

# RIDE YOUR RIDE

By Peggy Bogaard-Lapp

It is always time to get serious about the safety of your ride. Across the U.S. during May, Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month tries to bring attention to riding safety year-round—not just in the coming summer months. Colorado boasts enough sun that you can see motorcycles on the street nearly all year, as long as the sun is shining and roads are (mostly) dry.

Our state has the perfect everything for riding; weather, roads, places to see, and many biker-friendly destinations. Motorcycles have become more prevalent and are more affordable today than they have been in the past. Since nearly half a million new bikes are purchased each year by both men and women, the numbers of riders on our streets is growing. There are three wheelers, scooters, and sport bikes that are all quickly becoming more popular. However, only three percent of the total vehicles on the road are motorcycles and this makes it a more hostile riding environment than ever before.

Since there are more riders and drivers on the streets, the chances of colliding with a car or truck have increased, quite a bit for motorcyclists of all types. Motorcyclists cannot depend on other drivers to see us, be aware of us, or accommodate those of us on bikes. It is up to us to ride defensively. Many accidents are preventable, and the best way to ride is to ride prepared.

## RIDING DEFENSIVELY

The most important defensive riding technique is to pay attention. Pay attention and be ready for anything to happen. Always be looking and aware of everything around you—front and back, left and right, near and farther away. Keep looking ahead twelve seconds and make your assessments of road signals and signs, road conditions, and other vehicles, including vehicles in driveways. This is something that should be made into a habit.

According to Motorcycle Operator Safety Training (MOST) statistics, 1 in 4 motorcycle riders do not actually have an endorsement on their driver's license. That means 25% of the bikes you see on the road have an operator that has not passed a test demonstrating their understanding of how to ride a bike, the rules of the road, and how to be a responsible rider. If you are one of those riders, do yourself a favor and take a riding course, it is fun. When you finish you can take your completion certificate to the DMV and get your endorsement for a few dollars and no additional testing required.



## SKILLS FOR SKULLS

The best way to increase your safety as a rider is to take a training course. Today, most rider training programs have advanced rider training along with comprehensive beginner instruction. If you haven't looked at what is available recently, take another look. Since training can make a very big difference for a rider and their safety no matter how many years they have been riding.

These courses aren't just for beginners anymore. Both intermediate and advanced courses are available and you can do many of them on your own motorcycle. They are also quite affordable and many offer group and/or private classes and some offer discounts if you get an intermediate or advanced group together. If you took a course years ago, consider advanced training, it can help you stay a good rider and become a better one and it might just save your life.

There are many local area options, including ABATE, Full Throttle Academy in Thornton, or The Motorcycle Rider Training Center in Lakewood.

## DISTRACTION

It would be nice if we could but we really cannot always blame other drivers. While we want the car drivers, to be



aware of bikes and to not text, eat, apply makeup, play with their phones-- or anything else that takes their eyes off the road. We have to be more aware of how we ride as well. We need to know how to avoid accidents and make it to our destinations.

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) 2016 campaign is focusing on better awareness of car and truck drivers. They want drivers to go beyond the "look twice" message. Take Action Against Distraction, like the Look Twice campaign, is aimed to increase the consciousness of everyone that we all need to ride and drive responsibly.

## TRAFFIC LANES

To "optimize your lane position" is a catch phrase, but essential when riding on a multi-lane highway. Think of the lane as being divided into three sections, or smaller lanes. The far left, or blocking lane, is generally the best for overall visibility and maneuverability to avoid other vehicles. The center can be less safe if there is debris, oil or other compounds on the road. However, that center area is often the smoothest on wide open roads and highways. Using the far right can make you more visible to oncoming cars entering the road. Keep in mind that every ride is different and things can change quickly. Being prepared and having experience and training is your best safeguard.

## LEATHER NOT LACE

While wearing black is certainly the coolest look, consider wearing a reflective patch or a bright color to increase your visibility to drivers. Always ride with your gear, especially good boots - never with flip flops, unless you want to lose that little toe! Dress for the ride, but prepare for an accident. Anyone who has gotten a scuff on their leather knows that it is better to have the leathers hit the pavement than the skin. Levi's will shred once you hit the pavement, and the next layer is your skin so chaps or Kevlar jeans can protect you. Quality gloves are another must, for adequate protection.

"Just in case" pretty much sums up how all ride preparation can be described. Sure, many times you won't need that protective gear but there may very well come a day that you do need it. Keep an eye on quality for your gear. The quality of that gear is important if it protective gear. Sometimes spending just a few dollars more on those boots, jackets, chaps, protective pants and helmets can sometimes make a big difference in the quality.

## CRANIUM CANDY

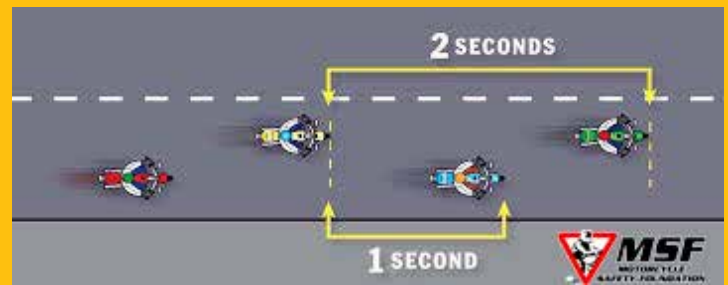
Helmets are a personal choice, and each year the styles get better, they provide better coverage and better protection and more comfort. It is essential to feel safe when you ride and a good helmet can help you feel more comfortable. Shop around and choose the best helmet for you. Choose a helmet for its protection and for proper fit and comfort. The best fit holds tight to your cheeks, jaw, and holds firm to your head.

Currently there are certifications by Snell Memorial Foundation (SNELL) and by the Department of Transportation (DOT) that indicate a helmet is designed for safety. Both ratings verify helmets through vigorous testing and high

standards. A SNELL rating on a helmet means that the helmet has tested to a higher impact standard than the DOT standard but both are good safety standards. Look for the endorsement decal from either SNELL or DOT on new helmets - stay away from used helmets, and helmets without DOT or SNELL certifications and any helmet labeled "novelty" since those helmets are not made to any standard of safety at all.

## STATISTICS SUCK

None of us wants to be a statistic, but too many riders end up as one. During 2014 seventy-nine percent of the fatalities of motorcycle riders involved only the motorcycle and no other vehicle. We are our own worst enemies sometimes-- not the cage drivers, not the texting teenagers or otherwise distracted drivers. Those statistics also show that many riders set themselves up by riding impaired or under the influence. Again during 2014, sixty-nine percent of fatalities were determined to have the rider to be "at fault" and whether you want to hear it or not, sixty-three percent of those fatalities were not wearing a helmet.



## GROUP FORMATION

Riding in a group can be fun, but also takes practice. Use hand signals to communicate with your group, to warn of road hazards, upcoming stops, or to signal the need to ride single file while passing an obstacle. Stay in a zig-zag formation, giving each rider space to react if needed. Use one lane for your group, rather than take over several on the road, so cars can safely pass you. If you see a car that indicates they want to pass, open a gap and let them pass. Stay with your group - don't leave everyone guessing as to where you are headed or why you are racing a mile ahead of everyone. But don't be afraid to separate if the group is going too fast for your skills or if it would not be safe for you to follow. Ride within your skillset, not in competition with other riders.



## NO-BRAINERS

- Do not tailgate. Be aware of your cushion of space, and how fast you (don't) stop. Since car drivers usually can not accurately gauge or guess how fast a motorcycle is going, obey the speed limit. Many accidents are

caused by speeding bikes that a car driver inaccurately judges to be going slower, pulling out in front of the bike and well, you know the rest. Make eye contact with drivers when possible, to verify they see you.

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- Take responsibility for your own safety. Riding impaired puts everyone at twice the risk. Don't risk it with drugs or alcohol, it just isn't worth it.
- Aggressive cornering is another frequent cause of accidents. Slow down and only ride within your ability. Remember, gravity will win – every time.
- Risky driving is always a bad idea, especially riding wheelies and cutting in and out of traffic on the highway.

## SEE YOUR PATH, SEARCH, EVALUATE, EXECUTE.

Consider the entire area around a car as the blind spot, and ride as if you are invisible to the driver. Even when drivers are scanning the road, they often don't recognize a motorcycle because they are not looking for it. Make yourself visible with clothing, have your headlight on, use your horn if necessary, and ride using the SEE method. Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) promotes the Search-Evaluate-Execute strategy (SEE) to judge situations while riding, and have the ability to react to hazards.

- Search – visually recognize the area around you and ahead of you, by examining the situation and obstacles, checking mirrors, watching for traffic signals and signs.
- Evaluate – Anticipate and be ready for all types of incidents. Is the car approaching the light going to stop? Is the curve ahead tighter than you think? Is the



road filled with grooves and potholes that can cause an accident?

- Execute – Assert the proper action in response to the situation. Adjust your speed (maybe increase it), take an evasive maneuver, or simply honk or wave to get a driver's (or pedestrian's) attention.

You may have to give up your right of way, or change your route, but those are small concessions to give to remain safe.

All Colorado riders are part of our fun-loving and responsible two-wheel family, and we don't want to lose anyone. If you don't have your endorsement—please go get it! Visit our training and testing advertisers in the Biker Friendly Directory

The road is not entirely a danger zone, but going with your eyes open and the right attitude, can lead you to some great places. Ride safe!

Source: 2015 MOST Annual Report

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