

Ten Years After

Rider safety is our responsibility, and it begins the moment we swing our bikes' sidestands up



FOR BABY BOOMERS, TEN YEARS After might ignite flashbacks of the late-1960s blues-rock band of that name, including its performance at the Woodstock festival. But 10 years after, I'm writing about something different in this month's column; 2016 marks my 10th anniversary as a columnist for *American Iron Magazine*. I've spent the past 10 years writing about motorcycle safety, and to be honest, I can't help wondering where the time went. Yet when I glance in my rearview mirror 10 years after, things look pretty good.

I covered many rider safety issues during the past decade, and sometimes even revisited past topics to review or refresh your road-riding skills. The approach has not been to simply toss in a little education here and there, but to spur you to consider a new and different perspective than what you're used to when riding your Harley or custom motorcycle. Some riders might consider subjects that address primary motorcycle riding skills such as turning, braking, and handling to be only beginner-rider material. Perhaps, but even experi-

enced riders can benefit from a little refresher training now and then. As for riding techniques, I always tell readers that a certified rider education program is the best place for that. Hands-on experience and application is generally more beneficial than simply reading about how to ride a motorcycle, so I usually leave that part of the learning process to the rider school instructors.

On the other hand, my columns focus on ways to increase rider awareness of situational developments, suggesting corrective approaches or alternate methods to crash avoidance. I share the same belief as many others in the rider education community: a majority of crashes could be avoided if riders are more proactive with decision making and awareness while riding. Granted, being more proficient with your riding skills is always good, but even skilled riders get caught up in situations that are out of their control, or because their mindset was momentarily idling in neutral so they either overlooked or never considered a "threat" during the ride. Our thought processes and ways of recognizing possible hazards can be one of our primary life-savers. Much of safe riding is based on common sense, yet common sense is not all too common sometimes.

Through the years I've received feedback from readers, sometimes in person at events where we happen to cross paths, other times through email. Not all responses are positive; sometimes folks disagree with a topic suggestion, or they offer a different action that would be more suitable and safer; sometimes they have valid points. Those are the reactions I relish. Indeed, often what I suggest is not the only way to avoid an accident; in truth there can be various ways that a particular scenario could be adjusted for. Replies like what readers share with

me let me know that my column is not only being read, but you're also giving deep thought about what I write. Your disagreement and alternate thoughts help fuel my pool of ideas and information to pass on in future columns.

So, 10 years after, have my thoughts or opinions on motorcycle safety and rider education changed? Overall, not much; I still believe that putting ourselves in a position to learn more, applying what we learn, and continuing to improve our riding skills in the process is the number one defensive tool that keeps us safe when doing what we love to do, and that's ride our motorcycles. Can too much safety education be overwhelming once you start with the "what-ifs," so much so that rider safety education snowballs out of control? Most certainly, but we need to keep in mind that as riders we're the ones responsible for where and how we position ourselves on the roadways. We can never assume that motorists and other drivers give much thought to bikers' safety. Rider safety is our responsibility, and it begins the moment we swing our bikes' sidestands up and doesn't end until those same sidestands are put down onto the pavement.

So, looking ahead, I plan to keep those rider safety ideas, topics, suggestions, and approaches the primary focus of this column, yet I'll continue keeping an eye in that rearview mirror because the past is a big part of our future. While I do that I ask you to keep sending in your ideas, to keep learning, and to remember that the moment you say to yourself, "I know how to ride," you're only increasing your risk of having a road accident. We're all in this together, so let's take the road that gets us to a destination with a smile that grows with every mile. Thanks for the past 10 years; I'm looking forward to 10 more. **AIM**