



## SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

# An Age-Old Problem

With the average age of a motorcyclist creeping closer to 45 (you can probably add 3-5 years for the average Harley rider), it's obvious that we're getting older as a group. However,

what is not as obvious to many is the staggering list of risks associated with being an aging biker.

We really don't want to acknowledge that we're getting older, but our bodies and minds have a way of always reminding us of this fact (also the evening news has a way of bringing it to our attention whenever an older rider has a crash). Have you ever noticed that your fading eyesight has rendered you unable to read the fine print? How about all those minor lapses of memory that occur out of nowhere? Then there are those aches; where do they come from? Does that morning coffee have a habit of making your lower intestine rumble like a V-twin with bad plugs? Now, before I go too far and start to sound like Andy Rooney, I believe you already know what I'm talking about. Sure, it may not be fun to get old, but we should be the wiser for it, and learn from everything. Right? Aging has its issues, but what does that have to do with me enjoying a Sunday ride, thundering down the road on my hog? Well, let's look at some of the things Father Time tosses at us, and what we can do to deal with them.

Most age-related problems are physical, mental, or associated with outside factors (e.g., medication), and can happen once we break the 40-year-old barrier. The physical changes may be easier to notice; problems like not being able to read clearly, loss of some physical strength, and, for some, the realization that we can't eat everything we used to enjoy. To start, however, let's begin with our eyes. An inability to read fine print when we're riding certainly isn't the worst thing to deal with, but it should be a clue that things may need to be addressed. It's a fact that our eyesight diminishes as we get older, but with that comes additional factors. Night vision can decrease, as can the ability to judge depth and/or distances. Of course, as time goes on, these problems can only worsen. A simple corrective measure is to employ a regular routine of having your eyes examined. Another thought

would be to give yourself a greater time/space barrier when riding to allow for unforeseen obstacles. These are not bad ideas for all bikers to consider.

I don't want to dwell too much on the fact that we, bikers or not, are getting a little heavier as we age. Between the lack of exercise, diet, body changes, life changes, and other reasons, we may be growing faster than we're aging. It's a fact that our muscle mass does lessen with time, and is taken over by a little more fat mass. Short of running out and joining a gym to keep riding, consider more breaks when on the road to combat the fatigue factor. The problem with fatigue is that you really don't know how tired your body is until you need to react in an emergency situation. By then, you can't properly execute some maneuvers because your limbs and mind are too tired to move fast enough. This is where the physical results of aging can cross over and cause problems with mental issues. Additionally, with age we can drift off a little from time to time, which can equate into longer times to react. We may need to use a little extra effort to be conscious of our actions and reactions.

Another topic we should consider is the use of age-related medications. You should know how your medications work, as well as their side effects. Aging can be considered an impairment; anything that takes away from us being at the top of our game when riding should be considered an impairing factor. The problem is that we may not realize the effects of aging, or even that we're actually getting older until we look in the mirror, and wonder who is that old person looking back at us. It's a slow process.

Whether you want to try to fight the aging process, ignore it, or surrender, it's your decision. But no matter what way you deal with it, just consider how it could relate to the joy you get from rolling down those roads. A little precaution and acceptance can equal many future miles gained on that motorcycle. Keep it safe out there. **AIM**