

Warming Up

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SPRING: THE DAWNING OF THAT season typically starts my juices flowing, because that's when my thoughts turn to my favorite time of year — riding season. But while bikers like you and me yearn to get out and ride, we need to keep in mind that this is also a time of year when, unfortunately, motorcycle crashes and fatalities cap the news. Often, we're absorbed in the excitement of rides, so any negative thoughts relating to what we love to do won't top the list of our concerns. Granted, this is the dark side of our sport, but we can take some simple steps to help protect us from catastrophe so that we can continue to enjoy each ride.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is that with the new riding season many motorists are lax in their driving habits regarding motorcycles on the road. Our absence during the winter months only compounds that problem. Consequently, as a rider, don't assume or trust drivers to see you. Some folks

say that we should ride as if we're invisible. That's not a bad idea, but I encourage you to try making yourself visible while employing that strategy.

One way to do that is to always contemplate your lane positioning in traffic. Continually adjust your placement so that other drivers see you. Also, try not to camouflage yourself. For instance, riding too closely to a vehicle can seemingly make you disappear from a driver's sight. The same goes for roadside obstructions such as trees, bushes, even traffic signs, that become points of visual distraction because they can hide you from view.

We know, too, that intersections are the prime locations for collisions with cars, so use caution when approaching them, vigilantly scanning for potential scenarios that could lead to disaster.

Little things, like covering your bike's hand and foot controls so that you can minimize the reaction time for braking or veering left or right, can prove the difference between making contact and avoiding a collision. Again, don't assume what drivers may or may not do; they are capable of doing anything. Also keep in mind that a driver's action may not be on purpose; when a motorist says he didn't see you, he's probably being truthful. A bike's compact size and visual properties make it hard to spot on the road. Factor in that it's difficult for drivers to perceive a bike's speed, and you have the recipe for disaster. This certainly emphasizes our need to be more proactive with our tactics to do what we can to protect ourselves.

There are road conditions to deal with, too. Potholes and rough roads are a norm to contend with from the winter season, and the initial weeks of the new riding season typically have residual sand or cinder gravel from rain runoff and snow abatement still on

the pavement. Develop the habit of using the S.E.E. (Search Evaluate Execute) plan to help you detect what's on the surface of the road. Making sure your suspension is properly adjusted is also a key factor for dealing with unfavorable road conditions.

That brings up another important point: inspect your bike to make sure it's mechanically sound. Give your motorcycle a good look over to make sure it's ready for the new season. Use the preride inspection T.C.L.O.C.S. (Tires and Wheels, Controls, Lights and Electrics, Oil and Fluids, Chassis, Stands) as a starting point, but go further with your inspection before heading out for the first time. This not only helps prevent a possible breakdown, but it's a major safety concern to make sure your bike is in top shape and ready to roll intact.

Finally, how about a spring tune-up? Since many of us become couch potatoes during winter, our riding skills can get rusty. Sometimes it takes awhile to get back into the rhythm and groove of riding. Maybe start out with shorter trips to help you work your way up to speed, in a manner of speaking. Your mental processing may not be as sharp as it was when you parked the bike before winter set in. Consider taking a rider course to help set your mind back in gear, or to improve some of your rusty riding skills. The cost of a program can certainly have a great payback to your survival in dealing with the risks you'll encounter this riding season.

Spring is here (or coming soon) and many of us are more than ready to get back on the road with our motorcycles. So go out and enjoy each mile on your bike. And to help make every ride a memorable one, take the steps to be proficient with your strategies, skills and safety. Enjoy the ride! **AIM**