

## **May is Motorcycle Awareness Month**

Motorcyclist deaths occurred 27 times more frequently than fatalities in other vehicles. To keep motorcyclists safe, we urge everyone to share the road and be alert, and we're reminding motorcyclists to make themselves visible, to use DOT-compliant motorcycle helmets, and to always ride sober.

### **Share the Road**

Safe riding practices and cooperation from all road users will help reduce the number of fatalities and injuries on our nation's highways. But it's especially important for motorists to understand the safety challenges faced by motorcyclists such as size and visibility, and motorcycle riding practices like downshifting and weaving to know how to anticipate and respond to them. By raising motorists' awareness, both drivers and riders will be safer sharing the road

### **Cycle Safety**

If you ride a motorcycle, you already know how much fun riding can be. You understand the exhilaration of cruising the open road and the challenge of controlling a motorcycle. But motorcycling also can be dangerous. Safe motorcycling takes balance, coordination, and good judgment. Here are some ways to ensure that you'll be around to enjoy riding your motorcycle for many years to come.

### **PRACTICE OPERATING YOUR MOTORCYCLE**

Given the fact that motorcycles vary in handling and responsiveness, be sure to take the time to get accustomed to the feel of a new or unfamiliar motorcycle by riding it in a controlled area. Once you feel comfortable with your bike, you can take it into traffic. Make sure you know how to handle your motorcycle in a variety of conditions (e.g., inclement weather or encountering hazards such as slick roads, potholes, and road debris

### **BE SURE YOUR MOTORCYCLE IS SAFE**

Before every ride, you should check the tire pressure and tread depth, hand and foot brakes, headlights and signal indicators, and fluid levels. You should also check under the motorcycle for signs of oil or gas leaks. If you're carrying cargo, you should secure and balance the load on the cycle; and adjust the suspension and tire pressure to accommodate the extra weight. If you're carrying a passenger, he or she should mount the motorcycle only after the engine has started; should sit as far forward as possible, directly behind you; and should keep both feet on the foot rests at all times, even when the motorcycle is stopped. Remind your passenger to keep his or her legs and feet away from the muffler. Tell your passenger to hold on firmly to your waist, hips, or belt; keep movement to a minimum; and lean at the same time and in the same direction as you do. Do not let your passenger dismount the motorcycle until you say it is safe.

### **WEAR THE PROPER PROTECTION**

If you're ever in a serious motorcycle crash, the best hope you have for protecting your brain is a motorcycle helmet. Always wear a helmet meeting the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 218. Look for the DOT symbol on the outside back of the helmet. That is the manufacturer's way of certifying the helmet meets the DOT standard. ANSI or Snell labels are voluntary indicators of helmet quality. Don't leave your helmet behind on short trips because it could be a deadly mistake. Some motorcycle helmets, in addition to offering protection to your head

in a crash, include plastic face shields that offer protection from wind, rain, insects, dust, and stones thrown up from cars. If your helmet doesn't have a face shield, be sure you wear goggles because eyeglasses won't keep your eyes from watering and can easily fall off. Arms and legs should be completely covered when riding a motorcycle, ideally by wearing leather or heavy denim. In addition to providing protection in a crash, protective gear also helps prevent dehydration. Boots or shoes should be high enough to cover your ankles, while gloves allow for a better grip and help protect your hands in the event of a crash. Wearing brightly colored clothing with reflective material will make you more visible to other vehicle drivers.

### **RIDE RESPONSIBLY**

Experienced riders know local traffic laws - and they don't take risks. Obey traffic lights, signs, speed limits, and lane markings; ride with the flow of traffic and leave plenty of room between your bike and other vehicles; and always check behind you and signal before you change lanes. Remember to ride defensively. The majority of multi-vehicle motorcycle crashes generally are caused when other drivers simply didn't see the motorcyclist. Proceed cautiously at intersections and yield to pedestrians and other vehicles as appropriate. You can increase your visibility by applying reflective materials to your motorcycle and by keeping your motorcycle's headlights on at all times, even using high beams during the day.

### **BE ALCOHOL AND DRUG FREE**

Alcohol and drugs, including some prescribed medications, negatively affect your judgment, coordination, balance, throttle control, and ability to shift gears. These substances also impair your alertness and reduce your reaction time. Even when you're fully alert, it's impossible to predict what other vehicles or pedestrians are going to do. Therefore, make sure you are alcohol and drug free when you get on your motorcycle. Otherwise, you'll be heading for trouble.

“Four wheels move the body. Two wheels move the soul.”

Joe and Paula Swift

Motorist Awareness Program Directors, Indiana