

Get Serious About Your Riding

I HEARD A STATISTIC THAT 25 PERCENT OF THOSE who die in motorcycle accidents do not have a motorcycle endorsement on their driver's license. This means one out of four riders involved in a fatal crash is not properly licensed to ride a

motorcycle. My question is: why are they riding a motorcycle in the first place if they don't have a license?

The other day I was speaking with a motorcycle trainer who told me in her home state of Florida many riders do not have a motorcycle license. I suspect this is true of many states. My question is, how come? It's hard to get away with driving a car without a license; why should motorcyclists get special treatment? If you're one of these people, it's time to get serious about your riding. Every person taking on the responsibility of riding a motorcycle should take the time to get properly licensed ... and trained for that matter.

It blows me away when I hear people treat motorcycle riding like something as simple as bicycle riding. No formal training needed; no license needed. I'm tired of hearing that they rode ATVs and dirt bikes as kids, so they already know how to ride a motorcycle. Okay, that's fine. Maybe they don't have to sit through a weekend of learning where the controls are and how to properly brake. I'll buy that. However, just because they know the basics and have been riding for years doesn't mean they're expert riders.

I heard recently (I'm paraphrasing here), "I've been riding a motorcycle for 20 years. What I realized is that I actually had only one year of experience that I was repeating over and over for 19 years." The person who said this is Jerry Palladino. Jerry is a retired motorcycle police officer. He'd been riding a motorcycle recreationally for years. It wasn't until he went through the motorcycle officers' training that he realized he wasn't as proficient a rider as he thought.

Over the years, Jerry has mastered the highly skilled maneuvers required of those two-wheeled patrolmen. He shares that knowledge in a fun and interesting series of tutorial DVDs called *Ride Like A Pro*. Basic skills include how to execute slow-speed maneuvers designed to increase your control of a motorcycle to better prepare you for avoiding obstacles on the road. He also explains how to find and use

the friction zone, the "look where you want to go" technique, controlled braking, and countersteering.

Practicing skills on your own with a DVD is one option if the Basic RiderCourse offered by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) seems mundane to you. You can, however, look into taking advanced rider training through the MSF. When's the last time you checked out the Motorcycle

Safety Foundation's web site, MSF-USA.org? In recent years, the courses have been reworked to better reflect the needs of riders. The Experienced RiderCourse no longer exists; it's now called Basic RiderCourse 2 for riders with basic skills, and is taken with your own motorcycle. Then there is a class specifically for riders looking for that license waiver; passing this course allows you to forgo taking your DMV's riding skills test to get your motorcycle endorsement.

For newly licensed riders who are skittish about riding on the street — many women fall into this category — there's a Street RiderCourse designed to be the first street-riding experience under the supervision and guidance of a RiderCoach. How great is that?! So many women tell me they pass the MSF class but are still nervous about riding in traffic. Often they're told to practice in an open parking lot. This course will help them transition to the street faster.

The point of my column this month is to inspire you to take some advanced motorcycle training if you've not yet done so. As I write this in March, I've yet to roll my Street Glide out of winter storage. When I do, I always find that after not riding for six or seven months, my riding skills are a bit rusty. That's a great time to sign up for advance riding courses to get those rusty edges smooth and sharp again!

Just a note that this will be my last column. After seven years of writing this column every month, the well is getting dry. I'm going to focus 100 percent of my efforts on my online magazine, WomenRidersNow.com. In the future, you can find me there. I will also have all my past American Iron columns housed there if you're interested. Thank you for your support and enthusiasm for my work. **AIM**



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