



THE WAY I SEE IT by Genevieve Schmitt

## To Gadget Or Not To Gadget

It's just a lot of stuff going on when I'm trying to escape stuff by being on my motorcycle.

I SAID I'D NEVER GO THERE. I'd never do it, but I did. I succumbed to gadget mania on a motorcycle for the sake of journalism. As I write this, I'm just back from the Sturgis rally on my '08 Street Glide. I used the

1,000-mile round trip to review some products. I was wired for heated gear and a helmet headset Bluetooth intercom system. This in addition to my iPod setup I've been enjoying for the past few months. I looked like an octopus with all the wires connecting me to my motorcycle. Heated liner plugged in? Check. Headset and Bluetooth turned on and connected? Check. iPod connected and turned on? Check. Thank goodness I didn't have a GPS. That's not for me.

Here's what I conclude about all these seemingly necessary gadgets as technology invades our lives. If you're used to getting on your motorcycle and can barely remember to put on your sunglasses and gloves before taking off, remembering to activate gizmos and gadgets will really crowd your brain. Turning on the music, flicking on the headset, and plugging in heated gear are three additional items on my already overloaded mental pre-ride checklist, which also includes ensuring saddlebags are closed, bungees have not gotten loose, I'm wearing proper layers for the upcoming stretch of ride, and I've looked at the map to know where I'm going. The additional checks really slowed me down, not that I was in a rush or anything, but it's just a lot of stuff going on when I'm trying to escape stuff by being on my motorcycle. Motorcycling for me equals escapism and simplicity.

I also discovered there is the tendency to think we can adjust these gadgets while riding. Bad idea. To think I could see the face of my handlebar-mounted

iPod in the glaring sun and make out what song I want to hear and try to press stop, pause, or play with my gloves on is a joke. Oh, I tried. No traffic. Wide stretch of road all to myself. "Do it. You can take your left hand off the grip to reach over to adjust the levels," that's what my mind was telling me. But my gaze was taken off the road to focus — no, squint — at the small face of the iPod to switch playlists. My focus should be on the road — all the time. Maybe we can get away with taking our attention off the road in a car for more than a moment, but when done on a motorcycle, it can have negative consequences. The key to iPod nirvana on a bike is having one long playlist, or putting your iPod on shuffle mode to play through songs in all your playlists to last you to your next stop.

The helmet intercom system worked great when communicating with my riding partner. No wires needed actually. Just have to ensure the system is turned on before taking off, and that's done by pressing a button on the controls mounted to your helmet. Not good to fumble with those buttons when riding, though, because my mental focus is now switched to my left hand fumbling with buttons rather than the road. I also tested the mobile phone Bluetooth feature. I can actually take a call while riding by just pressing a button on the controls on my helmet. It's just like pressing the button on an ear-mounted Bluetooth to answer a call. The caller could hear me fine, but I had a hard time hearing him,

so I took my left hand off the bars to adjust the volume, hence taking my mental focus off the road. Even when having a conversation, I noticed that 100 percent of my mental focus was not on the road, but rather on the conversation. That may be okay in a car (even that's debatable), but that's not okay on a motorcycle where 150 percent of mental focus is needed, in my opinion. There's little room for error on a motorcycle. I accepted the call just to test that feature, but for me, talking on the phone while riding takes me far away from one goal of my motorcycling experience, that is to escape technology.

Heated gear. Should you or shouldn't you plug in? I took the plunge and decided I do enjoy that luxury as I stop less to adjust layers as the weather changes. And I'm more comfortable because I don't have 85 layers restricting my movement. To make myself warmer, I simply turn the thermostat, a small knob I attached to an outside pocket. I do have to remember to plug and unplug the external wire coming from the jacket liner to the bike every time I get on and off the bike, but that's easier to remember because my mental pre-ride checklist already includes taking note of the temperature to see if I need to adjust layers. I'm only using a jacket liner for now, but there are heated gloves, pants, even socks, which mean more wires, more plugging in, more, more, more! I want less, less, less.

Each of these gadgets is fine if used alone, but using all three just made my ride complicated. My life is already complicated and busy. Motorcycling needs to remain as uncluttered as possible or I won't enjoy it anymore. **AIM**

*Genevieve Schmitt is the founder of WomenRidersNow.com, the leading source of motorcycling lifestyle news and reviews. E-mail her at Gschmitt@WomenRidersnow.com.*