

Hello Riders! When Paula asked me to elaborate on some of the topics we discussed at your last meeting, I was more than happy to oblige. I hope you find this information a valuable tool for your riding careers. Here goes...

With the longest winter in the history of the planet, I am sure all of you are anxious to get out there and ride your steel horses. Before you do, here are a few things you should consider before you climb aboard:

BIKE PREPARATION:

There is an acronym we use in the safety world that helps make a pre ride inspection easy to remember: **T-CLOCS**, it stands for:

T=TIRES AND WHEELS

- Air Pressure(primary reason for tire failure is low tire pressure)
- Tread
- Cracks, dents, loose spokes
- Bearings
- Brakes

C= CONTROLS

- Levers
- Switches
- Cables
- Hoses
- Throttle

L=LIGHTS AND ELECTRICS

- Working Condition

O=OIL AND OTHER FLUIDS

- Level
- Leaks

C=CHASIS

- Suspension
- Drive components (chain, belt, or driveshaft)

S=SIDESTAND

A quick check of your ride can make the difference between spending some unwanted time on the side of the road or enjoying the day as it was meant to be.

Preparation should not be limited to just your bike. As you all know, the weather can change in a moments notice, and nothing is worse then being unprepared for the elements. Here are a few things you might want to consider for permanent residence in your saddle bags:

- **Clear Glasses**: Carry an extra cheap pair of clear wraparound safety glasses for night riding or rainy days. If you ride with a tinted full face shield, make sure you have the clear cohort on board with you. When you leave the house on a great day, it is easy to be out unexpectedly after dark and with New England in mind; we can leave in the sun and ride home in the rain.
- **Rain Gear**: Any! Check out Frogg Toggs, they are breathable, lightweight and pack *real* well, they even come in a cool carry bag. Look to spend around 70 bucks for a set (pants/jacket) as in all riding gear, consider lighter colors for visibility.
- **Extra Sweatshirt**
- **Florescent Reflective Vest**: Wouldn't be caught dead in one? You're probably right. Consider the challenges we face, of being seen during the day, then picture yourself riding at night relying on nothing but an illuminated red light from behind you, telling other motorists you're there.
- **Bandana**: If you ride with anything other then a full face helmet, a bandana can work as a makeshift rain shield by placing it over your nose and mouth. You may look like you are going to rob a bank, but at least it will help alleviate the stinging sensation of the rain. It can also double as a sunburn shield for the back of your neck. Try soaking it in cool water before draping it on your neck on those real hot days for some relief.
- **First Aid Kit**: Include sunscreen
- **Road Flare**
- **Good Road Map**
- **Small Tool Kit**: Keep in mind that bikes vibrate and parts can become loose, pack it up accordingly. A small flashlight, tire gauge, and a quart of oil should also take up some space.
- **Pick Up Prepaid Phone Cards**: Cell reception can be lousy and a pay phone may be the only option in case of emergency. Rather than playing "who's got a quarter..." pick up a few prepaid cards. Be sure to read the back of the card, there is usually a surcharge of at least 8 minutes per card for using it at a pay phone.

When considering **Riding Gear**: Aside from protection, your ability to see and be seen should be priority.

- **Clothing**: Consider lighter colors and reflective material.
- **Shields, Goggles and Shades**: Should be shatterproof, scratch free.
- **Helmets**: Should be replaced every 5 years, even if you've never worn it. They will break down from the inside and keep in mind; there is unseen damage every time it is/has been dropped. This will contribute to a younger shelf life. Try to avoid the temptation to leave it on your bike seat unattended.
- **Over The Ankle Footwear**: Discourages exhaust burns and injury.
- **When Choosing A Boot**: Consider zippers, Velcro or a slip on boot, rather than ones with laces. Because they can dangle and get caught up, an unlaced boot can be just as distracting as a hair in your throat under certain riding situations. Oil resistant soles should be a consideration; they don't turn oil into gold but they do help with traction in slippery circumstances, for instance, at tollbooths or gas stations.

Now that you are ready to roll, let's go over the some questions you should ask yourself before you plan on **GROUP RIDING**:

- **Are You Riding Within Your Limits And Your Bike's Limits?**: If you are nervous about the ride, know that it isn't going to get any better or go away the further you get into the ride. You will know it when you are ready to embark on a group ride, and in the meantime, pay attention to that "little voice."
- **Is The Distance Of The Ride Realistic For You?**: The ride home can always seem longer than the ride there, especially if there is a change in weather. Make certain you and your bike are up for the challenge.
- **Are You Clear On The Destination Route?**: Do you know where you are going, and where and when the "pit stops" for food or fuel are going to be? Coordinate stopping times based on your participants' experience, and the size of their (different) gas tanks.
- **Has There Been A Review Of Hand Signals You Will Use To Communicate With One Another?**: Never assume every rider knows the signals, give a courtesy review. Pre, present and post communication is key when riding in a group! Designate cell phone contact numbers in case of emergency.

- **Has There Been A Designated Plan If The Group Gets Split Up?:** In order to manage a larger group, smaller groups should be established prior to the ride. Plans within each of the smaller groups should be made for re grouping and establish them BEFORE becoming separated. That way the yellow lights don't become a temptation or turn into a hazard.
- **Who Is Responsible for Your Safety?:** YOU ARE!
- **Who Will Be Leading The Group?** This position should be accepted by someone who has had group leading experience. The leader should be able to anticipate and time their hand signals within the group, far enough in advance, so by the time the signal reaches the rear of the group, the back of the pack should be able to make the appropriate riding adjustments of the signal.
- **Who Will Be Taking Responsibility As A Sweep Position?:** This position should also have someone with experience. It is the last position of a group and "The Sweep" has accepted the task of making sure no one is left behind, or broken down.
- **What If The Group Is Too Big To Feel Comfortable With Only One Lead And One Sweep?:** Break up into more manageable groups and conduct each group as it's own.
- **What Is The Suggested Group Riding Format?** Staggered Formation. There should be a two second following distance between you and the person in front of you. A one second following distance should be established between you and the person on your front diagonal. You are creating a space cushion all around you, in case you need to maneuver. If someone falls out (leaves the pack) their spot is filled by the person on their (rear) diagonal, that means that everyone behind will re adjust to accommodate the spot that is vacant on their front diagonal until everyone is back in staggered position. The designated sweep will remain the last position and adjust accordingly. If you are going through twisties (curvy roads) ride single file so you are have enough space cushion to comfortably ride through the apex of the corners. Single file also applies to construction zones. In that situation, increase your margin of safety to compensate for the changing road conditions.
- **When Is The Best Time To Ride Side By Side?** Unless you are Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda, or Paunch and John...NEVER RIDE SIDE BY SIDE, They were shot that way for cinematography purposes, to fit them in the frame...not for safety. Resist the urge to "roll into town," the consequences could be deadly. To minimize your risk on the road, always create a margin of safety to the front, the back and either side of you. It shouldn't matter if you are riding with 1000 people, or just one other person, this strategy will always apply.

This information is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to dealing with ways to minimize your risk. On many levels, there is so much to talk about when it comes to riding. For example: Skill, Techniques and Crash Avoidance are just to name a few. As a result, riding for me is no longer as simple as getting on my bike, starting it up and heading out. Those days are long gone since I have been involved in Rider Education; my riding paradigms have been shifted. I now have a keen awareness that I have been able to dial into. In the past that was missing, or shall I say, not *missing*... I just didn't know it existed. Through training, I am now intensely aware that in the past, I rode strictly on instinct and not on skill. And now after training hundreds, if not thousands of students, I know that I wasn't alone. Motorcycling doesn't just feed the soul; it encourages a certain human behavior which seem to instinctually create bad habits. I see it over and over again, not only with my new students, but experienced students as well. It is not unusual to see the same bad habits, just different faces.

So I challenge you to ask yourself the following questions and explore your own riding behaviors:

- 1) What do you do if you accidentally lock up the rear wheel and go into a rear wheel skid on pavement? How do you handle it to minimize your risk of injury?
- 2) If you are riding down the road and suddenly, something bounced off the back of someone's truck that is in front of you...what would you do and where should you be looking? What action should you avoid if you choose to swerve as a crash avoidance skill?
- 3) You are riding around a blind corner and "*surprise*"... a car is stalled out in the middle of the corner. What is the technique you would use in that situation to minimize your risk? What is the first thing you need to do?

The most important thing to recognize is that all three of these situations, no matter how long someone has been riding; the rider would be motivated to react initially by instinct. Take question 1 for instance; a direct result of locking a rear wheel is panic, an instinctual behavior. Look at question 2; most likely, the first reaction is to panic. Question 3 is also a breeding ground for instinct. As a result, here are some common answers based on the theory of riders reacting to instinct not skill:

- *1) If you answered question 1, "Release the rear brake."
You are also relying on instinct **NOT SKILL**.
- *2) If you answered question 2, "I need to look at the object so I avoid it".
Then you are relying on instinct **NOT SKILL**.
- *3) If you answered question 3, "Immediately apply maximum braking"
You are relying on instinct **NOT SKILL**.

**Please note, these mock answers could result in serious injury. Proper technique and skill for each of these situations are explored in Rider Education.*

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If you fall within the majority of both novice and experienced riders that answered any *one* of the questions (1-3) from instinct, I strongly encourage you to pursue further skill development. Recognize that surrendering instinct and habit is one of the most challenging things to do, no matter what level of experience you have. Developing proper riding skill and technique first require an understanding of what that means. When a rider has a clear understanding, they can practice skill to become their reaction, it is a trained behavior. Unfortunately, when we are out on the road we don't have the luxury of practice sessions; our decisions have to be made in the split of a second. As you know, every second counts so it is key to develop your skills properly.

Aside from my work with the Rider Education Department of Harley-Davidson Motor Company/Milwaukee; I am pleased to announce I will be involved with the launching of the brand new motorcycle training facility, RIDE SAFE of Plympton, Massachusetts. It is a state of the art training facility; we will be using 2005 motorcycles and a brand new asphalt training area. If you are interested in refreshing your skills, taking an Experienced Rider Course or know someone who is interested in learning to ride and getting their license, please know that we will be at:

RIDE SAFE

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Have A Safe and Enjoyable Riding Season~

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If you have any questions, my new email will be:

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