

Sturgis & Safety

... all it takes is one irresponsible person to ruin your good vibe

Whether you head there every year or this is your first time, this is the point where the excitement starts to really grow—you're heading to Sturgis, the biggest motorcycle rally there is. Those of you returning are probably looking forward to everything the event has to offer: bikes, concerts, riding, meeting up with some friends you may only see there, and perhaps gaining a few new ones. For those of you going for the first time, enjoy it, and try not to be overwhelmed by everything that's happening around you. Now the one thing you never hear in the same sentence with Sturgis is *safety*, yet in an effort to protect yourself, you really should consider what could go wrong. I hate to be the one to drop the downer that there are some hazardous things to think about just before you go, but to help reduce the chances of something going wrong, it's better to be mentally prepared than not at all.

What could possibly go wrong? We're surrounded by a half a million or more fellow bikers—bingo, there's problem number one. Sure, everyone is your brother or sister when you're attending the event, but look at it this way; you're surrounded by a massive number of mixed riding skills and capabilities. You have a multitude of riders, from those that are just getting into motorcycling whose dream is to be at Sturgis to those that have 10, 20, 30, or more years of "experience," who may not really be much more skilled than those newer riders, to folks that are very skilled. You are dealing with a large group of people that are definitely not familiar with the local roads and can do everything from stopping suddenly because they are not sure where they are heading to those hoping for an Instagram moment with a buffalo. Then there's the chance of someone go-

ing too wide in a turn. Hopefully, you won't be in the other lane.

Then there are some that really do not ride much year-round and do most of their riding at Sturgis, whether it's just up and down the main strip or outside of town. Then you have the chosen few that seem to worry more about how they look than looking where they're going. Keep in mind, when you have this many bikers together, there is a very good chance you'll have a surge of ego floating around, and all too often that ego is the root of problems. There are also some that may indulge in a few alcoholic beverages. What? You mean there are people partying *and* riding? As much as it seems like the dumbest thing to do, you're in the middle of one big party and sometimes people can have one too many, swing that leg over the seat, hit the starter, and go. No matter how you slice it, the percentage of those that do this can really raise that risk level, both for themselves as well as you.

Listen, I get it, you're just there for a good times. So are tens of thousands of other folks, yet some of their good time can include speeding, drinking, reckless riding, and so on. Overall, these people make up a very small percentage of those attending, but all it takes is just one irresponsible person to ruin your good vibe. In all honesty, you can encounter the same amount of risk from someone that doesn't do all that and just makes a mistake. Problem is, a lot of times

mistakes can be costly or painful.

My goal is not to set a level of paranoia just before you head out on vacation; I just want to lay out some scenarios for you to recognize that things can go wrong at any given moment, and with such high numbers of bikers enjoying the area, the odds of incidents increase. You could be dealing with more issues than you're accustomed to. So what to do? Be extremely vigilant, keep others in sight, and expect riders to possibly do the same thing we complain about car drivers doing. Bad bikers can do the same dumb things as car drivers. Even though traffic and roads may be congested at times with other riders, try to keep a safe riding distance from others. Ride at a pace you are comfortable with, and if you're with friends or family, perhaps just ride with them. When you start mixing up with people that have never ridden together, things could happen.

Bottom line, use that all-too-uncommon common sense when you're riding or around those that ride. Expect the unexpected. Taking the extra step of being a bit more aware can pay off, but, most of all, enjoy yourself. I mean, after all, it is Sturgis, and as all my friends tell me, what happens in Sturgis stays in Sturgis. Safe rides! **AIM**

