

The Older Motorcycle Driver

According to National Safety Council, 36% of all motorcycle fatalities in 2017 were older riders (50 years and older). According to the Insurance Information Institute, in 2016, motorcycle fatality rates were approximately 30 times greater than fatality rates for passenger cars. One can conclude that motorcycle fatality rates are disproportionately higher than that of a passenger car. Anecdotally, one surmises that once involved in a crash, the aging motorcyclist is more likely to get seriously hurt or killed. According to National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), 80% of all motorcycle crashes result in death or injury. So, should aging riders put their bikes up for sale? Probably not, but there are issues that the aging motorcycle rider should be aware of and habits they should adopt.

Fatality rate	Motorcycles	Light trucks	Passenger cars
2007			
Per 100,000 registered vehicles	72.48	12.36	12.05
Per 100 million vehicle miles traveled	24.18	1.10	1.07
2016			
Per 100,000 registered vehicles	60.90	7.80	9.94
Per 100 million vehicle miles traveled	25.85	0.73	0.93
Percent change, 2007-2016			
Per 100,000 registered vehicles	-16.0%	-36.9%	-17.5%
Per 100 million vehicle miles traveled	6.9	-33.6	-13.1

Some of the older motorcycle riders can be labeled as re-entry riders. Those are riders who rode in their 20's. As they begin to age and raise families, some of the motorcycles were parked or sold. However, later in life, the now older motorcycle rider begins a new chapter and begins riding again. Unfortunately, the riding skills and abilities have diminished. As one ages, glare sensitivity increases and contrast sensitivity decreases. Also, night vision is reduced as well as visual attention along with slower eye movement. The body is not as flexible as it once was, and range of head movement is restricted. Medical issues such as cataracts and glaucoma can increase. Most senior riders must also contend with a variety of medications that may decrease rider ability. More than 75% of drivers age 65 or older report using one or more medications, but less than one-third acknowledged awareness of the potential impacts of the medications on driving performance. With all the issues that older motorcyclists face, it is understandable that crash rates do increase for the older motorcycle rider. But one can and should counter this challenge using a commonsense approach. First, ride to your ability.

Younger motorcycle riders do not have many of the physical issues as older motorcycle riders. Reflexes and physical abilities are at their peak and therefore they can overcome minor mistakes. Usually speed or inexperience will be the contributing factor in a crash of the younger driver. Older drivers must be cautious to drive to their ability. Ability can be broken down into three categories; the expert, the beginner, and the wannabe. The expert rider, for the most part, will negotiate most roadway situations including driving through mountainous curves. The beginner

will drive cautiously and drive to their ability. Where the older driver might have had issues is in their youth; they were probably at the expert or near expert level. As their skills diminish, the now wannabe older driver may try to keep up with more skilled and younger drivers. As such, over driving their ability will increase the potential for crashes. The older motorcycle driver needs to be cognizant of their current ability and make the necessary adjustments for a safe ride. Listed below are some life lessons for the older motorcycle driver.

Take a Motorcycle Safety Class

As an experienced, re-entry or beginner rider, a motorcycle safety class is invaluable. These hands-on classes teach control techniques, laws, and general riding tips. It is usually the little things that will increase safety while riding. Classes will improve one's riding skills, add to one's safety toolkit, increase confidence and overall riding enjoyment.

Wear a Helmet

Motorcycle crash deaths are costly, but some are preventable. The single most effective way for states to save lives and save money is a universal helmet law.

According to the Center of Disease Control:

- Helmets saved an estimated 1,859 lives in 2016.
- If all motorcyclists would have worn helmets in 2016, 802 more could have been saved.
- Each year, the United States could save more than \$1billion in economic costs if all motorcyclists wore helmets.
- Helmets reduce the risk of death by 37%.
- Helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 69%.

Entering a Corner too Fast

Try to ride it out as the bike is very capable. Do not hit the brakes and skid. Once the motorcycle starts skidding, tire friction is lost and so is the control of the bike. Remember slow into a curve and speed up going out of the curve. Use a counter steering technique and lean hard into the curve. The motorcycle tires have an amazing traction to grip the pavement.

Urban vs Rural / Intersection vs Non-Intersection

Understanding that most motorcycle fatalities happen in urban areas is important. According to the FHWA, 57% of the fatalities occur in the urban environment while 43% occur on rural roads. It is also interesting to note that 34% of the fatalities occur at intersections. The issue is that you may be in plain sight as you approach the intersection, but some drivers of vehicles have cognitive in conspicuity. In other words, they just don't see you because their brain is conditioned to look for a large car or truck. As such, many crashes occur with a left turn violation in front of a motorcycle. To counter intersection type crashes consider the following:

1. Be ready as you near the intersection for evasive maneuvers. Hands and feet on brake and horn. Look for all threats from other vehicle entering the intersection.
2. If multi-lane, as you approach an intersection, ride adjacent to another vehicle. Be sure not to ride in the blind spot of the motorist.
3. Weave back and forth within the lane to increase conspicuity as one is approaching the intersection.
4. Do not lay the bike down, one's best chance is to reduce speed as much as possible. 10 to 20 MPH could mean the difference in life or death.

When it Rains

Most riders understand about the dangers of water on the road as it relates to hydroplaning and hopefully ride as conditions dictate. However, what most riders don't understand is that asphalt surfaces become extra slippery as the oil and diesel on the road gets lifted to the surface and floats on top of the asphalt. Lookout and avoid rainbow patches. The best practice is to enjoy a hot cup of coffee for an hour and wait for the "junk" to be washed to the edge of the roadway.

Be Alcohol and Drug Free

Alcohol and drugs, including some prescribed medications, negatively affect judgment, coordination, balance, throttle control, and ability to shift gears. These substances also impair alertness and reduce reaction time. Even when you're fully alert, it's impossible to predict what other vehicles or pedestrians are going to do. Alcohol-impaired driving fatalities for all vehicles increased by 1.7%, from 10,320 in 2015 to 10,497 in 2016. Twenty-five percent of motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes in 2016 were under the influence of alcohol. This is the highest percentage of alcohol-impaired drivers than any other vehicle types. In addition, 37% of motorcycle riders who were killed in single-vehicle crashes in 2016 were alcohol-impaired (NCSA, 2017).

Motorcyclists continue to account for a considerable proportion of U.S. road trauma. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NHTSA's NCSA), in 2016 there were 5,286 motorcyclists killed on U.S. roadways. This was a 5.1% increase from 2015. In addition, in 2016, motorcyclist fatalities occurred 28 times more frequently than passenger vehicle fatalities in motor vehicle crashes when accounting for vehicle miles traveled (VMT) (NCSA, 2018). NCSA reported that 28% of the total motor vehicle fatalities in 2016 were alcohol-impaired driving crashes across the U.S.

Speeding

NHTSA considers a crash to be speeding-related if the driver was charged with a speeding-related offence or if the investigating police officer indicated that racing, driving too fast for conditions, or exceeding the posted speed limit was a contributing factor in the crash. In 2016, 33% of all motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes were speeding, compared to 19 percent for passenger car drivers, 15 percent for light truck drivers, and 7 percent for large truck drivers.

Have Safe Fun

Riding a motorcycle for fun or as a means of transportation should be safe. There is nothing like the wind, the scenery, and even the smell of open fields as one travels down the road on the two-wheel chariots. But the older motorcycle rider is very vulnerable. Not being protected by being strapped in and surrounded by a sheet of metal (car); motorcycle riders are an at-risk user group. One can never be completely safe on any road, but we can minimize the risk by adhering to safety rules of the road. There are many little nuances that will help us. Just remember, always be on guard. Do not take other vehicles for granted. Assume a defensive track as we approach other cars, intersections and access points. It takes less than a second to turn your Sunday morning drive into an injury or a fatal crash.