

Time To Wake Up

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, A NEW RIDING SEASON is nearly here, ready to be taken advantage of. Many of us, especially up here in the northern parallels, have been eagerly anticipating the ever-elusive season for months. We've spent the past winter dreaming of new adventures, destinations,

and roads not traveled. Some of us have spent the downtime shining our steeds, while others have added new supplements of chrome and gadgetry that are just waiting to be shown off and praised. Now the time has arrived for us to swing our legs over our majestic machines, crank those mills of power, and crack the throttle to let our rides once again breathe. But wait, what kind of safety skills column would this be if we didn't go over some items to consider before we settle in and soar down the paved path to new journeys? Before I give you a chance to answer, let's dive right into some discussion.

We need to realize that it may have been up to six months since our last ride, and the time lapsed should be at the top of our consideration list. After not using our riding skills for a long while, we have a tendency to lose our sharpness and edge. We're not on top of our game as we were when we put our rides away for their winter naps, and our mental and physical skills have weakened. What can we do about this, you ask. To start with, keep your initial rides short. Let your muscles redevelop the movements and muscle memory they need, not only for riding, but perhaps for survival. Your wrists and hands probably didn't do much riding-related movement over the dark season. Don't forget those legs and the rest of your body either. Not many of us work or relax in the same position as we ride, so muscles tend to become tired and sore during the "retraining" process. Fatigue is a form of impairment, and you could put yourself in a dangerous situation without even realizing it. Anything that takes away from riding at 100 percent of your ability should be considered impairment. The problem with fatigue is that it sneaks up slowly, and you may find out at the wrong time that your body and brain cannot react properly because of fatigue-induced impairment. Not good. So, consider building up your riding "strength" slowly and steadily. Riding experience and saddle time should relate to each new season as well as your overall riding history.

Okay, we understand the need to practice, retrain ourselves, and just take things slowly at first, but what about those other risks and dangers like cars, trucks, and SUVs? Research has gathered plenty of information evidencing an excessive



amount of accidents each spring. And, in some cases, statistics show that there are more accidents (percentagewise) with motorcycles and cars during the first few weeks of summer than throughout the whole riding season. Some reasons for these stats include what we've discussed — fatigue and riding skills insufficient to prevent a conflict — while others relate to other vehicles.

We've all heard the number one statement from cagers: "I didn't see him." Even after hearing this over and over, most of us still find it a poor excuse — and though it is, there are some valid reasons for it. Many of us take for granted that we can be seen. "I see every motorcycle I drive by" is a statement I've heard a lot. That's because we are bikers; we're in tune to bikes and love not only riding them but seeing them. Being in tune enhances our sense of awareness, like buying a new car and then noticing the same model everywhere, or quitting smoking and then feeling surrounded by smokers. We're in tune to cycling and cyclists, but most drivers aren't, and it shows in the statistics. So what can we do to prevent the infamous left-turner or that cager from ruining our day by pulling out from a side street? First, remember that you and the rest of the riding population have been absent from the roads for many months. Just like we have to take time to retrain ourselves, it takes time for the driving population to "see" us again... At least, we hope they will.

There are other simple things we can do to help the process. Lane positioning is a great way to avoid a potential mishap. Ride within the lane that gives the best view for you and those around you. Constantly adjust position and speed for changing conditions. Another way to be seen is to wear bright gear. Trust me: Black may be cool, sleek, sexy, mysterious, and rebellious, but black is not a bright color. Consider a light-colored helmet or riding gear for increased visibility. Finally, consider taking a safety skills course. You can find one in your area for less money than your last billet piece; some states even offer the course for free. Seems a little foolish to pass that up.

So head out there and remember to keep those eyes up and the rubber down. Consider the risks and keep learning. The more you know, the better it gets. Have a safe riding season! **AIC**