



SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

Hey, Slick, Be Careful

I'd like to think all riders know that when road conditions are wet, there's going to be a loss of traction. I don't know too many folks who enjoy cycling in the rain, but it's a part of nature all

riders have to deal with sooner or later. The most dangerous time for bikers can be when the skies first drop moisture onto the asphalt, particularly when there hasn't been any rain in awhile. Vehicle fluids (i.e. antifreeze, motor oil, lubricants, etc.) build up on roadways, especially in the center part of a lane. And once some water comes in contact with them, an already-slick roadway becomes even more slippery, and riders are more likely to lose traction and control. Always remember to slow down when it starts raining; better yet, think about pulling over for awhile to let some of that road gunk get washed away. Although wet road conditions may be the most obvious danger to safely operating your ride, there are plenty of other conditions that can be just as perilous.

Ever take a look at those white-lined crosswalks? They're normally made with large swatches of paint that fill the cracks of the road, turning them into slippery hazards. If you come to a stop in a crosswalk, be certain your footing is strong (wearing footwear with decent traction will help) or you might unintentionally get a closer look at those lines. Again, here is a condition that will worsen with rain, so watch out!

If you come to a spot in the roadway where there's a large puddle (or maybe even a babbling brook after some torrential rain), it is suggested that just prior to crossing the water's path, you squeeze in your clutch and coast through it. This will help prevent the rear wheel from powering out, which could lead to a bad situation, namely you thrashing around in the puddle. Always have an idea of how deep the water might be as well. If you can't tell, perhaps an alternate route is the safer way to go.

Here's another tip. If you head out in the morning and see dew built up on your lawn, ask yourself "Where else could these droplets possibly be?" You'll increase your road awareness and safety if you correctly answer "On the road."

Now, many riders won't consider moss or algae to be a potential problem during the summer months, but they can be (okay, perhaps not in arid desert regions). Don't you love cruising on one of those roads that always seem cooler

because of all the shade from the overhanging trees? Always feels good to catch that refreshing air, but you certainly won't want to catch the pavement in your teeth as you're sliding down the road on your face. Keep in mind that if the road sees limited sunlight, it may be a perfect breeding ground for moss and algae. Even if you can't see these slimy buildups on the road, they might be filling those cracks in the pavement, and they'll definitely affect your traction in the event of an emergency stop or swerve. Something else those shady trees might do — throw their pollen on the roadway. That same green powder you see on your car on spring mornings can serve as a sliding hazard for your bike.

Gravel, loose dirt, and sand are additional culprits that steal grip from tires. When traveling over these substances, try to keep your bike as upright as possible and follow through with a steady hand on that throttle. It's especially important to recognize sand, which can blend in with lighter-colored roadways. If you've ever slipped on sand, you know how fast your tires lose their grasp on the road.

There are many other areas bikers encounter that may be inconspicuously slick. Covered areas such as toll booths, gas stations, underpasses, and tunnels can be traction traps. Oil and gunk can build up in these places because the rain can't get in there to wash the contaminants off the road. You're left with far less tire hold than you need for starting, stopping, or just rolling along.

So with that, always take into account the things that can take traction away and adjust for them. Remember, there's only a small contact patch where our tires hang onto the road. Even in optimum conditions, it takes skill to use that patch when turning and breaking. When these other conditions are tossed into the mix, it's important to be not only alert, but ready to adjust. Losing traction equals losing control, which can really ruin your day. Even when you think conditions are in your favor, expect the unexpected, be alert, and use your SEE (search, evaluate, and execute) strategy.

Keep it safe out there. **AIM**