

Educational Winds of Change

CHANGE IS GOOD. AT LEAST SOME PEOPLE FEEL that way. Other folks? They'll beg to differ, especially if the change causes a shakeup in the status quo.

During the past few months, some significant changes took place within the motorcycle rider education community that affect the status quo in how new riders receive their safety training. Perhaps the most notable change took place in California where Lee Parks' Total Control Advanced Riding Clinic was awarded the contract for the California Motorcyclist Safety Program that's administered by the California Highway Patrol.

The Total Control program is basically a fusion of the Idaho STAR curriculum (the acronym stands for "Skills Training Advantage for Riders"), and information that Parks' team has gathered from 15 years of instructing intermediate and advanced riding courses. Moreover, both of these organizations stress mental preparation as much as teaching riders the basic skills of riding. In fact, Idaho STAR states that its goal is "to prepare riders at every level of experience with the skills and knowledge for safe riding." Keyword is "knowledge."

On a more national level, there are upcoming changes concerning the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's (MSF) Basic RiderCourse, too. The change includes an updated curriculum for both classroom and range exercises. Some states have already implemented this newer program. So what does all this mean for the motorcycling community?

First of all, let's be up front: teaching a new rider the basics of motorcycling isn't a major challenge. No matter what program is used, there are limited ways to present information that teaches basic skills for operating a motorcycle. For the most part, any person possessing a basic sense of balance, coordination, and mental retention can learn the primary skills necessary to control a motorcycle. It's the mental side of the educational equation that may be most important, helping riders realize that there's more than just twisting the throttle to be a proficient rider. Statistics and safety studies show that riders with basic rider-training experience have better odds of not becoming a fatality

compared to riders without such an education. On the whole, I firmly believe that rider education works for new riders — but only up to a point.

And that point is the mental processing side of the education. By "mental," I'm referring to the thought process that's part of the riding experience. Some studies indicate that as many as 75 percent of reported motorcycle crashes are either fully or partially the fault of the motorcyclist. That's an alarming number. Perhaps with proper mental preparation by all riders, 75 percent of all crashes could be avoided. Simply, proper mental training taken during new rider courses would prepare riders for what awaits them down the road in both a literal and figurative sense.

Whether we're new riders or experienced riders, it's important to remember that having experience isn't the same as having proper training. Like everything else within the science of learning, there's a theory side and a practical side to consider. Experience would go under the theory portion, while rider skills would be the practical side. Understand, though, that you need both to make the science work. Many rider safety organizations like Total Control and Idaho STAR and the acclaimed MSF course are combining both aspects of theory and skills into their curriculum, but

what about the major portion of the riding community that's already rolling that doesn't go through an educational process? This, I believe, is rider education's biggest challenge: how to reach those who "know how to ride," so that they understand the importance of mental preparedness, too.

No biker likes to think that he doesn't ride well; many of us believe we're safe riders. Yet wouldn't it make sense that improving what we know could help us even more to survive the hazards of the roadways? Yes, there's change on several levels of rider education that, in the long run, will benefit future motorcyclists. But what good are those changes if we turn our backs to the wind of change for experienced riders? Personally, I would much rather ride into that wind of change to keep learning and to do all I can to protect myself and especially my passenger than to ignore it. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to motorcycling; ignorance can hurt you. The direction of future statistics relating to crashes depends on all riders. Which way will you let the wind take you? **AIM**



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