

Tips from the Safety Officer

Periodically, I will provide you with safety tips and riding techniques that I have learned from my training and years of being a Police Motor Officer. This edition covers....

Braking Tips & Techniques

Braking is the most important skill any motorcyclist can have. I've been to dozens and dozens of accidents involving motorcycles. Based on my own investigations of these crashes and in talking to officers in our CIU (Crash Investigation Unit), I believe that most crashes could have been minimized or avoided entirely if the motorcyclist had used his brakes properly.

You've probably heard a story of someone who "layed down" their motorcycle because a car pulled out in front of them. They may have made it sound like an intentional lay down. The reality is that the rider most likely panicked and locked up one, or both of the tires, and dumped it. If you lock up the front tire, it doesn't matter how good you are...your bike is going down. So how do you avoid or minimize a potential crash with a car that didn't see you? Practice emergency braking regularly. **FACT:** The front brake provides about 70% of your total braking ability. You should try to put about 70% on the front brake and 30% on the rear. A good technique for front braking is to squeeze (don't grab) the brake, applying firmer and firmer pressure as you squeeze it back. You will be really surprised how hard it is to lock the front brake up in this manner. But in an emergency situation it is hard to keep your cool, and you may end up grabbing the hell out of it, and locking up the front brake. *If you lock up the front brake, release it immediately and reapply, or you will go down. If you happen to lock up the rear brake, do not release it...stay on it.* When the rear tire locks oftentimes it starts to slide out to the side. If your rear tire is not tracking behind your front tire and you release the rear brake, you will high side...and in all likelihood, you will taste asphalt. If your rear tire is sliding out, and you keep it locked, it will track back in line. You can still steer with your tire locked and sliding. Remember that the motorcycle must be straight up when performing maximum braking...that's not to say you can't use your brakes while in a curve...you can lightly use both brakes in a curve, but maximum braking must be done with the bike straight up.

The only way to get better is to practice. You should practice braking at different speeds, but make sure you start slow and always in a parking lot or on private property. If you are ever in the unfortunate situation of having an emergency situation, hopefully you will revert to your training and practice. And even if a crash is inevitable, with good braking techniques you can minimize the damage to you and your bike. I would rather it happen after I've slowed my bike down from 50 mph to about 20 mph.

Next – Avoiding a Crash in a Curve

