

# Tips for Riding Motorcycles

## CHECK YOUR SKILLS SET

Illinois weather can run the spectrum. Riding a motorcycle is a physical and a learned skill. As such, your riding skills set can diminish if you do not ride regularly. If you have been off your bike for an extended period of time, take some time to reacclimate yourself to your bike. If you are a new rider, be sure you have the proper classification to ride your motorcycle. Find an open area or a parking lot and, if the surface is conducive, do some slow speed maneuvering and some braking drills.

## 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 with the concept of trying to identify every hazard you see - there will not be any surprises. When identifying or calling out hazards, there are no wrong answers. Call out everything: driveway, intersection, children, dogs, parked cars, oncoming line of cars behind a slow moving vehicle, blind curve, hillcrest, deer, gravel, construction, potholes, railroad crossing, etc. This exercise will help you prepare, but more importantly, it is forcing you to scan beyond your normal boundaries.

## WET WEATHER

If you ride your motorcycle as much as I do, you are going to get wet. I am a big fan of the weather channel, but weather is what it is. 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 of some type. 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, create distance and stay focused.

## LEAVES ARE FALLING

When fall begins to set in, the falling leaves can present an unassuming hazard. Many people venture out to see the fall colors, presenting a couple of hazards. Drivers may be a little distracted and not paying attention to the road and further may not see you. Be sure to keep your distance from other vehicles. Also, as the leaves begin to accumulate on the roadway, they can be very slick. Whether wet or dry, driving through stacks of leaves can reduce traction making it difficult to stop. A simple reduction of speed and awareness can make all the difference.

## DEER SEASON

Fall riding can present some particular hazards, none more problematic than deer season. As the crops are harvested, it reduces the area deer can forage in. Additionally, as farm equipment runs through the fields, deer are being pushed into other areas and in many cases, closer to the road. Also, during this time of year, hunters are in the timber and they too are pushing deer into

other areas. We also have to consider this is the breeding season for deer and they will be running more actively than normal. The best defense is to stay aware, particularly while in rural areas, scan the roadway and just off of the shoulders and watch for deer crossings. Typically deer movement will peak at dusk and dawn. Areas where crops or timber are relatively close to the road will present the greatest challenge because these are ideal places for deer to cross and unfortunately will provide you the shortest reaction time.

## **FROST**

Fall in Illinois brings variable weather conditions. Often midday temperatures may be warm and comfortable for motorcycle riding, while overnight temperatures may be near freezing. It becomes necessary to be cognizant of frost on the roadway in the early morning hours during this time of year. Be sure to pay particular attention for frost on bridge decks or other elevated surfaces, railroad crossings and in shady areas where the morning sun might not have melted the frost yet.

## **ICE**

It is a clear sunny winter day. It is below freezing outside, but you have new warm riding gear and the roadways are clear, so you decide to take a ride on your motorcycle. Be sure to watch for ice on the roadways, even if there has not been any rain or snow. Ice can form on the roads very quickly from a number of sources, such as from a driver who pours an old cup of coffee or other beverage out the car window, or from leaking vehicle fluids and car exhaust. Pay attention for ice on roadways in the center of the lane of traffic and on bridge decks over bodies of water. Also, pay particular attention near intersections. They are the most likely spot where people will pour out liquids and other fluids to accumulate and freeze.