

Safe Rider Overview

What makes a safe rider? There are many things that directly relate to rider safety. They include the rider's gear, his bike, his riding skills, his ability to ride defensively, and, most importantly, the rider himself. The conscientious rider makes the effort to get all of these things to work in his favor.

The Rider's Gear A rider's apparel and equipment can contribute to his safety. A good helmet, eyewear for vision and protection, ear plugs, sturdy boots, gloves, and garments that provide protection for knees, hips, elbows, shoulders and back are worth having. Protection from the weather and temperature extremes is a safety issue as much as it is a comfort issue. Being conspicuous to other vehicles is important. High visibility garments and a light colored helmet contribute to that conspicuity.

The Motorcycle A rider should select and equip his bike with safety in mind. A good physical fit of a bike to its rider is important. Modifications can be made to your bike's suspension, seat, handlebars, and foot and hand controls to make your bike fit you better.

Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) is now offered on an increasing number of models. It takes a skilled rider to be able to brake hard in an emergency without locking the wheels and skidding. ABS applies the brakes in a pulsating manner to avoid skids.

A good lighting system is essential for safety. Make your bike as conspicuous as possible to oncoming drivers by having a bright LED headlamp or a modulating headlamp on the front. Auxiliary lights on each side of the headlamp and fog lights mounted low make your bike appear larger to oncoming drivers and help them to more accurately assess your distance and rate of closure. Conspicuous lighting on the rear of your motorcycle reduces your risk of being hit from behind. Bright LED rear lights and brake lights that flash a few times as the brakes are applied make your bike more visible from the rear and help alert the driver behind you that you are reducing speed.

Your motorcycle should be regularly maintained by trained service personnel and items subject to wear such as tires and brakes should be replaced before they are excessively worn. Pre-ride inspections should be conducted before each ride. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) T-CLOCS inspection routine is recommended, i.e., **T**ires and **W**heels, **C**ontrols, **L**ights and **E**lectrics, **O**il and **O**ther **F**luids, **C**hassis, and **S**tands. There's comfort and safety in knowing that your bike is ready for the road and less likely to malfunction at some critical time.

Riding Skills Being a skilled rider makes riding more enjoyable and it also makes you safer. Every rider should strive to be as good of a rider as he can be. Learning just the basic skills is not enough. A rider seriously concerned with safety considers improving his riding skills as a continuing effort. Your control of your bike in traffic and on treacherous roads and curves in all conditions, and your ability to quickly execute crash

avoidance maneuvers, such as accelerating, swerving, and emergency braking, may save you from grievous harm.

There are several advanced rider training courses available. The Skilled Rider Course, offered at Old Glory HD, is recommended for experienced riders. You use your own bike and enhance the following skills: control at low speeds, risk management, limited space maneuvers, cornering judgment, stopping quickly in a curve, swerving and stopping quickly, multiple curve maneuvers and surmounting objects. There are also other locally available advanced courses that present detailed instruction on effective cornering techniques, effective braking, and low speed maneuvers.

There are also some good instructional books. Training courses and instructional books can teach the correct techniques. Practice the techniques in a controlled environment such as a parking lot. Thereafter, when you ride, consciously practice the correct techniques until they become integrated into your riding style. Parking lot practice is also a good way to refresh your skills after not riding for a while, when getting a new bike, or any other time just to keep your edge.

When you develop your riding skills to where they become instinctive and automatic, there is less of a distraction from your concentration on defensive riding. This greatly increases your safety.

Defensive Riding Riding a motorcycle has many inherent risks. The term “defensive riding” refers to *riding in a manner to avoid or reduce these risks.*

The MSF recommends a defensive riding strategy based on the acronym “SEE.” This stands for “Search,” “Evaluate,” and “Execute.” “Search” involves constantly scanning for potential hazards, with an understanding of the situations that represent a threat to motorcyclists. “Evaluate” is the process of determining to what degree these potential hazards might become real threats. “Execute” involves taking appropriate response actions to avoid the hazards identified in the previous phase. This normally involves signaling intentions and adjusting position or speed. The SEE process allows the rider to anticipate problems and react to them in a controlled manner before they become immediate threats requiring emergency maneuvers. The concept is easy to understand, but requires effort, knowledge, and decisive action to implement effectively.

The safe rider generally employs a SEE type strategy and integrates other tenets of safe riding into it. There are many “rules” that apply to defensive riding. Some of these rules are: Ride within your skill level. Maintain 360 degree situational awareness. Ride in positions where you can see and be seen. Ride at a speed that will allow you to stop within your sight distance. Maintain appropriate space cushions around you. Identify emergency escape routes. Cover your brakes on entering intersections and other areas of caution. There are many other rules and techniques. Not all of them are intuitive and they should be learned correctly. The safe rider makes the effort to learn this knowledge through training, books, safety articles, etc. and applies it to his riding.

The Rider The rider himself is the most important of all of these things. A safe rider has certain characteristics. Primary among them is a good attitude regarding safety, a personal commitment to learn about safety and to do those things that make him safer as he rides. He has a high degree of risk awareness, makes realistic assessments of his ability and prevailing conditions, and adjusts his ride accordingly.

The experts say that safe riding is ninety percent mental. They also say that motorcycle crashes are preventable. These are things for us to think about. We are in charge of our own safety. Let's be safe and enjoy our riding.

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