

Signs of Caution

AS BIKERS, WE NEED TO BE CONSTANTLY aware of our surroundings to help prevent any conflicts that may damage our rides, our passengers, or ourselves. One way we can tune into what lies ahead is to simply observe the clues

given to us via road signs. Suggested speed limits, road conditions, and upcoming hazards provide important information for riders. We shouldn't forget how vulnerable we are to all conditions, foreseeable or not. We don't have the luxury of roll cages, bumpers, airbags, or seat belts to protect us. So when those caution signs are present, pay extra attention to them.

One sign that shows up on a regular basis during riding season is the ever-annoying "Road Work Ahead." As much as we want our roads repaired, we all hate dealing with the work related to them, but these areas should be ridden with extra concern, since they elevate risk factors by the truckload.

With the increase in roadway construction around the country comes an increase in accidents and related fatalities. The most prevalent accident in these areas is the rear-end collision, attributable to various situations, including, but not limited to, distractions, speeding, surface conditions, and the inordinate number of bad drivers out on a daily basis — a lengthy list, for sure, but there are still plenty of other hazards to consider when riding into a road-work zone. Large pieces of heavy equipment used on these sites dramatically decrease visibility, plus they have a habit of dropping debris in their wakes that can be dangerous to riders. Whether it's slippery fluids, gravel, sand, or any other material that can cause traction problems, we need to be aware of the original condition of the road, as well as any added obstacles that make a challenging scenario even more difficult. Other surfaces to be cautious on include grooved pavement, fresh asphalt, roads with potholes, and strategically placed temporary drainage trenches.

How about those signs that direct traffic for lane changes, detours, or merges? They sure can toss a wrench into the works if you or the drivers around you aren't paying attention. We've all seen those people who try to get up as far as they can before merging. If they're so concerned about getting a couple of feet ahead of everyone else, do you think they see you sitting in your lane at the merge point? Maybe, but don't count on it. How about those concrete barriers on the side of the road? They block off the lane shoulders and any possible escape route you could use. Having no way out of traffic can increase the stress levels for you and those around you. Keep an



eye out for drivers who seem excessively agitated or angry. Arm waving, horn blowing, and steering wheel pounding are obvious signals of road rage, and individuals who demonstrate these signs could potentially do something stupid if you get in their way.

Some other scenarios to consider: Mobile work areas can adversely affect our riding comfort zones. Beyond getting yellow paint splatter on our bikes, road paint is extremely slick prior to drying and just as slippery in wet conditions. In residential areas, lawn mowing seems to be fairly safe until the mower kicks out cans, bottles, and other garbage into your path (or even onto you!). Road repair/patching areas often have only a DOT truck and flagger as warning upon approach. Speaking of which, remember that flagmen are usually positioned close to the roadway (frequently standing in the lane of traffic) and can stop traffic at any time. Just like car drivers always claim not to see cyclists, flaggers may use the same excuse after accidentally whacking you with their orange flags. Sure, it's not a common hazard, but believe it or not, it happens — and it sure startled me when it did.

Night work brings a whole different form of risk into the picture. Motorcyclists are hard enough to notice during daylight hours, and nightfall does not help. Sure, most areas are fairly well lit, but keep in mind that the general public is not always on the lookout for motorcycles. Riding at night always brings extra risks; add the night factor to work zones, or any of the other conditions mentioned, and your vehicle of choice can quickly go from a Harley to an ambulance.

One final note: In most states, work zone speed limits are enforced 24/7, whether work is ongoing or not. Fines increase in these areas (often as much as double), and some states are now suspending licenses for second offenses in these controlled road sections. Be careful when entering work zones, and if at all possible, avoid them when you know work is in progress. Don't worry about investing a little extra time working your way around hazardous areas and conditions. Your ride will be safer, and you never know what you'll discover by taking that detour. **AIM**

For more safety information, check out www.SkilledRider.com.