Bead Buddy. This is one handy tool and it's like having three hands. The Bead Buddy holds the tire in place.



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With part of the tire over the edge, it's now time for the tire spoons. This is the second place we use the MP rim savers. Using the spoons, take small bites and start to work the edge of the tire onto the rim. Don't yank the spoons over much past 90 degrees because this is how you pinch tubes. If it starts to get really tough, it's usually because the bead is still on the flat edge of the rim. Push the areas of the tire that have already been peeled over down into the center of the rim and also pull the underside of the tire up and try to get the edge squeezed into the center of the rim as well.

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15

If you keep the bead pushed down, it shouldn't take a lot of force to get the last portion of the tire on. Again, small bites as you work your way around the tire. Also, make sure you never end at the valve stem on a tube rim; you'll run the risk of pinching the tube. If a small section is hung up just before you get the entire tire on the rim, a little smack with a rubber mallet or a firm push with the palm of your hand will finish it off.



16a

Hopefully, the tire went on fast enough that the little bit of lube you put on the bead didn't dry up. You should now be ready to install the valve stem and pump up the tire. If you're doing it with a hand pump, good luck. One of those cheap 12-volt car cigarette lighter air pumps will do the job much better. Wear safety glasses when airing up a tire and keep your hands and fingers away from the bead because when it sets, it can be a little violent and loud.

With the bead popped in on both sides, air down the tire to around 27 pounds. Recheck the pressure in about an hour. Then, when you're at the track, set the tire to the desired hot or cold pressure. Having a quality gauge like this oil-filled unit from Motion Pro is important. A few pounds of pressure can make a huge difference in handling. We've seen cheap gauges be off by 5 pounds.



17



16b

This is what happens when you don't wear eye protection; you get a face full of tire ooze when the bead finally pops over the lip and seats the bead.



18

Every motorcycle enthusiast should have one of these in his or her house. If you ride moto, supermoto or have any spoked wheels, a truing stand will save your butt. This vital piece of equipment from K&L Supply not only acts as a truing stand but it's also a wheel balancer.



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With a gravity balancer, a wheel will tell you where the heavy side is by swinging back and forth until it's pointing down. Using small lead weights that you can pick up from K&L or most auto supply stores, add weight until the wheel fails to drop or move from any position.



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Beading up tubeless tires can be a real pain in the ass. Having an air compressor with a load of pressure and volume helps, but not all the time. We've gone as far as using two ratcheting tie downs in the center of the tire to squeeze it and help it take air. As soon as it starts to build pressure, remove the tie down and finish airing her up.

This is a tire tool from K&L Supply that does a better job than a tie down to bead up a tubeless wheel. Same concept but it has straps to help center the device on the tire.

Although this process appears to be a lot of work or a real pain in the rear, it's not a difficult task once you get a few under your belt. We think it's easier than changing a motocross tire because there are no rim locks to mess with. Follow these directions and make sure you remember that if you don't control the bead of the tire, the tire controls you. If you're fighting a tire, it's almost always because the bead has pushed its way up to the edge of the rim and isn't in the drop-center of the rim. Good luck! Motion Pro: 650.594.9600, motionpro.com; K&L Supply: 408.727.6767, klsupply.com



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