

TELLING IT STRAIGHT

It's time we all took more responsibility for our safety on the road! Here's a question for you: ***If you enjoy something, why would you not want to be as good as you possibly could be at it and at the same time reduce the risks?***

Riding a motorcycle is all about managing the risk so you can enjoy the experience as much as possible. There are only two things you can control when you ride a motorcycle.

1. How you control your machine
2. Your behaviour on the road.

There are plenty of things we can't control, like other road users, weather, road conditions, climate, hazards etc. So if you do your best to take care of those two things, then you are as prepared as you can be.

Many of our accidents and injuries in New Zealand are single vehicle motorcycle accidents on the open road - and a lot are the result of loss of control on a corner. That tells us there is room for us to improve our bike control skills which includes braking, steering and cornering techniques. Enhancing our skills in this area will mean that we have a much better chance of taking the right action at the right time whilst maintaining control of our machine.

Motorcycles are a very different animal from what they used to be - and each time we own a different bike, it's a good idea to spend some quality time learning about the handling characteristics of that machine. Knowing exactly how much braking capacity you have on your bike will prepare you for that



emergency situation - and these are the things that you can only learn from practice, practice and more practice. Being competent and comfortable at handling your machine in any situation is the first step to reducing your risk.

The second step is 'switching on' 100% while riding your motorcycle. This will help you anticipate the hazards challenge you constantly. You need to own the road by making sure you've spotted all the clues about what's coming up ahead of you.

One problem is a tendency to follow traffic too closely, especially vans and trucks. Another problem occurs in corners, especially left-handers, where the rider turns in too early and ends up over the centre line into on-coming traffic on exiting the bend.

Most problems involve poor planning - all too often bad positioning limits the view ahead leaving too little time to take control of the situation.

We need to plan more. Planning is the key to fast, safe and confident riding. Although not the most glamorous of subjects, it's generally the difference between an OK ride and a great ride with no nasty surprises.

By gathering as much information from ahead and around us as possible we can be proactive about hazards such as intersections and other traffic. What do the road signs say? Why are there street lights ahead? This information enables us to deal with something before it happens, rather than being reactive, where something happens and we need to find a suitable response in double-quick time. It's important to drop back to provide a better view, thus giving more time to plan.

There's never any guarantee that some lunatic won't randomly roll around the corner on the wrong side of the road, run a red light or sling a spanner in our safety in countless other ways. Fools on the road, hazards left by fools on the road, and a constant variety of interesting weather and environmental factors are all sent to try even the cleverest of us.

No matter who we are, or how experienced, there's always room for improvement - yes, really! Complacency is just as big a killer as



recklessness, and even seasoned riders who have never had a spill or a near miss can benefit from up-skilling or refresher training, to help reinforce what they already do well, and support them to gaining confidence in areas they need to work on, such as cornering, gravel riding, or low speed manoeuvring and here's the thing... sometimes we don't know what we need to or can do better, until someone points it out to us.

None of us really wants to think about what could go wrong, but we do need to, because a split second literally can make all the difference to whether we live, end up maimed for life, or die. While riding, we are never more than that split second away from making widows of our wives, robbing our kids of their mums, and tearing gaping holes in the lives of all the other people whose worlds we're a part of. Tough words? Maybe, but true ones. Why leave more to chance than we have to? Why not be as skilled and prepared as it's possible to be? How much is a life worth?

Take responsibility to ensure you are managing your risk as much as possible and everyone around you will benefit from that. Good coaching helps virtually every sport - why not ours?

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