

What-Ifs Part I: Weather

MOST OF THE TIME, SAFETY AND SKILL ARTICLES are constructed to present information for readers to consider, or as a basis to educate riders on improving skills that may need a little more attention. One reader referred to me as the *Dear*

Abby of motorcycle safety, saying that I have uncommon common sense. It's not your everyday compliment or comparison, but I'll take it.

One thing I often hear is: I understand that I shouldn't do this or that, or try not to be in a certain situation, but what if I am? What should I do? In a perfect world, we would avoid all the situations that could increase our risks, but sometimes we're stuck right in the middle of them. It could be by accident, or just by playing the odds that you wouldn't be there and yet there you are. With that thought, I'll be doing a series of columns discussing the infamous what-ifs we may find ourselves in.

One of motorcyclists' biggest nemeses is rain, especially the heavy downpour kind. While none of us plan to ride in these conditions, they can sometimes come up fast. Now, how many of you have used an underpass for protection from the sudden storm or seen others do this? While it may be natural instinct to seek shelter, an underpass may not be the safest place to be. Many times, those locations are prone to flash flooding during a downpour, causing other vehicles to lose control right where you thought it was safe. Also, keep in mind that during heavy downpours, a car's windshield wipers struggle to keep the view clear. Another thing to keep in mind is that in bad weather like this, vision is reduced due to the lack of sunlight and those underpasses become even darker. How about just pulling over to the shoulder to wait it out? Once again, the possible loss of vision could result in unwanted consequences. So what could we do?

The better thing is to continue as safely as you can until you can get to an area that will afford you more protection. Use the tracks from vehicles in front of you as a path where the water may not be as deep. Remember that braking distances will increase due to the lack of traction, so keep a safe distance. Riding to the next exit or turning off will

almost certainly make you wetter than you'd like to be, but the cost in time to dry off is without doubt far less than the expense of a bad situation.

Scared to ride in the rain? Would you wind up riding so slow that you could be causing another problem (faster moving traffic not seeing you or noticing your speed)? Don't let your nerves get the better of you. Adjust your speed accordingly; if your bike has flashers, use them and keep a firm grip

on the handlebars until you find a safer place to hang out while waiting for the storm to pass. If you make the decision to park on the shoulder or below that dark underpass, try to keep your bike as far off the road as possible.

What if the rain turns to hail? At that point, if you aren't wearing a full-face helmet, you'll wish you had the benefits of one. Hail hurts just standing in it; being unprotected and moving at any speed will just amplify the sting of those ice pellets. They also make things real slick on the road. Tough judgment call here: do you keep going or stop where you can and try to protect yourself from the pounding ice? This is a time when you have to evaluate all the conditions and risks to see what works best for you.

How about snow? If you think it couldn't happen, don't be too sure. I had to deal with walking out of a restaurant after a lunch on an early summer day in a higher elevation to find over an inch of

snow covering everything. As much as it may be challenging, riding in snow is achievable. It is better to approach it differently than rain, meaning, don't ride in the car tracks. Those tracks may just pack the snow to a slipperier level. Consider riding within the new snow. Sure, there's obvious traction loss, but if the snow isn't too deep, it can be done. Also, keep your stopping distance in mind; being heavy on the brakes in snow could have a seriously bad effect. Your alternatives would be to either wait for the snow to melt, which could take longer than you like, or call a flatbed tow to bring you to a lower, dryer elevation. Once again, take into account which approach is best for your skill level.

Sure, the best thing to do with those what-if situations is to avoid them, but that may not always be possible. The bottom line with suddenly having to deal with those unwanted circumstances is to be able to recognize the possible risks in your choices. Remember to make use of that uncommonly used common sense and be safe out there. **AIM**



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