

Safety Corner (March 2008)

Not to take away from you dedicated readers of *Enthusiast* and *H.O.G. Tales*, there are several other sources of safety information for the year-round motorcycle rider. As a primer for those of you spending these less-than-ideal riding days participating in activities that usually involve a couch and a “clicker,” here are some highlights and excerpts from recent issues of *American Motorcyclist*, the magazine of the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA). (Hint: if you’re not already a member, consider joining, because that’s about the only way you’ll ever see the magazine!)

“Yeah, it’s that time of year again: winter, which offers its own challenges when it comes to riding a motorcycle. Aside from the obvious tips, such as dressing warmly, watching for early signs of hypothermia and being careful around slick tar strips, remember this biggie: **Cold weather cuts your reaction time on the bike**, both in terms of how quickly you can perceive danger, and how quickly chilled hands and feet can react. Play it smart and leave a wider margin of safety on the road when the mercury dips (*Overthinking It...*, January 2008, p. 14).”

“You’ve probably heard the common-sense warnings to take it easy for the first couple of miles of a ride, and for good reason. It takes a while for your mind, body and tire temperatures to come up to speed. But **it’s worth being mindful of the dangers of the final few miles**, too. That’s when you’re tired, mentally dull, and the familiar surroundings close to home can lull you into a false sense of security. Work to keep your mind in the game until after your kickstand is down in the garage (*Overthinking It...*, February 2008, p. 16).”

“If you’re one of those riders whose local climate requires a bit more time off the bike than you’d like in the winter, you’ll soon be back on the road full-time after a season of low-mileage riding. Do yourself a favor and **take the time to come up to speed both mentally and physically** as you spend more time on the bike. A great pre-season drill is simple: Find an empty parking lot and practice your hard braking, swerving and weaving. And don’t forget to re-train your brain to think motorcycle after all those dulling car miles (*One Good Tip*, March 2008, p. 23).”

For those of you interested in what your tax dollars are being spent on, you may want to check out the new motorcycle safety initiative being unveiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), available at www.nhtsa.gov/motorcycles. The NHTSA action plan will include evaluating the results of a comprehensive study into the causes of motorcycle crashes (the first in more than 25 years!), developing national standards for motorcycle rider training, amending DOT motorcycle helmet standards, offering guidance for highway officials to increase motorcycle safety through better roadway design, creating training and education programs for police on enforcement efforts, and marketing a “Share the Road” campaign kit (*NHTSA Unveils Motorcycle Action Plan*, January 2008, p. 18).

NHTSA’s analysis of motorcycle crashes revealed some “ah-ha!” as well as some “well, duh!” moments, among them:

- 35 percent of all fatal two-vehicle motorcycle crashes result from a car or truck driver violating the motorcyclist’s right of way;
- 25 percent of the crashes were the result of riders speeding;
- 15 percent of the riders failed to stay in the proper lane or ran off the road;

- 13 percent of the motorcyclists used their brakes to try to avoid a crash;
- 6 percent of the riders tried to swerve to avoid a crash;
- 9 percent of the motorcyclists were under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication;
- 5 percent of the riders were operating their bikes “in an erratic or reckless manner;”
- And almost a quarter of the riders who were killed didn’t have a motorcycle license

According to *American Motorcyclist*, this points out that we need to “maintain control of your motorcycle, practice crash-avoidance maneuvers, get a license, don’t speed, and don’t drink and ride. Oh yeah, and watch out for the other guy (*Federal Study Notes Crash Factors*, January 2008, p. 19).”

Finally, under the rubric of “It’s worse than you think,” some really frightening statistics about distracted drivers and what they are doing when they multi-task behind the wheel should give every motorcycle rider pause (and reasons to be ready for evasive action at any moment!):

- 10 percent of drivers have done work-related tasks while driving, either by reviewing notes, talking on the phone or using a computer;
- 18 percent have applied makeup while driving;
- 32 percent of drivers admit to having read while driving;
- 39 percent have tended to children while driving;
- 51 percent say they use a cell phone while driving;
- 70 percent admit to eating while driving.

And this information was obtained through a survey conducted by the industry group Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, which means the numbers could be even higher if respondents were less-than-honest about their answers (*More Evidence of Distracted Drivers*, March 2008, p. 22). Be careful out there!

-- Greg Drake
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