

BE PREPARED

Be prepared is not just the motto of the Boy Scouts, it should be the motto of every motorcyclist on the road. If there is one word to best describe what a good motorcyclist's should have it is "preparation". The ability to anticipate what lies ahead is the key to safe riding. This past year we have talked about everything from Group Riding, routine motorcycle maintenance to wearing the proper attire for the changing seasons. They all have one thing in common, being prepared.

Motorcycling provides us with the freedom and control few activities can offer. It is also one of the few sports where the participant can be in control of the risks involved. My job, as Chapter Educator, is to make you, the chapter members aware of some of the many obstacles facing the motorcyclist today. Some problems are simple like routine maintenance. Others are more complex like learning the symptoms of hypothermia or heat stroke. The key to solving problems lies with understanding them. Once you know the cause you can find a solution and hopefully prevent it from happening to you.



I have focused on three specific areas in my talks. First, and perhaps the most important is the **RIDER**. Next are the **SKILLS** he or she must have to ride safely. Finally, there is the complex **MOTORCYCLE** itself. Less than 100% in any one of these areas can lead to disaster.

Way back when we took the MSF course for the first time, the instructor told us that this sport was 90% mental and 10% physical. To any one who has tried to do a tight U-Turn this may seem like an exaggeration but being mentally prepared is necessary for survival. Being prepared means that from the very moment you climb aboard you are focused on motorcycling. Paying attention to your surroundings, constantly scanning to the sides and always checking your mirrors are only a start. Problems with your family, your friends or yourself must be put aside to concentrate on motorcycling. To paraphrase the old adage, "you go where you look", you might try "you go where you think". If your mind is wandering off to some distant horizon, then that is probably where you will end up.

The physical side of the rider is a little more concrete. If you are sick or injured, don't ride. Do some bending/stretching exercises to get loosened up prior to riding. Being mentally alert and physically ready are the first steps to a successful ride.

To accompany this concentration and preparation you have to have the necessary skills. The ability to negotiate a decreasing radius curve when it is unforeseen helps keep the rubber side down. Learning how to brake in a straight line or even the more difficult maneuver of braking on a curve will add a great deal to your chances of survival. The ERC course offers you a chance to learn these skills and lose some of the bad habits you may have picked up over the years. In addition, it will point out the



areas where you are weak and need to practice. Even if you have had an ERC course it is not enough. You must practice what you have learned and then practice some more. A good habit to get into is leaving 15 minutes before a ride and stopping at an empty parking lot to "tune-up" your skills. Some days you can snap off right hand U-turns easier than left hand U-turns. Spend a few minutes to sharpen up those left turns.

Practice until you get it perfect, every time. Remember, there are no "retakes" after a crash!

To complete the picture your motorcycle has to be in top notch operating condition. Start with good tires properly inflated. Top off all fluids and insure the battery is fully charged. Brake pads good and steering head bearings tight? Are your cables adjusted and all the lights are working properly. This is a good start. Are you carrying everything you might conceivably need? Rainsuit, jacket or sweater, extra tools, air hose, fire patch kit and your first aid kit? Perhaps now you are ready to take that ride.

Being prepared begins the moment you walk out the door and head for your motorcycle. You must be focused on the ride and alert. You have invested the time to hone your skills and you are confident in your machine's ability to carry you wherever you want to go. Proper attitude, refined skills and a mint motorcycle. Enjoy the ride.

Ride Safe, Bob