

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of June 26, 2017 – Motorcycle Safety

I must confess that when it comes to motorcycles, I am far from being a subject-matter expert. As a matter of fact, outside of being a passenger on a motorcycle, my experience is quite limited; although I must admit, going 80 mph on California's Pacific Coast Highway, with the Ocean's breeze flowing through my hair (obviously a long, long, long time ago) was a rush. So lacking true expertise, I turned to an article from a Consumers Report Story written in April 2013. The following is based on information found in this commentary.

Yes, motorcycles are fun and fuel efficient. But the reality is they are also way more dangerous than a car. The cold fact is, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), motorcyclists are 30 times more likely to die in a crash than people in a car. And nearly half of all motorcycle deaths are the result of single-vehicle crashes.

Today we see older people, who are either first time riders or returning to motorcycling after many years. Because of slower reflexes, weaker eyesight, more brittle bones, and other disadvantages, riders over 60 years old are three times more likely to be hospitalized after a crash than younger ones.

The key to optimizing your odds is to be prepared and avoid risks. Here's an FYI: 48 percent of fatalities in 2010 involved speeding, while alcohol was a factor in 42 percent. Eliminate these factors and you've dramatically reduced your risk. Here are some more tips to help you stay safe on two wheels....

Don't buy more bike than you can handle. If you've been off of motorcycles for a while, you may be surprised by the performance of today's bikes. Even models with small-displacement engines are notably faster and more powerful than they were 10 or 20 years ago. Make sure you look for a bike that fits you. When seated, you should easily be able to rest both feet flat on the ground without having to be on tiptoes. Handlebars and controls should be within easy reach. Choose a model that's easy for you to get on and off the center stand; if it feels too heavy, it probably is. A smaller model with a 250- to 300-cc engine can make a great starter or commuter bike.

Invest in antilock brakes. Now available on a wide array of models, antilock brakes are a proven lifesaver. Data shows that motorcycles equipped with ABS brakes are 37 percent less likely to be involved in a fatal crash than bikes without it. Locking up the brakes in a panic stop reduces a rider's ability of any steering control. That can easily lead to a skid and crash, which can result in serious injury. ABS helps you retain steering control during an emergency stop, and it can be especially valuable in slippery conditions.

Hone your skills. Experts strongly advise to find a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) riding course in your area. An MSF course (or similar class) can teach you the basics, as well as advanced techniques, such as how to perform evasive emergency maneuvers. The cost ranges from free to about \$350. An approved safety course may make you eligible for an insurance discount and, in some states, to skip the road-test and/or the written test as part of the licensing process.



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Use your head. Yes, helmets are an emotional topic for some riders, but the facts show the risk. According to government studies, riders without a helmet are 40 percent more likely to suffer a fatal head injury in a crash and are three times more likely to suffer brain injuries than those with helmets. When Texas and Arkansas repealed their helmet laws, they saw a 31- and 21-percent increase in motorcycle fatalities, respectively. A full-face helmet that's approved by the Department of Transportation is the best choice. (Look for a DOT certification sticker on the helmet.)

Wear the right gear. Jeans, a T-shirt, and sandals are recipes for a painful disaster on a bike. Instead, you want gear that will protect you from wind chill, flying bugs and debris, and, yes, lots of road rash if you should slide out. For maximum protection, go for a leather or other reinforced jacket, gloves, full pants, and over-the-ankle footwear, even in summer. Specially designed jackets with rugged padding and breathable mesh material provide protection as well as ventilation for riding in warm weather. You'll also want effective eye protection; don't rely on eyeglasses or a bike's windscreen. Use a helmet visor or goggles. And keep in mind that car drivers who have hit a motorcycle rider often say they just didn't see them, so choose gear in bright colors.

Be defensive. A recent study by the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research found that in collisions involving a motorcycle and a car, car drivers were at fault 60 percent of the time. So, you need to be extra alert, especially in this age of epidemic phone use and texting behind the wheel. Keep an eye out for cars suddenly changing lanes or pulling out from side streets. And don't tailgate; keeping a safe following distance is critical, both to ensure you have enough stopping distance and so you have time to react to obstacles in the road. An object that a car might easily straddle could be a serious hazard when on a bike.

Avoid bad weather. Slippery conditions reduce your margin for error. Rain not only cuts your visibility but reduces your tires' grip on the road, which can make cornering tricky. If you need to ride in the rain, remember that the most dangerous time is right after precipitation begins, as the water can cause the roads' oil residue to rise to the top. And avoid making sudden maneuvers. Be especially gentle with the brakes, throttle, and steering to avoid sliding. When riding in strong side winds, be proactive in anticipating the potential push from the side by moving to the side of the lane the wind is coming from. This will give you some leeway in the lane, should a gust nudge you.

Watch for road hazards. A motorcycle has less contact with the pavement than a car. Sand, wet leaves, or pebbles can cause a bike to slide unexpectedly, easily resulting in a spill. Bumps and potholes that you might barely notice in a car can pose serious danger when on a bike. If you can't avoid them, slow down as much as possible before encountering them, with minimal steering input. Railroad tracks and other hazards should be approached as close to a right angle as possible, to reduce the chances of a skid.

Be ready to roll. Before each ride, do a quick walk-around to make sure your lights, horn, and directional signals are working properly. Check the chain, belt, or shaft and the brakes. And inspect the tires for wear and make sure they're set at the proper pressure. When tires are under-inflated, steering can be really hard.

I don't have any problems in life, just situations.

Evel Knievel

