

For Nonriders

ALL TOO COMMONLY, WHEN WE HAVE CONVERSATIONS with people who don't ride, they'll either talk with some envy or state that riding motorcycles is just a death wish. Moreover, they usually talk about someone they know who was in a

terrible motorcycle accident and go on to discuss the sometimes gory details. While it may be good to be reminded that what we do for enjoyment has its risks, I'd rather not hear of the tragedies of others each time I speak with nonriders.

Though some of us may be on the defensive side of these conversations, perhaps consider it an opportunity to educate those who don't understand. We need to be aware that most nonriders don't know that the skills required to properly ride a motorcycle under various conditions are different than those used when driving a car. Also, because of the education or awareness process, or lack of same, most drivers don't recognize a motorcycle on the roads.

We may see every bike that comes near us, but that's because we ride and are in tune to others on the road, but we have to keep in mind that motorcycles are smaller, narrower in profile, and easily hidden in blind spots or masked by larger objects (other cars, trucks, surroundings). In addition, it may be harder for nonriders to judge the speed of the traveling bike because of its size and the tendency for bikes to seem farther away. Some of these factors, or a combination of them, contribute to the most common response when a driver has an accident with a motorcyclist: "I didn't see him." Unfortunately, his statement is correct, and typically a driver's actions are unintentional. If a driver causes serious injury to the rider, he more than likely will never forgive himself — a no-win situation for all involved.

Over 50 percent of all motorcycle accidents involve another vehicle. When we talk to nonriders about motorcycling, we can give them a lot of information that would help them, as well as ourselves.

The way we operate the bike in certain situations may be something nonriders don't understand. We can adjust our

speed to slow down just by decelerating on the throttle, or downshifting, which won't be indicated by the brake light. We also can maneuver within a lane to position ourselves for the best view or better visibility, as well as to avoid objects such as potholes or debris. While most autos can just drive over an object without incident, cars in front can also suddenly kick that object into our path, creating an issue for us. Furthermore, though motorcycles may be more maneuverable than a car, that doesn't mean that

one can avoid any situation that may arise. A rider's skill level, road conditions, motorcycle capability, and possibly weather can all have serious effects.

Intersections are the number one location for conflicts between motorcycles and autos. Emphasize that drivers need to be more vigilant in viewing everything at these locations, certainly motorcycles, but everything else that can be a possible hazard. Nonriders also seem to think motorcycles can stop a lot faster than a car. At times, the distance may be shorter, but if you consider weight ratios, our stopping distance is overall not a lot better than a car's or truck's.

Sharing the road is the responsibility of all drivers, riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians; becoming better educated is beneficial for all. Ask those who don't ride to consider giving us a little more room, becoming more watchful for motorcycles (especially at intersections), and focusing on driving. That means no texting or using cellphones or other electronic devices while driving. If they consider a motorcyclist could be someone they know, it can

fuel the desire to become better educated and more aware, which, in turn, is a major plus for all.

With all this information, we also have our responsibility: becoming a better rider through education and rider courses. Practice can not only help protect ourselves, but others we share the road with. Perhaps, if we take the time to educate nonriders and improve our own skills and awareness, in time, the conversations regarding motorcycle accidents may disappear. It may be wishful thinking, but it's something we can help become a reality. Be smart and safe out there. For more information, visit ForCarDrivers.com, a web site run by the MSF to promote motorcycle awareness. **AIM**



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