



## Risky Thoughts

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HERE'S SOMETHING YOU'VE PROBABLY heard many times before or maybe even said yourself: nothing clears the mind better than swinging a leg over a bike and taking a long ride. While I agree wholeheartedly, it's important to remember the risks associated with riding. Wouldn't it be safer to have that mind cleared before starting to roll down the road toward possible encounters that may not be forgiving?

The mental processing involved in motorcycling is as important to self-preservation as applying riding skills. Granted, there are some physical requirements for handling a motorcycle correctly, but if the bears in circuses can ride dirt bikes, most of us can easily master the balance and motor skills necessary for riding. It's how we filter those skills using the knowledge in our brains that help us stay on the road and out of the back of an ambulance.

Anything that takes away from rider awareness and processing should be considered an impairment to some degree. A lack of complete focus while riding can interfere with the use of the SEE strategy (search, evaluate, execute) and may be the start of some bad habits and unfortunate outcomes. Can someone who just had an argument be focused enough to ride safely when he jumps on his bike to clear his head?

Passengers can present another opportunity for us to divert our attention from the road. Here's a scenario

many of us are probably guilty of. While cruising a scenic, twisty back road your passenger taps you on the shoulder to point out something cool to look at, and you take your eyes off the road to check it out. Taking our minds and eyes off the road for just a moment could lead to a hazardous situation. Simple conversation with a passenger can also become a dangerous distraction. Riders may not think of conversation while riding as a potential problem, but let's take a look at how riders talk to their passengers. In most cases, in order for the passenger to hear, the rider must turn his head while speaking. With that head turn comes a reduction of frontal vision. On top of that, his mind is no longer focused 100 percent on riding; part of it is paying attention to the conversation. Once again, a simple action increases the risk of something unwanted happening.

So how do we handle all the thoughts and outside forces that can interfere with our ability to ride safely? Pay

attention. Sounds simple, but it really takes a lot of self-control. The ability to recognize that we may be drifting mentally is a difficult but important skill to have. Yes, we're out there to enjoy ourselves, but engaging ourselves mentally with the ride can be a pleasure of its own. To take in all the sensations that come with riding — the road, the bike, the feel of everything — is what got most of us into this sport to begin with. Why not absorb it all? With that, our reactions and input may become better to enhance the safety and overall enjoyment of that ride.

Thoughts like "I know how to ride," "I always know what I'm doing," and many others could lead to the development of a sense of complacency and a level of self-confidence that leads to problems. As soon as we think we know what we're doing and become comfortable, we might be taking on some hidden risks. Riding takes a lot of thought. If you put all your effort into riding safely, the payback can be significant: you'll get home in the evening and live to do it all again another day, plus you'll enhance your riding experience, bringing a level of pleasure and sensation you may not have reached before.

So when you're ready to roll, make sure you're just that: ready. Put your mind and thoughts into riding, and make sure your bike is up to par mechanically. This way, when you hit the streets, it will be in the figurative sense and not the literal one.

Keep thinking and riding safely. **AIM**