

More Education, More Risk

BACK IN JANUARY, I COVERED THE TOPIC OF mandatory education for motorcycling, which in turn sparked some feedback. Not that anyone was against rider education, it just seems the word *mandatory* has a way of setting folks off.

Some Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) RiderCoaches I know also chimed in on the topic, and during our conversation, we went to the other side of the spectrum and the question arose: can too much education and skill improvement also increase risk?

Seems almost like an oxymoron. I never heard of anyone being too good or too smart (except for snide remarks about being too smart for your own good), so I listened closely to get a different perspective on what direction the question would lead our group. I honestly believe that when it comes to education, especially if you're an educator, you need to keep an open mind. Certain parts may not work or suit you, but some points may put a different or better twist to the information presented.

I, as well as many others, feel that one key factor in rider education and skills improvement is the confidence that comes with practicing one's new skills. This isn't only to develop the person into a better rider, but to alleviate stress factors, including the ones we're aware of and the ones we're not. Hidden stress? How many times have you done something differently because of information you've taken in and responded with "Why didn't I do this sooner?" due to discomfort or stress you dealt with unknowingly prior to your newly gained knowledge? Hidden stress can be as big a factor in increased risks as the demons you know. So with that, increased self-assurance should be a good thing — but then again, maybe not.

When it comes to motorcycle riding, increased certainty in one's mind could cause a rider to go a bit faster, leaning more into turns, or minimizing stop distances, possibly more than they're able to handle. I don't think many beginners who start feeling more comfortable with their new-found skills will be tearing up the street or signing up for track days, but what about the ones who've ridden for awhile and learned some new tricks? I've had riders tell me

how they've taken advanced riding classes and now they are so much better for it, but when I ask them how often they actually practice what was taught to them, I normally get a lot of blank stares. If you don't practice what you learn, how do you get better? This is a case where education has developed some false confidence, which in turn can raise the danger aspect for the rider.

The fact is, the education didn't develop the false sense of security, the rider's mind, aka ego, did that. So after listening to the other instructors talk, it seemed that two of the major examples brought up of education increasing your risk included becoming overly self-assured due to new information or skills and people feeling that they're better just because they took a course of some type. Yet both points have that common ego aspect at the core of the issue.

I understand, but I feel that pushing one's self a little more, which may also mean elevating risk, is good to do to become more proficient. However, I can also see how unsuspectingly going a step too far can be hazardous to your health. So how do we balance this all out? Especially, how does one know when one has that skill level somewhat mastered and is able use it to the fullest without worries? First we have to consider that we can never eliminate all risk in its entirety. You have to keep practicing as well as learning. Taking

the same course again after working on the skills will help you get feedback on what you're doing well and what you may still need to work on. I know some folks may find it a waste of time and money to do the same class again, but I think that the cost of the class to find out where you stand with your skills is far cheaper than the price of finding out what you're doing wrong on the road. Another option is taking different courses that offer other skills. As much as I ride, practice, and teach, every time I take a riding course that offers new information, I realize how much I don't know, and that keeps my ego in check.

So, can too much education increase your chances of a mishap? Well, it seems it could, but only if you let it. Learn to be honest with yourself, don't be one to say I know how to ride or I can do that; actually practice those skills as well as have them evaluated from time to time. Plus those little white lies you'd use to cover up your mistake may be more embarrassing than the truth. Stay safe out there. **AIM**



Can too much education and skill improvement also increase your risk of crashing?