



**SAFETY SKILLS** by Don Gomo

## Motorcycle Event Safety

Remember that not everyone's first line of thought is safety.

BY NOW, MOST OF THE TRIPS to rallies that we've planned during our winter hibernation are just around the corner. We'll soon be taking to the roadways to join in on everything these events have to offer. Whether we'll be attending the Rolling Thunder run to the Wall, Americade, Laconia, Sturgis, state HOG rallies, or any number of others nationwide, our excitement level is increasing and we're roaring to go. The shows, rides, parties, and camaraderie with others — it's all good, but like with

everything else in motorcycling, there are risks to consider when traveling to and attending these events. Let's look at a few to consider in hope of making your time spent not only fun and memorable but safe, too.

When traveling by bike, there are a few things to take into account, the first being the mechanical condition of your motorcycle. Whether it's headed for a single night's stay or weeks on the run, the bike will require, for the most part, the same amount of attention. Get it in its best running operation prior to heading out. Failure on the road can lead to anything from aggravation to the worst scenario, an accident with a bad outcome.

Another thing to review is how to properly pack the bike. Overloading it and/or loading it incorrectly can adversely affect the handling of your bike — not good. Make sure to check your owner's manual on weight limits (with a passenger, if applicable). Also, be sure everything you load is secure and won't wind up in moving parts. If you tow a trailer, be sure to know all the information regarding it as well.

It's easy to become complacent about

the possible risks at an event when you're with tons of folks just like you. Being in an area that's taken over by bikers will give you better odds of not having a mishap, right? Wrong. Remember that not everyone's first line of thought is safety; many people are just focused on what's happening around them. And how about the vast array of skill levels you're in the middle of? Just because they rode there (okay, in some cases used a trailer), doesn't mean they can ride properly. It's easy enough to spot the riders who are real shaky, but what about the people who are just a little better? Do you want to be next to them in traffic or riding with them in a group when they do something stupid that could cause a problem for you? Always keep others in mind when riding on the open road or in congested areas. And that includes parking areas, where many riders have trouble rolling around at slow speeds and can end up maneuvering into you or your bike. I've seen tons of folks fall over while trying to park. Some have just fallen over in open space, but others have done something wrong with their clutch, throttle, or brake and went

into a group of bikes or people. That can really ruin a trip, theirs and possibly yours.

Now take a look at the other side of the spectrum — riding at higher speeds. There are hazards there as well. Considering that 40 percent of single-vehicle motorcycle accidents develop on curves, radii, turns, and the like, it makes sense to keep your head up and eyes scanning for others in these areas. With an increased amount of riders on the same roads as you, the chances of someone crossing that centerline into your lane certainly increases. Then, add in the earlier point about the unknown skill levels of riders around you and maybe toss in a bit too much speed; a nice, leisurely ride on some twisties could turn into a nightmare.

Finally, there's that never ending problem that science can't explain: for some reason, when you combine a mix of ego and testosterone with a little throttle twisting, the engines some folks sit on churn enough power to suck all the common sense out of their skulls. Listen, I love to watch folks do wild stuff on their bikes (notice I said their bikes). Watching someone do burnouts, wheelies, or other stunts can be cool to pass the time, but it really depends on where they're doing it. I've seen guys lose control of their bikes, and the outcome didn't always turn out well, especially when the rider and bike wound up going into a crowd. Can you feel the ouch with that thought?

Is this a lot of paranoia and just a downer? Sure, but with a little common sense, logic, and awareness of the possible risks, they can be managed accordingly. With that, it's possible to have a great time and get to enjoy a ride again tomorrow.

Keep thinking and stay safe out there. **AIM**