

## **Summer sizzles with motorcycle fever; safety paramount as bikers 'beat big slab'**

"Big hog" or cruiser, "crotch rocket" or off-roader ... they all share at least one thing in common. They get owners out of the cage (biker lingo for a regular automobile) and on the open road. Some motorcyclists would compare the exhilaration of "riding the wind" to a drug with freedom and horsepower as its main ingredients.

While motorcycles can be fun and exciting, the dangers they bring cannot be ignored. Long-time riders would be the first to admit their world is not for the foolish, careless or incautious (the slang term is SQUID – Stupidly Quick, Underdressed, Imminently Dead). Anything from poor maintenance habits to ignoring the basic rules of the road can cause a serious accident. Add hot-dogging by a "wanna-be organ donor" and poor driving habits/unawareness by other motorists, and the potential for a crash increases several times over.

In the interest of promoting motorcycle safety, here are a few reminders to keep our bike-riding brethren riding high and healthy.

### **Tips for Riders**

Be visible:

- Remember, motorists often have trouble seeing motorcycles and reacting in time.
- Make sure all lights are operational and turned on day or night.
- Use retro-reflective strips on clothing and retro-reflective decals on motorcycles.
- Be aware of the blind spots cars, trucks and other motorcyclists have.
- Flash brake lights when slowing down and before stopping.
- If unseen by a motorist, use the horn.

Dress for safety:

- Wear a quality helmet and wrap-around eye protection or face shield.
- Wear bright retro-reflective clothing and a light-colored helmet.
- Wear thick, protective clothing. Choose long sleeves and pants, over-the-ankle boots, and full-fingered gloves.

Apply effective mental strategies:

- Constantly search the road for changing conditions. Use MSF's Search, Evaluate, Execute strategy to increase time and space safety margins.
- Allow sufficient space to respond to other motorists' actions and vice-versa.
- Use lane positioning to be seen. Scan the roadway for obstructions; make changes while staying within the lane to avoid debris when possible.
- Watch for turning vehicles.
- Signal all moves in advance.
- Avoid weaving between lanes.
- Do not ride when tired or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Know and follow the rules of the road, and stick to the speed limit.

Know the bike and how to use it:

- Get formal training and take refresher courses. Seek out mentorship programs and network with other riders in the area.
- Call 1-800-446-9227 or visit [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org) to locate Motorcycle Safety Foundation hands-on rider courses.
- Practice developing individual riding techniques before going into heavy traffic. Know how to handle a bike in conditions such as wet or sandy roads, high winds, and uneven surfaces.

**Tips for other motorists:**

- Be aware of motorcycles at all times. Check twice before changing lanes; motorcycles can be hidden in the blind spot.
- Respect motorcycles like any other vehicle.

- Assume motorcycles are closer than you think. Due to smaller size, their distance and speed can be difficult to judge.
- Motorcycles may slow down without engaging the brake light, so increase the following distance to allow safe stops for you and the motorcycle.
- Motorcycle turn signals do not turn off automatically. Be aware that a rider may have forgotten to turn off the signal.
- Do not expect a motorcycle to dodge out of the way, especially when road conditions are less than ideal.
- Think of a motorcycle as a human being rather than just a machine.

Cars and motorcycles can safely share the road. Respect a person's mode of transportation, whatever it is. Remember that all vehicles are carrying human lives. Follow the rules of the road, and always be aware of your surroundings.

*- U.S. Army Garrison Fort Lee and CASCOM Safety Team*