

We're Back!

... we always need to reflect on the risks and make our riding safer

For many of us, especially those shaking off the snow and frost in the northern latitudes, the doldrums of winter are just a memory now, and we're excited by the prospect of chewing up some miles on the road. While this is what we all have been waiting for, there are a lot of things to consider besides firing up those cylinders and rolling down the asphalt ribbons. So with that, we'll touch on a few things that we need to keep in mind.

Environmental Conditions

Although the threat of snow and ice may be behind us we still need to keep in mind that risky conditions can develop well into spring. We can still deal with drastic temperature swings, especially when the sun goes down. Remember to prepare yourself by dressing in layers or having the gear needed for varying temperatures. Heading out dressed for a 70-plus-degree day will drastically affect your ride if the numbers drop to 50 or below. If you're thinking about trying to stay warm, you're not focused on diligent and aware riding. Not to mention rain—we all know about the stealthy super-soaking effects of one of the more common surprises. And for those that suffer from allergies, the pollen flying around can really make your journey miserable, plus your bike will be covered in the green stuff.

Road Conditions

Yes, winter is gone, but the lingering effects remain. Thawing roads, salt, snow, and other remnants could cause issues we would rather not deal with. With that in mind, road repairs and construction should be on our radar at all times. Traffic may be altered by lane merges, sudden stops, barriers that limit our escape routes, and more. We need to be vigilant in our situational awareness to be able to avoid the conflicts of

the road; this goes for other drivers as well. We need to keep in mind that our absence on the roadways can cause car drivers not to recognize us. They don't see us normally, but the long period of no regular motorcycle sightings will diminish their looking out for us.

Motorcycle Condition

While our eagerness might force us out on the road, we need to make sure our bikes are in prime condition to deal with the season ahead. Follow the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) T-CLOCS (Tires/Wheels/Brakes, Controls, Lights, Oil/Fluids, Chassis, and Stands) procedure to check things over; it's far better to deal with something that may cause an issue on the road while you're at home. Problems on the road leave you in a spot that is possibly not safe, or, even worse, having to deal with a potential conflict because you didn't look things over. Depending on how your V-twin was stored, winter can affect your bike, even if stored indoors. Tire pressure is a major thing to check, as it fluctuates as much as the temperature we deal with this time of year.

Checking Ourselves

This might be the most important; we need to make sure we are ready for the ride. Some of us may not have ridden for months, which will definitely augment our risk factor. Our skills more than likely deteriorated since we put our bike to rest for the winter. Hand in hand with rusty skills, we

also have aged, an inevitable process. Reaction time, operational smoothness, and mental alertness may all be a bit off. As much as we may want to just go, go, go, perhaps taking it easier with shorter rides in areas of less congestion is the way to start, limiting those initial issues of readjusting ourselves to the ride. Another reason to take shorter rides is fatigue. This is one impairment that could have devastating effects, and the problem is that it happens slowly, and many of us do not recognize the problem until it is possibly too late. Our minds and physical responses may not be in the best condition when we first roll, so when we start riding we are re-using or retraining ourselves, which can be both mentally and physically fatiguing. Along with making an allowance for this with shorter rides, take the time to make additional stops for breaks to stretch, hydrate, and just have a simple breather from thinking and moving.

Finally, if you haven't taken a rider course in a long while, or even at all, now may be a good time to attend one to gain the information needed to be a more proficient rider.

Yes, we're back, and it's

always a great time of year, but we always need to reflect on the risks and make our riding safer.

While it's easy for us to blame others for a lot of headaches we deal with while riding, we need to always look at ourselves to make sure we are ready to enjoy what we love so much. Take it easy out there, and be safe! **AIM**

