



Motorcycle Rider Safety Tips

Despite an increased focus on safety for all motorists, motorcycle fatalities have steadily increased over the past decade. According to the [Governor's Highway Safety Association](#)[®], motorcyclists were about 37 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in motor vehicle traffic crash and nine times more likely to be injured per vehicle mile traveled in 2007. Fatalities totaled 5,154 in 2007. While motorcycles may be inherently less safe than cars, there are actions motorcyclists can take to stay safe. Here are a few tips to help keep you safer when riding.

Take a Motorcycle Rider Safety Course. This will help prepare you to hit the road safely and with increased confidence. If you've never ridden a motorcycle, a hands-on rider safety course is the best way to learn the basics of operating a motorcycle and make wise judgments when riding. Even experienced motorcyclists can continue to learn and improve their riding skills with additional training.

Always Wear a Helmet. Head injuries are the [leading cause of death](#)¹ in motorcycle crashes. According to government studies, riders without a helmet are 40 percent more likely to suffer a fatal head injury in a crash and three times more likely to suffer brain injuries than those with helmets. The [National Highway Safety Administration](#) estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,829 motorcyclists in 2008. If all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 823 lives could have been saved. A full-face helmet that's approved by the Department of Transportation is your best choice. Look for a DOT certification sticker on the helmet. Also, be sure to wear a visor or goggles for effective eye protection; don't rely solely on eyeglasses or a bike's windscreen.

Dress for the Occasion. In the event of a spill or crash, proper riding leathers will protect you from coming into direct contact with pavement. For maximum protection, wear a leather/reinforced jacket, gloves, pants and over-the-ankle footwear, even in summer! Ventilated motorcycle jackets with protective "armor" and can help keep you cool and safer. For footwear, look for boots with a rugged sole, sturdy ankle supports and a low heel. And, while basic black is always "in," consider choosing brightly colored gear -- drivers who've hit a motorcyclist often say they just didn't see them.

Watch for Road Hazards. Wet leaves, sand, gravel, debris or pebbles can cause a bike to slide unexpectedly, easily resulting in a spill. If you can't avoid a hazard, slow down as much as possible and avoid abrupt throttle or brake inputs while keeping steering corrections to a minimum. Also, try to keep your bike as upright as possible. If you lose traction at a 50-degree angle, you're going to go down; lose traction while perpendicular (90-degrees) to the ground and you should be able continue on safely. Use this approach whenever you cross railroad tracks or encounter rough pavement to reduce the chances of a skid.

Ride Defensively. A [recent study](#) by the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research found that in car/motorcycle collisions, car drivers were at fault 60 percent of the time. Be extra alert, especially with the proliferation of cellphone use and texting behind the wheel. Keep an eye out for cars suddenly changing lanes or pulling out from side streets. Don't tailgate -- a safe following interval is critical to giving you enough stopping distance and reaction time for changing conditions.

Don't Drink and Ride. Never ride while intoxicated. Data from the [Governor's Highway Safety Association](#)[®] shows that in 2008, 30 percent of all fatally injured motorcycle riders had BAC levels of .08 g/dL or higher. Alcohol not only slows your reaction time but gives many riders a false sense of confidence, often leading to increased risk taking and poor judgment. Staying safe when riding requires you to be hyper-aware of everything that's going on around you and that can only be accomplished while sober.

Maintain your Machine. 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 brakes. Ensure that your tires are properly inflated. Check all fluids to make sure they're at the recommended levels. Service your bike promptly if anything appears amiss.

¹ National Transportation Safety Board: https://www.nts.gov/doclib/safetvalerts/SA_012.pdf

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