

## Influences

Although we can't help but be influenced by people, situations and emotions while we're out riding, we can recognize how these influences both increase risks and hinder our enjoyment of "knees in the breeze and bugs in the teeth." Knowledge is power, so recognize what influences how you react to –

Traffic: The type of traffic you find yourself in (flowing easily or frantic) can influence how mentally sharp you are; the trick is to stay vigilant regardless.

Tailgaters: The increased likelihood of being rear-ended is the biggest risk of having a tailgater behind you; adjust your mood and pace to prevent frustration from influencing your better judgment.

Peer Pressure: It's easy for riders to get "sucked in" to doing things that they know aren't considerate or smart; resist these negative influences through awareness and self-discipline.

Looking the Part: One of the most obvious displays of peer influence is riding gear; you will find yourself being influenced simply by the style of motorcycle you ride or the type of riding you do. Do not consider it an option (wearing your protective gear) because you might stand out as the oddball in the group.

New Riders: A motorcycling "upstart" asks you for advice – your answer may influence critical decisions, so measure what you say carefully. You'll also likely be asked what motorcycle you'd recommend, which may cause you to gauge your response on what works for you, but not necessarily for the other rider.

Mechanical Influences: When choosing a motorcycle, consider the bike's character – modern sporting motorcycles have aggressive styling and seductive power, while cruisers and large touring bikes encourage a more relaxed attitude.

Emotions and Fatigue: Daydreaming, missing clues about hazards, or having difficulty with simple maneuvers are all signs to watch for. Boredom can increase risk (you're not being challenged by an overly familiar environment or when riding on long

stretches of highway) – task underload and dulled awareness can lull a rider into a “trance.” Physical discomfort can influence how you feel.

Perceptions: Many riders have an inaccurate view of their riding ability that can influence their attitude toward skill development.

Alcohol: Mental skills are often affected well before we notice any deterioration of control skills. Alcohol causes peripheral vision to narrow and focus to become sluggish. The most dangerous aspect of drinking and riding is how alcohol reduces inhibitions and clouds judgment. Anxiety increases the inhibitions that are decreased by alcohol – anxiety (e.g., is that a police car there by the side of the road?) is probably very appropriate.

Fear: Fear plays an important role in keeping us safe – normal and necessary to have some anxiety about your well-being, but excessive fear can impede good judgment and make riding less safe. It can also lead to higher risk if a rider fixates on what they fear (e.g., cornering). A close call or a crash can cause residual fear long after the incident occurred. Finally, being nagged by well-meaning family members can seem like a pain, but this influence can be a good thing if it leads to a safety-oriented mindset.

Bottom line: be aware of these influences and act to minimize their negative effects. (*Adapted from Motorcycle Consumer News articles “Influences” by Ken Condon and “I’ll Drink To That!” by Flash Gordon, M.D., August 2008.*)