

Safety Tips for Motorcycles: Share the Road

Motorcycles are the most vulnerable of all vehicles on the road because they do not have seat belts and riders can be thrown in the event of a crash, which can result in serious injury and death. Your chance for survival significantly increases if you wear a helmet and follow the safety tips below when riding.

WATCH THE NO-ZONES

Never hang out in a truck's blind spot or "No-Zone." Trucks have large No-Zones on both sides, the front and behind the truck. Truck drivers cannot see you when you ride in these blind spots, which allows for a greater chance of a crash. The front blind spot is particularly dangerous if you need to stop quickly. Because of their light weight and braking system, motorcycles can stop much faster than trucks. A truck may not be able to stop as quickly as you do, so you need to take special precautions to avoid crashes before they happen.

ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET

Make sure to always wear a helmet. Beware of helmets that do not meet U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) standards. Check for the DOT label inside your helmet. Helmets are the most important piece of equipment you can wear when riding your motorcycle. A helmet could be your only source of protection in a serious crash.

DRIVE TO SURVIVE

Motorcycles are the smallest vehicles on the road. Unfortunately they provide virtually no protection in a crash. Other drivers may not see you on your motorcycle so you must be aware of everything on the road. Be extra cautious, paying attention to the signals and brake lights of other vehicles, especially trucks. However, you still need to be prepared in the event their signals or lights don't work. Ride with caution and drive defensively. Even though your motorcycle may be small, you must adhere to the laws of the road. Never ride in between lanes in traffic or share a lane with another vehicle. Don't instigate aggressive driving with other motorists; you will only increase your chance of a crash.

CHECK YOURSELF AND YOUR BIKE

Conduct a safety inspection of your motorcycle before each ride, and wear protective clothing including gloves, boots and a jacket. Proper maintenance and protective clothing will help reduce your chance of a crash or the severity of injury if you are involved in a crash, especially with a large truck or bus.

WATCH YOUR SPEED

Of all vehicles, motorcycles accelerate the fastest, while trucks and buses are the slowest. Please watch your speed around trucks, especially in bad weather or at night. Colliding with the back of a truck may end your riding days.

CHECK YOUR SKILL SET

Illinois weather can run the spectrum. Riding a motorcycle is a physical and a learned skill and your riding skills can diminish if you don't ride regularly. If you've been off your bike for an extended period of time, take some time to re-acclimate yourself to your bike. If you are a new rider, be sure you have the proper classification to ride and consider taking the free Cycle Rider Safety Training Program offered by IDOT. Course information is available at this link:

www.startseeingmotorcycles.org/Motorcycle_courses.aspx.

HAZARD AWARENESS

Your nice relaxing ride through the country should be fun but do not relax too much. When riding, you have to maintain a constant state of awareness. If you ride anticipating hazards - there will be fewer surprises. Calling out hazards helps you scan beyond your normal boundaries. Call out everything: driveway, intersection, children, dogs, parked cars, oncoming line of cars behind a slow moving vehicle, blind curve, hill crest, deer, gravel, construction, potholes, railroad crossing, etc. This exercise will make you prepared for the unexpected.

WET WEATHER

If you ride your motorcycle frequently, your chances of getting wet are good. Riding in the rain can be done safely if you follow a few simple rules. Keep rain gear with you, if you have room. Riding while dry will keep you more comfortable and is less distracting. Keep a pair of clear glasses or wear a helmet shield. Keeping the rain out of your eyes is imperative. Adjust your riding speed for the conditions. Keep in mind, when it rains for the first time after an extended dry period, there will be excessive amounts of oil on the road, making conditions extremely slick.

WATCH FOR STANDING WATER

Motorcycle tires by design are efficient at displacing water, but are not exempt from hydroplaning. Remember water will pool in the normal vehicle's tracks on the road and most roadways are crowned causing water to be deeper on the right side of the road.

Gear up, slow down, keep a safe distance and stay focused. For information of safe riding campaigns, visit www.startseeingmotorcycles.org.

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration