

Technology & Safety

IN TODAY'S WORLD, TECHNOLOGY SEEMS TO BE A key partner for vehicular safety, especially in automobiles. These days, backup alerts, advance braking (backward or forward), blind spot indicators, sleep prevention alarms, backup cameras,

and a plethora of airbags sure have made cars safer for their drivers and passengers. It appears easier to build a car with all this technology to keep people safe than to expect them to become safer drivers. With all the electronic pulses available for safety, when it comes to motorcycles, it looks as if the techno stuff is incorporated into designs for faster speeds or to hide certain aspects of the motorcycle (wiring harnesses and control items). Basically, items we do not see, yet help our rides each day.

Motorcycles have enjoyed safety upgrades such as ABS brakes, some have gained the advantages of traction control, and there is even a model that has an airbag (personally, I'm still not totally convinced that one that is worth the money spent on the design). But why hasn't the motorcycle industry encompassed some of the science that the four-wheeled world is slowly becoming accustomed to? I imagine it's due to several reasons, cost probably being a big one. The available space on a motorcycle compared to a car is certainly limited — especially if you want to hide devices. Also, though the auto industry has spent a lot of money developing its safety doodads, even if somewhat replicated, it would still cost a lot for manufacturers to design something similar for a motorcycle application. Another reason could be that we as riders haven't been demanding items like this enough for companies to consider installing them, or that manufacturers have already done some research and found several ideas may become more distracting than helpful, offsetting the safety aspect of the devices.

Now if we shift gears to the personal side of technology, the distraction factor is a big one to consider, and I have to admit that I have faulted myself on occasion. High tech has also entered motorcycling at an accessory level in many different ways. We have Bluetooth, GPS, iPod, high-definition video cameras, and more. While these devices may add a

more personal touch to your riding or riding memories, they also add a level of distraction that can easily be translated into increasing one's risk of an unwanted situation. I've used Go Pro cameras to record details from my ride, but I've learned to pretty much just set them up and turn them on before rolling. That way I don't need to be distracted if they need adjustments; they just record until I stop at the next location. I also enjoy listening to music while cruising around.

I normally do that via the bike's speakers and at volumes that the area of riding dictates; many times it's not on in congested or new areas; I prefer to have my full concentration on riding then instead of rockin' out.

As for talking on phones while riding, I cannot see the reason for it. To keep ourselves safe, we need to be able to concentrate on the road and conditions ahead of us as well as all around. Engaging in a conversation on the phone also unknowingly takes a level of focus; I can't see any phone call worth risking an accident for.

More and more of us use a GPS, and as much as they may add some convenience, they can also add some threat. Granted, this technology is helpful, because we no longer have to ask for directions. GPS systems can also have a degree of disruption to the mental aspect to riding. While most GPSs have an audio output (whether internal speaker, bike speakers, or headset), I would make an assumption that most of

us when we hear the directions being spoken will automatically look at the device to get a visual confirmation of the upcoming direction change. Something to keep in mind: if we're using a GPS, we may not be familiar with the area we're riding in. Wouldn't you think the combination of riding on unknown roads and taking your eyes off them to look at a device may be a poor decision? It could well be; once again, that's something we'd be better off not having to deal with. Sometimes the hassle of a U-turn may be a safer choice.

Technology seems unstoppable. There will certainly be a lot more modifications done to motorcycles and accessories that will be beneficial for us riders. Some of the future doodads will have also a measure of risk linked to them to always consider. We always have to keep things within our capabilities and skills to safely enjoy the ride, and maybe do what bikers without all these gadgets did a generation ago — just go out and ride. **AIM**



Why hasn't the motorcycle industry encompassed some of the science that the four-wheeled world is slowly becoming accustomed to?