**You're riding along, it's a beautiful day, and your motorcycle is cruising along beneath you.**

Then all of a sudden, it's not. Maybe it popped or sputtered once, but the bottom line is you're coasting to the side of the road.

"What'll I do now?" you think.

Here's a brief look at what you need to know.

First and foremost, make sure you are safely pulled off to the side of the road or on the shoulder. Hanging out in the middle of the pavement is usually a recipe for disaster.

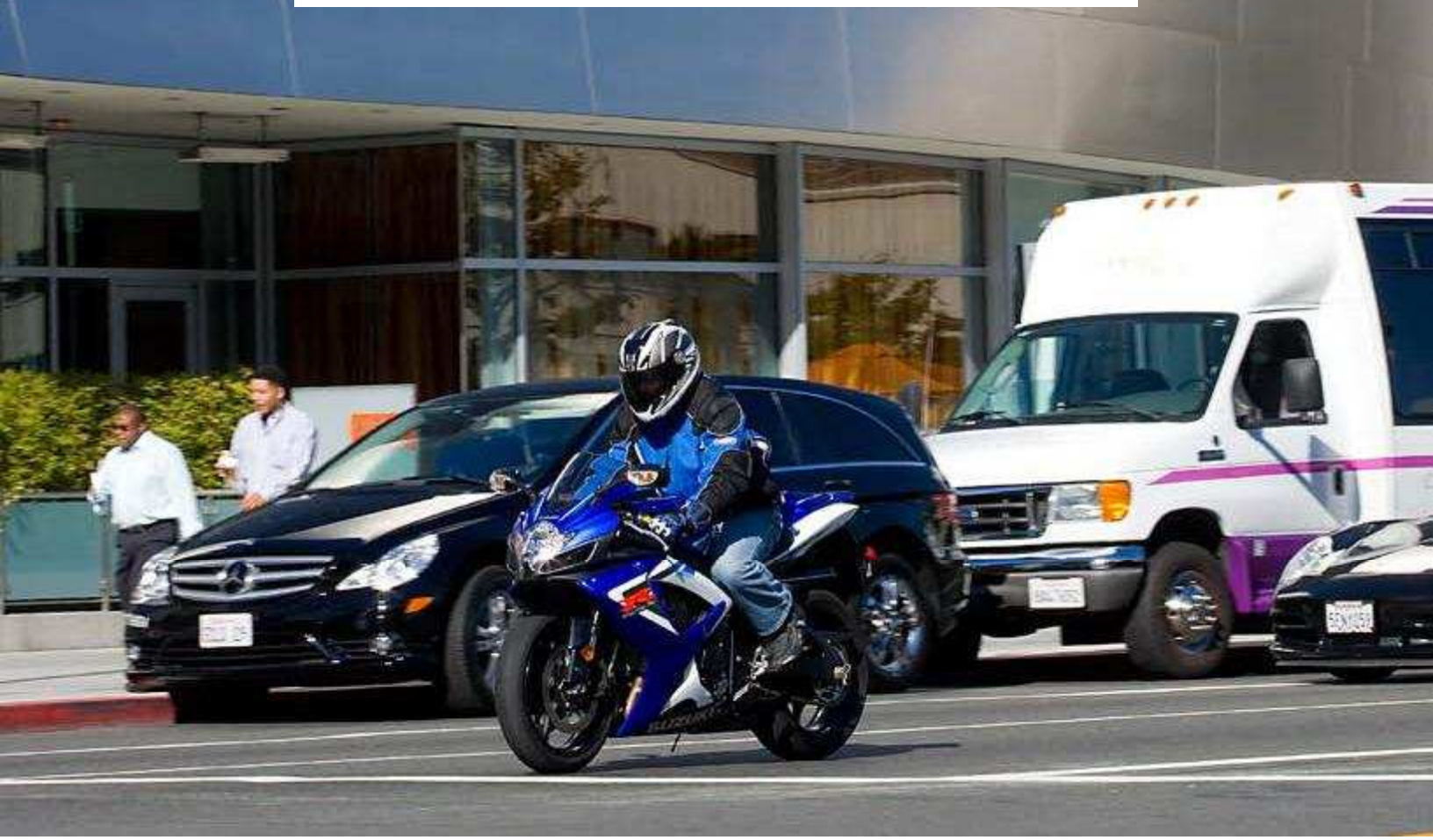
Then, it's time to take stock.

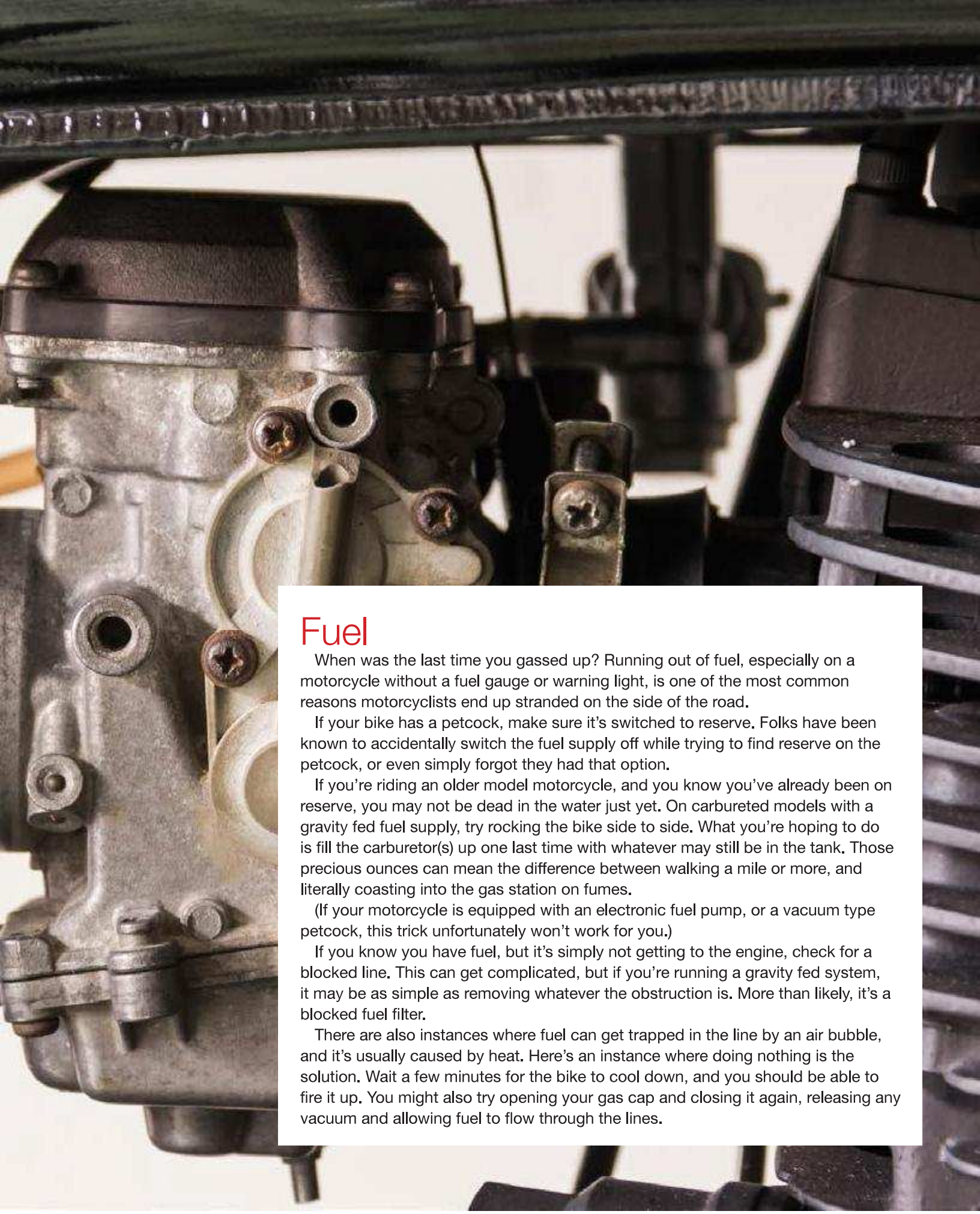
First, modern motorcycles are so reliable that if one stops working, it's most likely going to be something you can't fix on the side of the road. In that case, you're best tool is your cell phone and AMA Roadside Assistance.

(Don't have AMA Roadside Assistance? AMA members get it for no additional charge by purchasing three-year memberships or by electing to auto-renew. Call (800) 262-5646 to sign up.)

Still, there are a few things worth checking, and one of them just might get you back on the road.

Your motorcycle engine needs three basic things to run: fuel, electricity and air. Consider looking at each of these components individually to see if there is simple to fix.





# Fuel

When was the last time you gassed up? Running out of fuel, especially on a motorcycle without a fuel gauge or warning light, is one of the most common reasons motorcyclists end up stranded on the side of the road.

If your bike has a petcock, make sure it's switched to reserve. Folks have been known to accidentally switch the fuel supply off while trying to find reserve on the petcock, or even simply forgot they had that option.

If you're riding an older model motorcycle, and you know you've already been on reserve, you may not be dead in the water just yet. On carbureted models with a gravity fed fuel supply, try rocking the bike side to side. What you're hoping to do is fill the carburetor(s) up one last time with whatever may still be in the tank. Those precious ounces can mean the difference between walking a mile or more, and literally coasting into the gas station on fumes.

(If your motorcycle is equipped with an electronic fuel pump, or a vacuum type petcock, this trick unfortunately won't work for you.)

If you know you have fuel, but it's simply not getting to the engine, check for a blocked line. This can get complicated, but if you're running a gravity fed system, it may be as simple as removing whatever the obstruction is. More than likely, it's a blocked fuel filter.

There are also instances where fuel can get trapped in the line by an air bubble, and it's usually caused by heat. Here's an instance where doing nothing is the solution. Wait a few minutes for the bike to cool down, and you should be able to fire it up. You might also try opening your gas cap and closing it again, releasing any vacuum and allowing fuel to flow through the lines.

# Electrical

Modern motorcycles have worked out most electrical gremlins by way of reliable solid-state components.

Still, fuses are still found on bikes, and occasionally they short out, wear out or become loose.

If you haven't purposely included an extra fuse in your tool kit, bikes often come with a spare or two attached to the back of the fuse cover. If you're still coming up empty, replace the blown fuse with a fuse from a non-essential component to get you home.

Blown fuses can knock out all kinds of electronic components, not just the ignition. They can affect fuel pumps, for example. That familiar whine when you turn the key on? That's the fuel pump. If you don't hear it, the fuse for the fuel pump may be blown.

Also, remember that following the recommended maintenance schedule for your motorcycle can help prevent one of the most common causes of electrical failure - a tired or neglected battery. Make sure your battery has the proper amount of electrolyte before heading out.

There's a simple check for batteries. Does the engine crank when you hit the starter? If the starter engages and turns the engine over, it's not the battery.

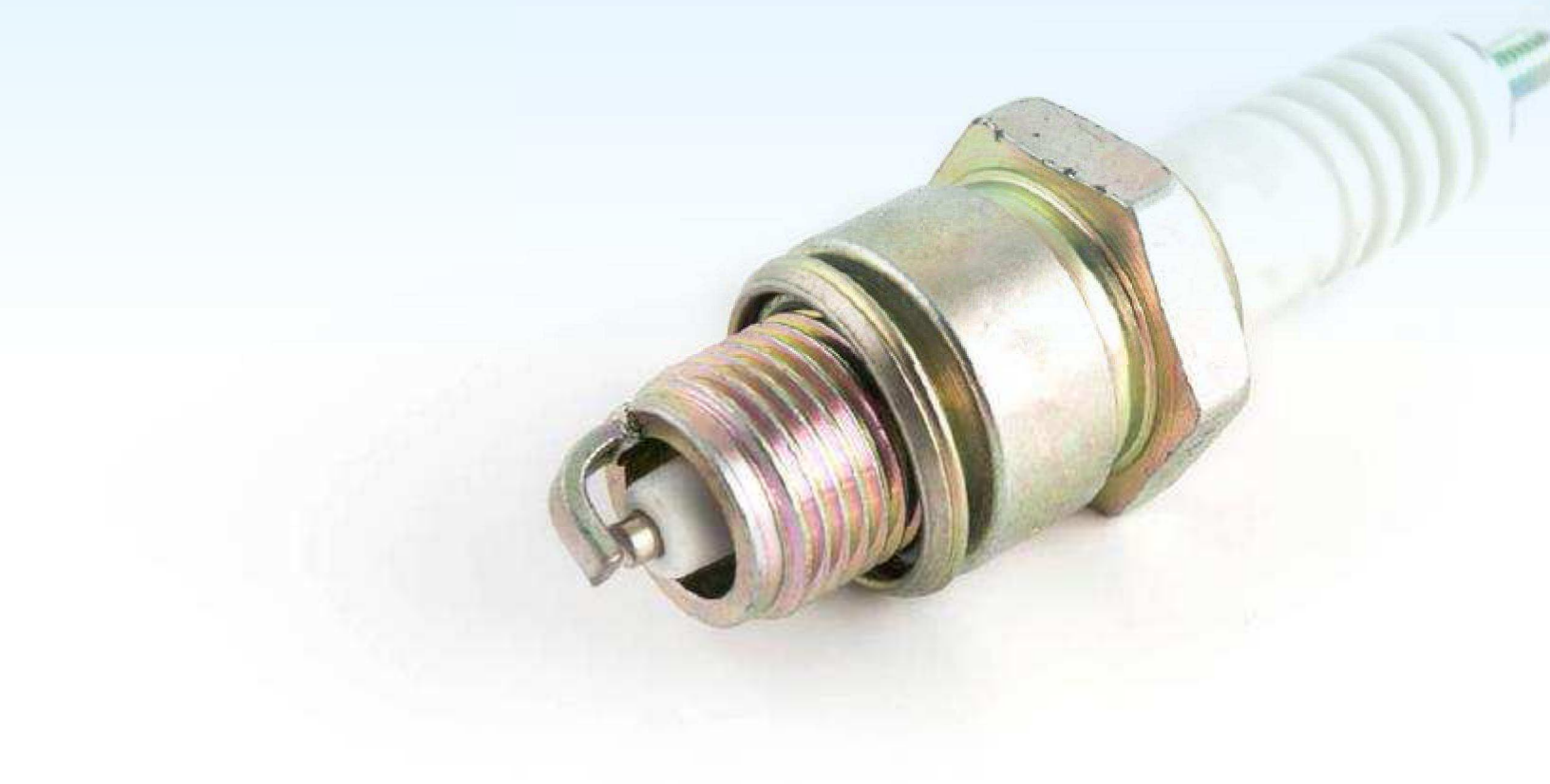
If you press the starter button and nothing happens, check to see that the battery is still hooked up correctly.

If your battery is behaving properly, check to see if you're getting a spark.

To do that, you'll need to know where your spark plugs are, and you'll need to have a tool to get one out. Most motorcycles come with a small tool kit that includes a spark plug wrench.

After removing the plug, reconnect the spark plug wire and lay the plug next to the spark plug hole. You want to be able to see the electrode end, but make sure the metal part of the plug is touching a metal part of the engine. Turn the engine over and look for a spark.

If you get nothing, the problem probably isn't something you're going to fix on the side of the road. The simplest culprit would be a loose ground wire, but even that may require you to remove significant pieces of body work. If you have extra spark plugs, you could try those, but on a multi-cylinder bike, it would be extremely rare for all of the plugs to go bad at once. Even bad spark plugs can still create a bright spark.



# Air

Air is the third factor needed to keep you happily motoring down the road, and this is another case of preventive maintenance. If your air filter gets clogged, the engine can't breathe.

This is not likely to occur suddenly, though, and can be readily avoided by following your bike's maintenance schedule.

Indeed, regular maintenance is the real key to avoiding unexpected stoppage of any kind.

If you're noticing a recurring theme, here, that's it: take care of your bike before it breaks. Nearly all of these problems can be avoided with regular check-ups.

If all else fails, your best solution will be AMA Roadside Assistance, which covers all the motorcycles, cars and trucks in your household.