

SMART **RIDE**

2013 Edition

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Dirt Bike
TRAINING
Group Ride
Tips



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

***Hello Riders.** Thanks for sticking with this publication and getting us to the five-year mark! Your continued comments and inputs are the heart of Smart Ride magazine. Please keep it up.*

A lot has happened since last year. For one thing, we all learned a new word this year: Sequestration. I'll talk a little bit about how it affects you as motorcyclists in just a sec.

First, I want to fill you in on some changes here at the Naval Safety Center. The big news is that Rear Adm. Brian Prindle retired in January. I know many of you stationed stateside had a chance to meet him during our tour of fleet concentration areas last year. Our new Safety Chief is Rear Adm. Kenneth "KJ" Norton. He's a helicopter pilot and former CO of the USS Ronald Reagan, so he knows a thing or two about risks, and the kinds of people prone to taking them. As long as you do the right thing, get your training, wear your PPE, and manage your risks, you and he will get along fine.

You'll notice that this issue of Smart Ride focuses on two major themes. One is group rides. These are important mentorship and team-building opportunities, but they can be dangerous if not properly planned and executed. You'll find several articles that will provide ideas on how to do it right.

The other focus area is dirt bikes. These are becoming hugely popular but there isn't as much risk management information about them readily available. Lots of dirt bike riders grew up on these bikes, and learned by trial and error. Sometimes this works fine, but sometimes the lessons can be painful. Read on to learn about training opportunities and ways to maximize the thrill of the dirt.

I'd like to thank Naval Station Norfolk's Command Master Chief, CMDCM(EXW/SW/AW/PG) David Carter. (Seriously Master Chief. You couldn't squeeze in at least one more warfare designator?) As an avid and experienced rider, he contributed a guest editorial with a lot of great, common sense gouge. Read and heed.

Now, back to the four-letter-word. Sequestration. We've heard a lot of you asking for advanced track day training opportunities. As you know, those can get expensive. Let's be honest. Right now, when carriers remain in port and maintenance periods are being canceled, motorcycle track days aren't at the top of anyone's budget requirements. This is just an unfortunate fact. However, you know how good that training can be. If you live near a track, look into ways to take advantage of it. Ask about military discounts. If there is a group of you, lobby MWR to set up a trip to the track.

Empower yourself to be a better rider. Mentor a younger rider. Volunteer to be a Command MSR. Let us know how we can help. Email me at april.phillips@navy.mil. And as always, keep the rubber side down.

April Phillips

You're Never THAT Good...

BY CMDMCM(EXW/SW/AW/PJ) DAVID B. CARTER

IF THERE IS ONE THING I have learned in my life and almost 30 years as a motorcyclist it is that you are never too good to learn something new or sharpen existing skills. Complacency and overconfidence are killers.

Earlier on in my career I had the honor and pleasure to work with Navy SEALs, and was given the opportunity to get qualified as a Navy Parachutist. Before attending the Army Airborne Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, a SEAL Chief friend of mine named Bobby gave me some very valuable advice. He had more than a thousand jumps logged and was a former member of the Leap Frogs, the Navy's parachute demonstration team. Bobby's advice to me: "The day you are not afraid to jump is the day you should not be jumping."

What Bobby meant by his very sage advice is that a little bit of fear and/or apprehension helps to keep you focused on the task at hand, especially high-risk ones. It keeps you on the edge and hyper-aware of your surroundings. When you are too comfortable and confident, you might miss that little thing that could end up killing you. This bit of advice has served me well in many aspects of my life and career, to include riding my bike.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am not advocating spend-

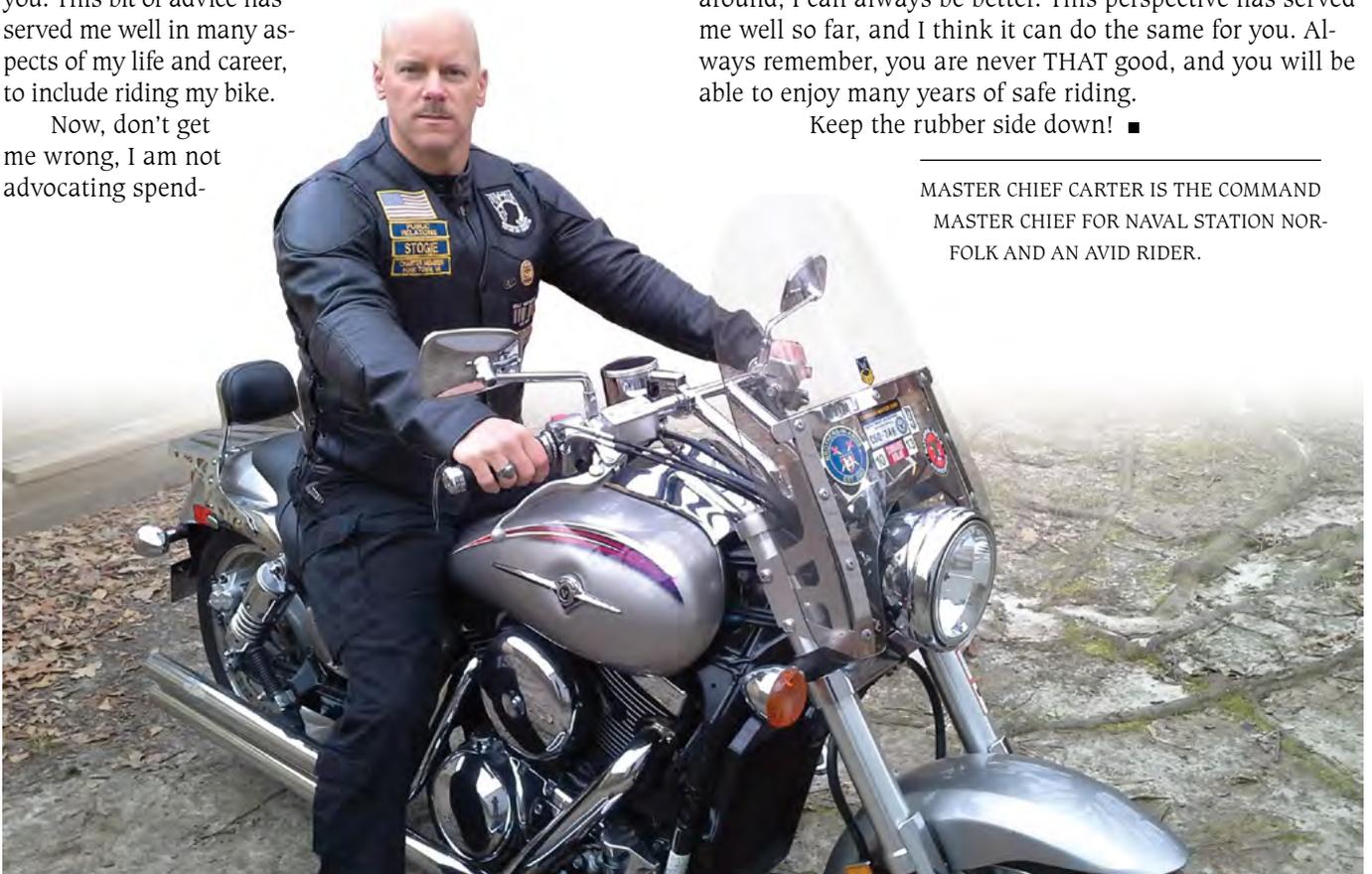
ing your life walking around in fear of everything. Far from it. What I am saying is that getting too comfortable or confident can cause you to overlook hazards around you or forget an important detail/procedure that will keep you from taking a spill.

This thought process ties into my motorcycle safety training as well. As I said earlier, I have been riding for almost 30 years. I have taken the Experienced Riders Course three times so far. Each time I do so, I do it with an open mind and I always learn something new that helps me to be a better rider. I also spend time reading motorcycle magazines, getting tips from professional riders and safety instructors, and learning from my trusted riding buddies. I am always open to advice that will help me improve my riding skills and make me safer on the road.

At this point in my life I think I have become a pretty good rider, and I always have Bobby's bit of advice in mind as I keep my head on a swivel when I am out riding. However, I will never kid myself into believing I am THAT good. For my sake and the sake of those I ride with and around, I can always be better. This perspective has served me well so far, and I think it can do the same for you. Always remember, you are never THAT good, and you will be able to enjoy many years of safe riding.

Keep the rubber side down! ■

MASTER CHIEF CARTER IS THE COMMAND MASTER CHIEF FOR NAVAL STATION NORFOLK AND AN AVID RIDER.



A Great Day that Almost Went Bad

BY ROB PRY, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH SPECIALIST, MARFORPAC GROUND SAFETY OFFICE, CAMP H.M. SMITH, HAWAII

In my position, I see every “8 Day” report that involves a PMV-2 fatality occurring anywhere in our area of responsibility. About 99 percent of the time, I wonder why the rider put him or herself in that situation.

Then I went for a ride that really brought it all home.

I had just returned from Temporary Assignment of Duty to a rather long but required course for my development as a safety professional, and I was looking forward to my first day back on the job. It was a nice day, the bike was running good, and traffic was flowing smoothly as I entered the H3 to join the morning commute.

But instead of concentrating on my ride I started thinking of the course, my co-workers, and just general, happy thoughts. This little daydream was soon interrupted by the car in front of me that had been about a mile up the road but was now riding the forward edge of my front fender.

I remember thinking, “OK, I’m trained. I don’t have to hit the car; I’ll just back-off a little and switch lanes.”

I look over to my right and there is another car pacing me and not presenting the out I needed. To make it worse, unbeknownst to me, a car had been trailing me and was now in perfect position to run me over if something went wrong and I dropped my bike.

By this time, I was at full alert and began using operational risk management to process my situation. In a split second, the ORM process presented a couple of options. Option one, stay in this rolling box surrounded by metal and a one meter concrete divider, or option two, take the small opening the car on my right presented at random to escape this enclosure.

Based on the possible outcomes, I decided riding in the box was far worse than a calculated, determined move to break free. I signaled the car to my right and tapped my



brakes to alert the car behind me that something was going to happen. Everything slowed way down in my head; I saw the opening and took the move. After escaping the box, I moved into a less congested slower lane and focused on a safe ride to work.

When I got off the bike I really analyzed what had happened. The cars weren’t at fault. The whole bad scene fell directly on me. Even though I was in a good mood and trying to ride my ride, I failed to do that fundamental thing we all know to do on a bike, Pay Attention and leave yourself an out.

I have ridden for the past 30 years in Italy, Germany, Korea, and across about half of America. Additionally, I have attended the Motorcycle Safety Foundation Basic, Experienced Rider, Military Sport Bike and Rider Coach Courses. My mistake was rookie and could have cost my life and the physical/emotional well being of others. I learned again no matter what your mindset, education, or perceived skill level, if you drop your guard you will at best become your own enemy or at worst a statistic. ■

Hit the Dirt!

BY LANCE CPL. SARAH WOLFF, MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON

Marines from Marine Corps Installations -West conducted off road motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle training while building camaraderie and forming new bonds during the Traffic Safety Program's Military Dirt Days at the Pala Raceway, last June.

Military Dirt Days is the Traffic Safety Program's initiative to give motocross and ATV riders their required training in a controlled environment.

"We wanted to focus on the dirt side of riding, because we believe it's a safe environment, and you can transfer some of the skills from the dirt to the road," said Blaine Bromwell, traffic safety manager for MCI-W. "Focus has been on the sport bikes on the street and we're kind of lacking on focus with the off-road riders."

The push to educate Marines on motorcycle safety expanded three years ago to include off-road sports. This event is the second Military Dirt Day that provided course completion certificates upon fulfillment of the required morning clinics.

With different courses set up to accommodate a variety of riding levels, Marines learned basic controls and safety while others were separated into groups to go through skill specific, advanced clinics. This year advanced clinics for the ATV riders were included in the itinerary as well.

"The problem we had when trying to do this on base is that Camp Pendleton has limited space with a lot of restricted facilities," said Bromwell. "[Pala Raceway] is a better venue for the professionals to teach these Marines how to ride."

To help teach the Marines to ride safely, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation provided equipment and student dirt bikes, and instructors to conduct the courses.



“The first military class we did, we had three girls and they were so excited by the end of the day,” said Laurie Cary, an MSF certified dirt bike instructor with Coach to Ride. “One of the ladies told me she was going to go home, talk to her husband and get her kids involved. To me, that was super exciting because I was able to expose people to something really awesome.”

By taking advantage of opportunities to gain new experience and more practice time, Marines are more likely to retain and gain riding risk management skills.

“This is a perishable skill, so they need to continue to come out and ride,” said Bromwell. ■

PHOTO BY LANCE CPL. SARAH WOLFF.



Motorcycle Safety – Riding to the Front

BY AO1 MARQUETA RODGERS, USS
BOXER COMMAND MOTORCYCLE SAFETY
REPRESENTATIVE
LT PAMELA STEFANSKI, USS BOXER SAFETY
OFFICER

Motorcycle Safety has become one of the Navy's hottest trending topics and safety concerns. USS BOXER (LHD-4) has set the standard for maintaining an outstanding program across the San Diego waterfront. BOXER's Motorcycle Safety Representative (MSR) and Safety Department have implemented several practices to ensure our Sailors are prepared for the challenging task of riding a motorcycle.

As the command's MSR, I actively identify new riders as they check onboard and immediately enroll them in Enterprise Safety Applications Management System (ESAMS), the program that tracks all Navy riders. At a large command, it is challenging to ensure all riders have been identified. I tackle this in three ways. The Safety Department asks each Sailor "Do you ride? Do you intend to ride?" as they visit the Safety Office during their ship check-in process. If confirmed, all required paperwork is completed immediately and placed in the program binder. I also ask who rides when I speak about class requirements, properly sizing a bike, and our rider mentorship program at Command Indoctrination. My third way is via the Enlisted Distribution Verification Report (EDVR). Using the EDVR, I see if our prospective gains are already listed in ESAMS with their commands. Upon their arrival, having knowledge that they are riders, I gather their information, move them to our command in ESAMS, check them for class expiration and add them to my tracker.

Another key to a successful program is follow-up. Every month I follow up with shipmates who expressed intent to become a rider. If they have no desire to ride, their paperwork is purged from the binder. If their desire is to continue to ride, the paperwork remains. If they purchase a bike, they are enrolled in ESAMS and scheduled for class. This ensures no shipmate falls through the cracks.

Follow-up has also reduced our no-show rate at motorcycle safety classes. These classes fill up quickly and wait times

can be significant. Missed Training Opportunities (MTOs) waste valuable time, resources and opportunities for others to gain the important training. To reduce our no-show rate, training notifications are sent to Sailors and their immediate supervisors as well as a follow-up reminder a week prior to the course. This has considerably reduced our MTOs.

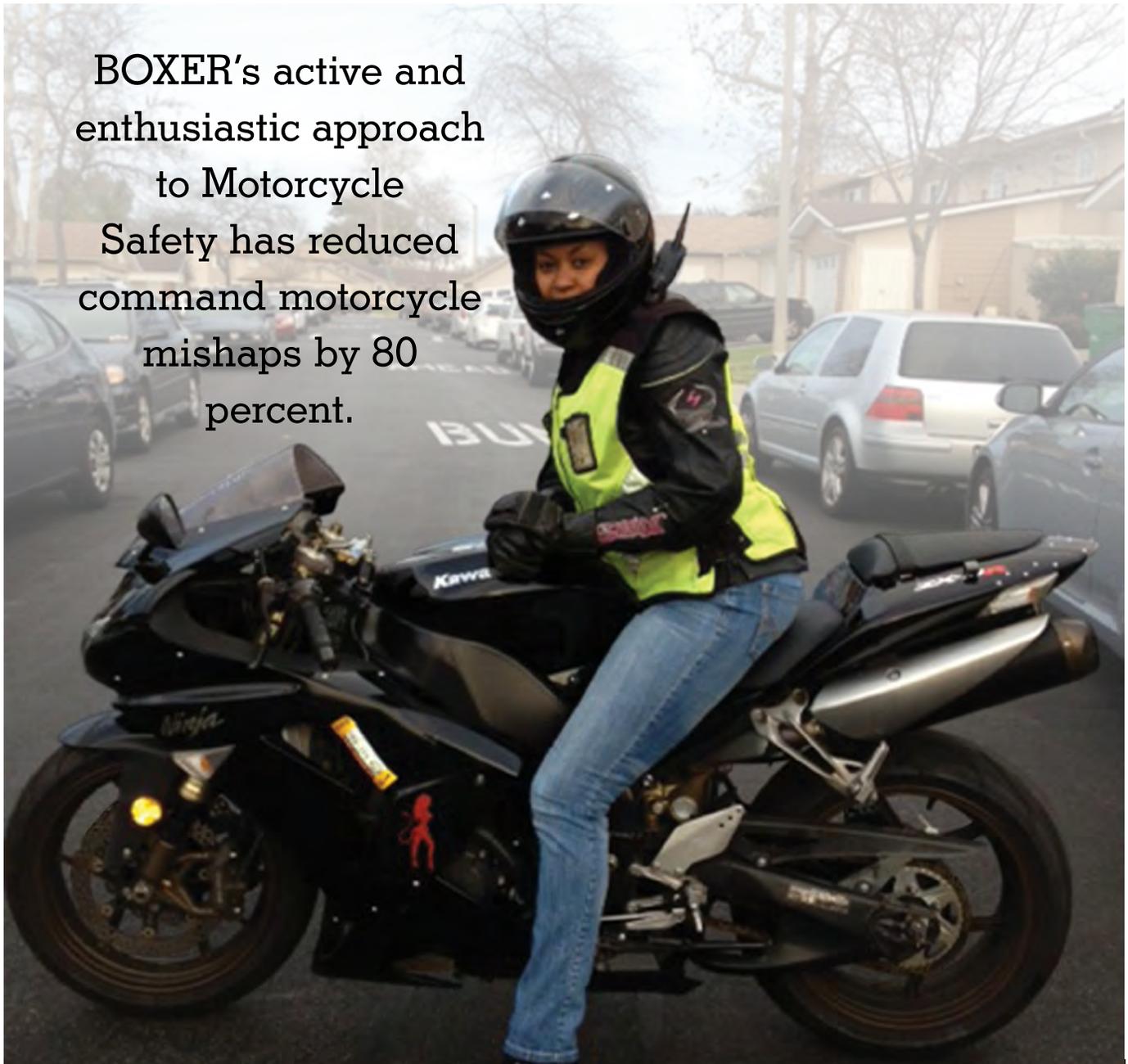
Given that classes fill up quickly, I check class availability multiple times a week and work closely with our Assistant Force Deputy Safety Officer. The minimum for a class is six riders. If classes are full, I request a class and discuss possible dates for the BOXER riders' class. It is crucial to schedule classes early; therefore, a rider report is printed every Friday. All riders whose training expires within 30 days is scheduled for a refresher class.

Initial and follow-on training is critical for all riders because it links the gap between beginner and experienced riders and improves the abilities of experienced riders as well. Safety training allows riders to perform a self-analysis of their skills and gets them in the riding mindset to minimize the risks associated with exceeding them.

An additional feature implemented by the Safety Department is a bi-monthly Motorcycle Rider Meeting, led by the command MSR. I ask who wants a refresher class and discuss who is due for classes, seasonal weather changes, hand signals, and local accident prone roads. Recently, we added a segment called "Lessons Learned" during which BOXER Sailors who have been involved in a mishap or near miss speak about their situation, what went wrong or right, and how the situation could have been avoided. These discussions make riders aware that it can happen to anyone, even our very own. I also point out who the senior riders are so new riders can contact them and have a mentor.

BOXER's active and enthusiastic approach to Motorcycle Safety has reduced command motorcycle mishaps by 80 percent. This impressive mishap reduction is due to riders attending motorcycle safety training throughout their riding careers and being aware of treacherous roads in the local area. Our early identification of riders, rider mentorship program, shared experience forums, and work with program personnel outside the command have made our Sailors safe, successful riders – BOXER's ultimate goal. ■

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Keys to a Strong Program

1. Proactive Identification of Riders
2. Follow-up
3. Sharing Experiences at Organized Meetings
4. Working Closely with Outside Personnel
5. Mentorship Program

Motorcycle Safety Foundation's DIRT BIKE TIPS



Off-Road Hills

LOW-TRACTION HILLS (e.g., gravel or muddy) often provide a challenge to off-road motorcyclists, especially novices.

For a successful run up or down a loose, steep hill, there are some points and techniques to remember. First is to know the motorcycle and rider limitations. Not all motorcycles are capable of riding up a steep hill and more importantly, the rider may not have the proper skills to surmount the specific task. With that in mind, let's work on the techniques of climbing a hill.

When approaching a hill, keep both feet firmly on the footrests. Stand up and grip your motorcycle with your knees. Keep your upper body loose, with your weight forward towards the hill. Depending on the length of the hill climb, choose an appropriate gear and maintain momentum and RPMs. Typically, for a shorter and loose hill climb, shift to a higher gear (remember to keep the momentum) so that your rear tire will not bury itself.

For longer and steeper hills, shift to a lower gear (keeping your momentum) and speed up before you get to the base of the hill. The key for longer climbs is to have enough momentum to propel you over the hill and enough RPMs to prevent you from stalling your motorcycle.

For descending a hill, you should keep both feet on the footrests. Transfer your weight to the rear. Shift the transmission into low gear and descend with the throttle closed. Apply brakes as needed to reduce speed; try to favor the rear brake on traction-critical areas and apply the front brake lightly to avoid locking it.

Terrain variables will affect the motorcycle's stability whether you are ascending or

Be aware of other trail users, including ATV riders, 4x4 drivers, hikers and horseback riders.

descending a hill. On loose surfaces the motorcycle will waiver in its path slightly; this is normal. On wet or slippery surfaces brake application will have to be much more gradual to avoid sliding of tires. A helpful reminder when riding in sand or mud is to accelerate sooner and brake later than you would on surfaces having greater traction – the motorcycle takes longer to get going and slows down much faster than on a hard surface.

To help protect yourself and other recreationists, know what is on the other side of the hill. Be aware of other trail users, including ATV riders, 4x4 drivers, hikers and horseback riders. Evaluate the possible paths up or down the hill and choose the best line possible. Finally, get some practice on a level surface with the loose conditions, whether it is sand, mud, gravel, or larger rocks. Once you are comfortable riding on the varying surfaces, tackle the hill with the advice given.

Obstacles

THERE ARE FOUR THINGS

to keep in mind when crossing obstacles on the trail that you cannot or do not want to avoid. We'll discuss the implications of each element in a bit. The first is to stand up and plant your boots on the foot pegs. Next is to approach the obstacle as close to perpendicular as possible. Your speed should be slow, but enough to maintain momentum so you don't get stuck on the obstacle. Finally, apply a short burst of throttle, prior to the front wheel reaching the obstacle and close the throttle before the rear wheel makes contact with the obstacle.

Standing up as you approach the obstacle allows you to use your legs and arms to absorb the impact, and stabilizes the motorcycle by shifting the center of pressure from the seat to the footpegs. Remember to hold and

control the motorcycle with your legs by squeezing with your knees and minimizing pressure on the palms of your hand. Your weight should be focused on your legs. A vital skill in off-road riding is to be able to read the terrain; be sure to look well ahead to predict what will happen on the other side. Crossing an obstacle, whether it's a log or a rut, at 90 degrees will allow your wheels to do the majority of the work, minimizing deflection so the handlebars don't swing to one side. Also, check for the traction of the obstacle's surface (particularly if it must be crossed at less than 90 degrees). With the speed constant (neither accelerating nor decelerating), the engine will react crisply when the short burst of throttle is applied, unweighting the front wheel.

Close the throttle before your rear wheel makes contact with the obstacle, ensuring a predictable crossing. It is possible to cross an obstacle too fast and cause too much 'air' between your bike and the obstacle.

Practice with landscaping timber (they look like a rounded 3"x4").

This allows you to practice techniques without the intimidation factor.

There are a couple of things to look for when you practice.

- 1) If the obstacle rolls forward, your burst of throttle is too late,
- and 2) if the obstacle shoots out

backwards, your throttle burst is too long – try closing the throttle faster. The goal is to cross with minimum movement on the obstacle. Once you feel comfortable with your progress using the landscaping timber, gradually work your way to bigger obstacles. Remember to keep your eyes up. Don't fixate on the obstacle; look at it only as much as necessary to decide your strategy and actions.

Whether you're practicing in your yard or riding on the trails, wear full protective gear – and have fun! ■



Positive Reinforcement:

Not all lessons must be learned from mistakes and injury

BY LCDR JASON BRAGG

I've been riding motorcycles since I was 15, two decades of riding experience. I love sport riding, sport-touring, and ride to work regularly. I have ridden well over 100,000 miles on public roads all around the country from New England to Florida to California. I ride solo, small groups, big groups, two-up, cross-town, and cross-country. I have taken the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) Basic Rider Course, the Experienced Rider Course twice, and the new Military Sportbike Rider Course. I've attended California Superbike School and Danny Walker's Super-camp, plus an occasional Track Day. I am experienced but certainly not perfect. And, I've had a few mishaps over the years, including a recent one that was my first one ever involving another vehicle ("Case Study: How One Rider Learned to Look Twice," *Smart Ride*, 2010). While I certainly believe we can learn from the mistakes of others, I feel we can also learn from their successes and recognize that there is always more to learn. What follows is some advice I've picked up over the years on riding responsibly, while also enjoying the challenges of motorcycling.

Learn to ride

Choose your bike thoughtfully, especially if it's your first one. Flight school doesn't start with F/A-18s, Drivers Ed students don't get a Ferrari, and new motorcycle riders shouldn't start with high performance machinery either. Most people would see this as obvious good advice, but there is a catch. You can't judge "reasonable" just by the engine size, price tag, or physical size. For example, a modern 600cc sport bike is not necessarily a recommended first bike. They generate over 100 horsepower and weigh 400 lbs (a higher power to weight ratio than a Dodge Viper). That's more horsepower than many 1000cc cruisers, more power than 750cc sport bikes from the '90s, plus they are lighter, quicker, and less forgiving. In short, they are designed for experienced riders, professional racers, and should not be considered "learner bikes." Choose a bike that is designed to be easy to ride, fits you well, and has enough performance so you won't get bored too soon. My recommendations are the Suzuki V-strom 650 for tall riders, Ducati Monster 620 for average size, and Ninja 250 for smaller folks. Mid-displacement cruisers like the Honda Shadow VLX (583cc) or supermoto/enduros like the Yamaha WRX250

can be great first bikes too depending on which style of motorcycle interests you. Suzuki's GS500E and the BMW F650 are also nice mid-size bikes that have been around for many years. So, pick your price and see what model-year you can afford. I recommend buying a used machine as a learner bike. A used bike is less expensive and won't lose much value if you later want to upgrade to a newer or bigger bike. Also, consider learning to ride off the street. Dirt bike parks, trails, or abandoned parking lots are good learning places. If you can learn to physically operate a motorcycle without having to deal with traffic, you'll be better off when you get on public roads.

Learn to ride better

There are literally dozens of riding courses available, from the MSF safety courses, to off-road lessons, to performance riding schools. These courses contain academic curricula and take place in closed course, controlled environments. They are instructed by experienced riders who enjoy passing their knowledge and experience to you. The MSF slogan "the more you know the better it gets" is really what it is about. Many aspects of motorcycling are not intuitive. These courses arm riders with techniques and advice that you probably won't just figure out on your own. Take the MSF Basic Course as early as possible and spend the time and money to educate yourself. The results are rewarding.

Wear the right gear

We've all been lectured about wearing protective equipment, but why do you wear the gear? Is it just in case you have an accident? That is one reason, and a good one, but here's another. Your exposed skin was not intended to go through the atmosphere at 70 mph. If it's cold out, frostbite is an issue. If it's hot out, dehydration. Even if it's perfect and sunny, sunburn and chapping can still get you. With the proper gear for the riding environment, your body is more comfortable. Instead of spending your attention wishing you were warmer, cooler, or dryer, you can focus on the riding. Warm or electric gloves maintain your finger strength and dexterity on cold days. Ventilated light-colored jackets keep you from overheating on a ride through the summer heat. A full face helmet protects you from bugs and rocks that get kicked up by the car in front of you, as well as avoiding facial reconstruction if you happen to face-plant into the asphalt. This brings us back to the just-in-case-you-wreck-it argument. There is a well known



I feel we can also learn from their successes and recognize that there is always more to learn.

adage regarding motorcycle riders and wrecks, “there are those who have and those who will.” I hate to be pessimistic, but part of the appeal of motorcycles is the challenge of the ride. When you buy a bike, be sure to budget for some quality riding gear and wear it.

Ride as if you were invisible

A seemingly silly bit of advice, but one that really makes a point. “I never even saw him,” is a phrase uttered all too frequently at Auto/Motorcycle accident scenes. Wearing bright clothing, making sure your lights work, and using prudent lane positioning can help, but the fact is that a motorcycle profile is tiny compared to that of a car. An oncoming motorcycle can be momentarily obscured by a telephone pole or other vehicles. Even if the driver looks exactly in your direction, it is dangerous to assume they see you. The fact is motorcycles are easy to miss. If you assume you are invisible to other traffic, you will not be surprised when motorists move into your lane or turn left in front of you. You will have already positioned yourself to avoid the other vehicle, and planned a way out of the situation.

Routine Maintenance

I have already mentioned that motorcycles are relatively unforgiving. A mechanical failure while riding can result in a more serious problem than coasting to the side of the road. It is important to make sure the chain (if you have one) is adjusted and lubricated, and the tires

are in good condition and properly inflated for each ride. The MSF teaches the acronym T-CLOCS as a reminder of the basic items that require frequent attention. T-CLOCS stands for: Tires, Controls, Lights, Oil, Chassis, and Stands. For more detail please see the MSF website at www.msf-usa.org.

Keep practicing

Aside from formal training classes mentioned above, there are things you can do to make yourself a better rider. Practice braking and swerving before you need those skills to avoid disaster. Swerve around small potholes or manhole covers in your lane as if they were obstacles. When you ride down your street, ensure nobody is behind you and brake hard to stop at your driveway. Brake harder as your confidence increases. You never know when that skill might prevent you from hitting a truck that turns left in front of you. If you haven’t ridden in a while, warm up gradually as you get used to it again, and always pay attention to the road conditions. Find a deserted parking lot and refresh some of the other skills from MSF courses: stopping from a turn, slow speed maneuvering, etc. Every motorcycle has a different feel and different limits. It is important to gradually explore these skills on the bike (or bikes) you ride. You might not need these skills every day. But it pays to keep them fresh so you can perform with confidence when they are needed.

Have fun and Ride Smart! ■

LEA





ARN TO WALK BEFORE YOU FLY ...

MSF DIRTBIKE SCHOOL

[HTTP://WWW.DIRTBIKESCHOOL.ORG/](http://www.dirtbikeschool.org/)

Don't Ride Naked

BY FCC(SW) PHILLIP OWEN
CF DIVISION LCPO, USS RAMAGE (DDG-61)

I started riding go carts at age 14 and not long after that, I graduated to three-wheelers. Many of you may not know what three-wheelers are, because sales have been banned for years due to the dangers of roll-overs. They were very easy to flip.

Nonetheless, my friends and I lived in a rural area and three-wheelers were our primary source of transportation. Despite the dangers, we never wore helmets. It was the mid 80's and helmets weren't cool and back then they were heavy and expensive. We also rode with at least two people on board, sometimes even four. We were young; we didn't have time or the brain power to think about dangerous! Looking back, I realize how lucky we were.

We had many memorable crashes. Thankfully, we were never injured badly but we had some pretty close calls. We learned the value of a helmet and PPE the hard way, but at least we were still alive and able to get smarter about gear.





When I turned 16, my friends and I discovered dirt bikes. They were faster and more fun to ride. Fortunately, our simultaneous discovery of helmets saved us all from injuries or death more times than I can count. We tore around the back woods at first, but that didn't last long when we discovered motocross!

We loved watching the professionals ride and of course, if the pros could do that with a bike, well surely we could too! Nowadays you can find tracks all over the country, but back then, my friend Michael and I had to build our own off-road motocross track. Like budding motocross converts all over the country, we discovered the best place to build our own track was under the power line in the no-man's land cleared conveniently for us by the power company. We raced each other all the time.

Our first hills were little mounds but they got bigger and bigger. At first we were a little scared to jump over the hills we made, but we got better and braver with each jump. Before you know it we were jumping what are called doubles. That is where you jump up one hill and land on the backside of another. We had lots of fun times, rode a lot and our skills improved. Even so, we crashed a lot too.

Our helmets took a beating but thankfully our heads didn't. By this time, we knew riding without gear means riding naked.

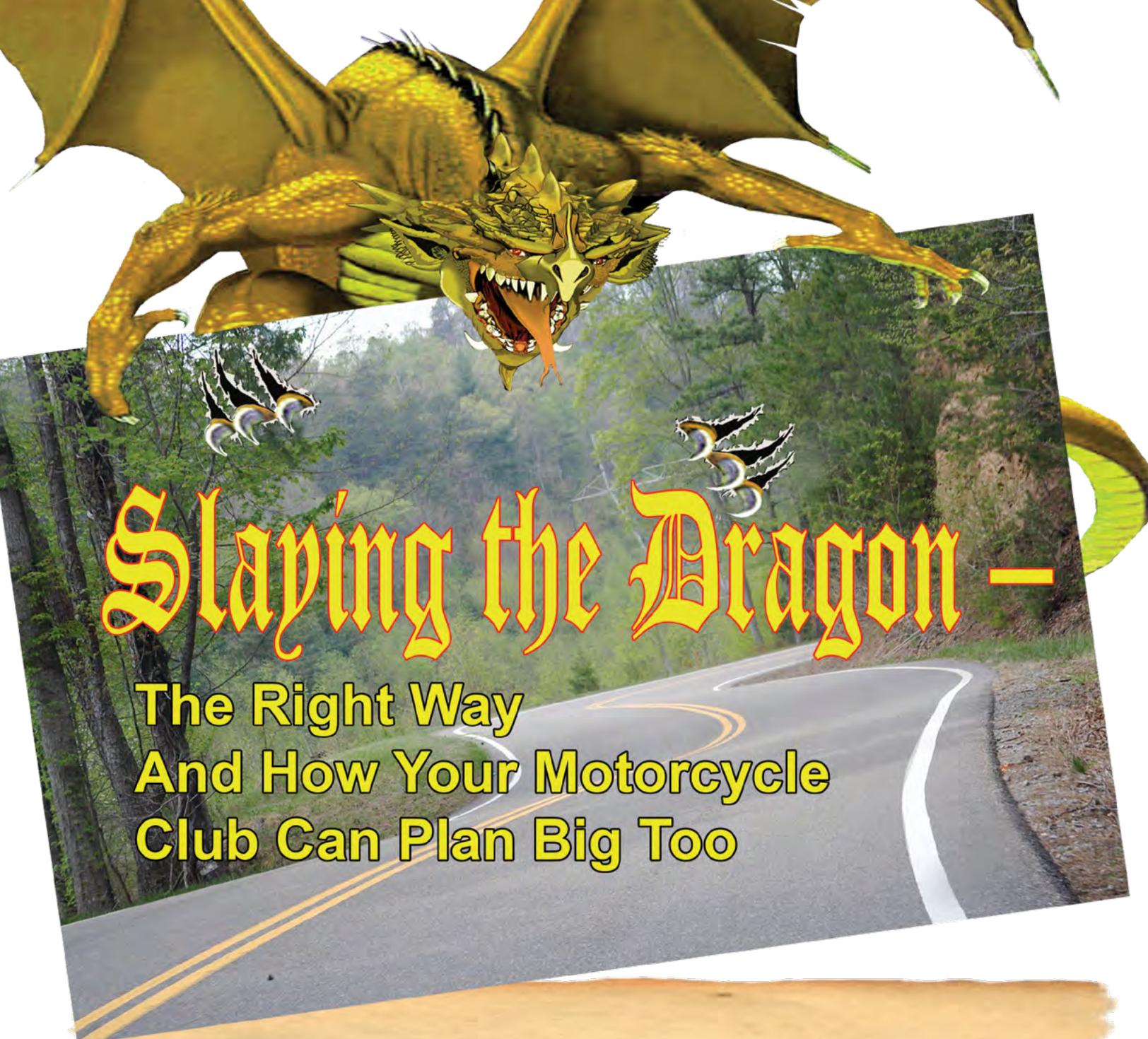
I got my first serious injury while riding in a sand pit. Some friends and I had just arrived at a home-made track that was awesome so we threw up dirt and were racing around like crazy. Unfortunately we were too enthusiastic in an area that we were still a little unfamiliar with. I was following the guy in front of me so close in such thick dirt that all I could see was his helmet through the dust cloud. But I was following him so I figured "no problem, I'm passing him once we get over the rise anyway."

Well, as soon as we got over the hill we rolled on the throttle down the hill and to my surprise the blind side of the hill ended in a sand pit and a 90 degree turn! I could not turn to go around a log laying in the middle of the sand so I pulled my front tire up over it. The problem was my back tire caught the log and launched me over my handle bars. This is where the helmet comes into play.

I landed right on my head, and while my friends tell me my head is extremely hard, I'm pretty sure it would not have offered much protection in that high-speed, high-flying crash. I broke my collar bone, but did not receive any head injuries thanks to the helmet. My head wasn't naked. There is no doubt in my mind that without a helmet I would not be here and normal today ... well, mostly normal.

I still ride and enjoy it very much. These days, there is great gear for riding in the dirt. There are collars, back protection, shoulder pads, light, well designed helmets and goggles, riding boots and padded gear. If I had this gear when I crashed, I might have gotten a few scratches, but I'm sure I wouldn't have busted myself up as much as I did. From a skill perspective, if you have the right gear, you can ride with more confidence and really improve your riding performance!

One thing is for sure, I won't ride naked! "Dress for the crash" as they say and you'll have more fun, get better faster, and live longer. ■

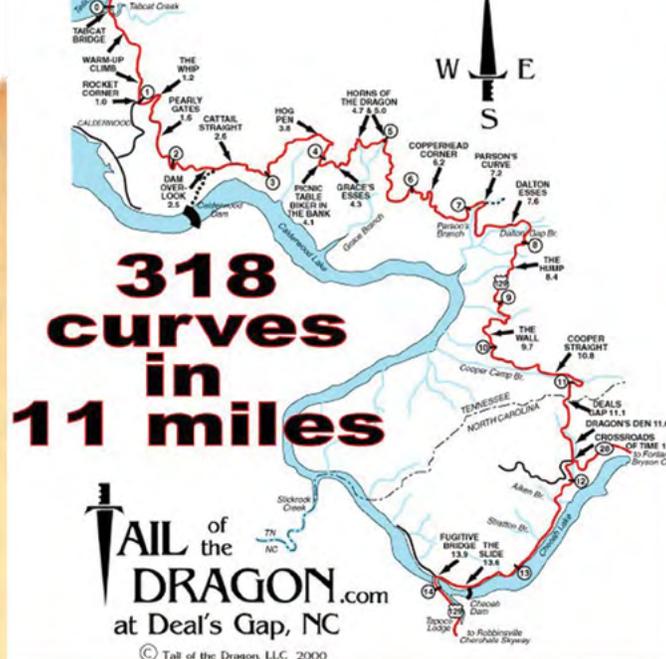


Slaying the Dragon —

The Right Way And How Your Motorcycle Club Can Plan Big Too

BY GUNNERY SERGEANT BEAU BRENNEIS
U.S. MARINE FORCES COMMAND

Riders and many non-riders alike hear the phrase “Tail of the Dragon,” and their minds automatically think Danger! Challenge! Thrill!



It's true that the Tail of the Dragon, a twisted-up piece of road through the mountains of North Carolina into Tennessee offering 318 curves within an 11-mile span can be all of that. That's the allure.

However, a lot of factors, specifically from a safety and training standpoint, need to be taken into consideration for anyone hoping to tame the dragon – especially a group of riders attempting to do so. Failure to plan will increase the risk of a bad outcome for those choosing to undergo the experience.

Sure, it would be easy to simply talk about the safety factors, or provide a brief to Marines at my command about riding the mountains on switchbacks, but that does not provide them with any experience. I wanted to offer something invaluable that would build on experience, but also create an opportunity for mentorship and cohesion among our riders.

We decided to ride the dragon together, as a group.

Planning a long ride of this nature and involving the Marines in the process will teach them to plan on their own behalf for future rides. Not to mention the added morale benefit of riding together on one of the most notable pieces of road in the country.

When the idea arose to tackle this ride as a club, I used the time to create open discussion on what considerations were necessary to plan and safely execute a ride of this nature. As each member discussed thoughts, so began the plan. One of the hardest things to do when planning is to keep it all in your head, so I immediately wrote down the key components for planning the ride:

Training

Route

Safety

After laying down the foundational categories I began listing what needs to happen within each through the suggestions of the members and my own thoughts:

Training

Training conducted at the meetings;
March meeting: **T-CLOCS**, Rules to

group riding

April meeting: **Traction control**, counter-steering, and safe turning

May meeting (day prior to ride): Pre-brief with visual of the route we will ride, and provide a check list of things to bring

Practical application.

- One week out, conduct a full T-CLOCS inspection and set up range time to practice drills;

- Stopping in a turn
- Practice weaving the off-set cones
- Avoiding obstacles in the road
- Quick stops
- S-Curve
- Approaching a turn safely
- Route
- Where will we start the ride?
- What is the route?
- How long will it take
- Sunrise/sunset times
- What areas will we travel through (traffic times?)





- Establish the checkpoints (fuel/rest/chow)
- Safety
- Weather
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Motorcycle maintenance; when was it last done?
- Motorcycle recovery plan
- Rider fatigue
- First aid kit
- Operational Risk Management Checklist
- Communications (cell phone reception?)

Putting all this into consideration allowed me to arrange reconnaissance, and make reconnaissance.

After some searching online, I found a training video complete with a narration of the ride on the Tail of the Dragon; perfect for the pre-ride training scheduled the day prior to. I also pooled my resources to obtain curriculum from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) on Group riding and other training points. A quick email to the safety office let them know I wanted to set up range time with the Marines participating in the ride and explained the drills I wanted to conduct and why. They fit us into the schedule. Easy day. We will also do a full T-CLOCS inspection via the MSF checklist on each other's bikes at that time.

Now that the training plan was established I focused on the route and safety considerations. The riding distance from our command in Norfolk, Va., to the mountains is approximately eight hours. That's quite the haul, especially for those who have not ridden for even half that amount of time. I checked the sunrise time to establish the right time for starting the ride, and ensured I took note of the sunset time as well, considering that the end of the ride would be in the mountains, so, sunset could be earlier out there. I also wanted to ensure that the dates we picked were well-thought-out, so I checked the historical weather trends for the best months that offered good temperature and the lowest propensity for rain.

For the ride out to North Carolina, we decided that the group meeting location would be an hour and a half out on the route plan. Psychologically, the ride would not have started, so the amount of time on, "the ride," is reduced to six and a half hours. Coming back from North Carolina, we decided to break it up into two days with a nights rest in between to prevent rider fatigue. Since I knew how we would get there and how we would come back, I established check points for when we would stop to eat, rest, or re-fuel along the way.

All members of our group are aware of the current policies regarding PPE, but a checklist indicating other articles of clothing or comfort items to pack for the trip, such as a rain suit, is always a good idea.

As of this writing, we are still several months out from our trip to the Tail of the Dragon, and we are still finalizing the plan. Starting so early has allowed us to take on this dream of completing a challenging ride a considerable distance away and make it a well-managed reality. Check next year's Smart Ride magazine for an update on how it goes! ■

Know Your Group Ride Hand Signals

Stop - arm extended straight down, palm facing back.



Slow Down - arm extended straight out, palm facing down.



Follow Me - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward.



Speed Up - arm extended straight out, palm facing up.



You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front.



Single File - arm and index finger extended straight up.



Double File - arm with index and middle fingers extended straight up.



Hazard in the Roadway - on the left, point with left hand; on the right, point with right foot.



Pull Off - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder.



Highbeam - tap on top of helmet with open palm down.



Fuel - arm out to the side finger pointing to tank.



Group Riding Considerations for Inexperienced Riders

BY ITSC(SS) DONALD A. DAVIS

Researching a number of different sources will reveal all manner of sage direction on where to place inexperienced riders in a group, but very little amplification on the reasons why. Some say the middle, some say the front, and a few even say to put them in the back. Almost invariably, the inexperienced rider will choose to ride in the back, but is this the best choice? In staggered formations that maintain a good 2-second following distance and also utilize an experience rider for a “tail-gunner” or “sweeper” at the back, it theoretically shouldn’t make a great deal of difference where the inexperienced rider is placed; however, there are things to consider for those occasions when we find ourselves riding with a less-experienced or informal group (such as what often happens on the way back from an “official” ride), combined with

an inexperienced rider or riders that are desperately in need of experienced support, mentorship, leadership and sound recommendations in such a situation:

1. How big is the “group”? “Front”, “middle” and “back” don’t mean much with three bikes! In general, two or more bikes should have the more-experienced “leader” on the left, and obviously staggered to be in front. In larger groups, “middle” could mean anything between the Road Captain and the Tail Gunner, which is where everybody else already is, too, so is that advice really helpful? In that sense, “front” and “back” will never happen, because those positions are already reserved!

2. Are there any trikes or sidecars? For the most part, sidecars and trikes should be placed at the back, just in front of the tail gunner. It’s not uncommon, however, to have one lead in a parade-type formation, especially memorial holidays when large standards are being flown. They should be placed together when riding just in front of the Tail Gunner and stagger as best they can if there’s more than one, for the purposes of predicting the preferred direction of a swerve, should it become necessary, and also to help the Tail Gunner maintain perception of the overall formation. With all that said, inexperienced riders should not be placed behind them. They don’t move or react like normal two-wheel motorcycles, and since most of the other riders in the formation have never driven a trike or used a sidecar, none are going to be particularly good at predicting or reacting to what the trike or sidecar bike in front of them will do in a panic situation.

3. How inexperienced is inexperienced? Most that have been riding for a couple of years know that we can ride exceptionally well in normal conditions - all the way to the scene of the crash. When was the last time that the rider in question took a safety course? What mistakes have you

seen from them so far? Do they drift into the middle of the lane often? Are they unsteady? Does their bike fit them well? Are they rounding off left turns and swinging wide on right turns? If so, they need extra room in the turns, and that starts being more about the experience of the rider that is staggered off just behind them, rather than concepts of “front”, “back” and “middle” of the group.

Since the intent is, after all, to TRAIN the inexperienced rider for riding in groups while maximizing safety and risk management for all concerned, it is therefore recommended that inexperienced riders be strongly encouraged to ride directly behind the leader. Here again, many sources will advise that inexperienced riders and riders with passengers (especially those that don’t normally ride two-up and tend to be a bit wobbly) should ride in the right track of the lane when feasible. For the training benefit and safety of the inexperienced rider, however, strong consideration should be given to placing the inexperienced rider in the left track, directly behind the leader, and here’s why:

1. The leader – often a qualified Road Captain – is really the only rider in the group that is imbued with a feeling of responsibility for any other rider besides himself. The rule is to “ride your own ride”, but every Road Captain knows that setting the speed into curves, rate of acceleration following turns, braking up to an intersection as well as braking and positioning in anticipation of hazards has a dynamic effect on the group. The best results of his careful consideration will have the most positive regulatory effect on the rider directly behind him. The regulatory effects of the actions of the leader are diminished toward the rear of the group.

2. In fact, the “dynamics of the group” are always MAGNIFIED towards the rear! The larger the group is, the more diverse the group is in terms of the range of experience, so



the “accordion effect” will be much more pronounced at the rear. Acceleration following turns to catch up can easily facilitate and encourage wide-open throttle operation followed by hard braking to re-establish the formation. Any interference such as breaks in the formation due to traffic lights, or cars passing through, has similar effects. Riding in the back can be more fun and interesting as a result, but is the “inexperienced rider” ready to run with the ever-surging-and-revving thrill-seekers back there?

3. Anybody, after about the first two bikes, can get caught by a light and find themselves leading the rest of the group! My wife and I each ride our own bike in a staggered formation all the time. I don't know how many times I've cruised through a clean, solid yellow with plenty of time, but my “better half” decided to stop. That's just two bikes in staggered formation, one second apart, and she “chickens out” on yellows all the time! Maybe the fact that I've got an 88 and she's got the 96 is a good thing – she's getting better at catching up, and enjoying it! Still, many inexperienced riders will quickly abandon their preference for riding in the back when asked the question, “are you ready to lead if you get caught by a light?” If not, get up there behind the Road Captain, where you'll be safe!

4. Last but not least is the left track vs. right track consideration. The right track is great for training riders to hug that white stripe and not swing out on right turns, but if they aren't so good at it, the mistakes will be more pronounced and more greatly affect the other riders in the group until they are comfortable turning HEADANDEYES (yes, that's one word, for us!) and getting that bike to lean so it can turn to its potential. Then again, rounding off LEFT turns cuts across the track of the bike staggered off rear and left of them. This is going to be an even BIGGER problem, because, unfortunately, there are rarely any painted stripes for their guidance through the intersection when only one lane can turn left. Very often, we try to keep the formation tight through left turns to avoid





getting riders in the back caught by the light, so when the inexperienced rider rounds off the turn, the front wheel of the bike to their rear and left is often right there, forcing them to brake quickly in the middle of a turn, which is NEVER GOOD. A quick stab at the rear brake is often all that's required, but what if that rider is also relatively inexperienced or inattentive as well? They're going to grab the front brake and the bike is going to try to go straight into the ground, unless they know how to do "the stomp", which is not a very fun dance, and feels like you've collapsed your ankle! There is also a greater likelihood for inexperienced riders to inadvertently leave the paved roadway when in the right track due to the greater incidence of potholes, broken pavement edges and gravel on some of these two-lane blacktops. While the inexperienced rider may feel more exposed in the left track, they actually have more room to swerve and react, larger and more equal sizes of available road space to their left and right, and a larger, more equal natural radius for both left and right turns, as well as generally better and safer road conditions. ■



Chief Davis is Active-duty Navy and has been an avid rider for more than twelve years. He has served as the Motorcycle Safety Officer/Coordinator/Representative for three prior commands, riding extensively in Georgia, Hawaii, Guam, Florida and Texas, including a honeymoon riding the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. He has instructed many military riders on motorcycle safety and skill development, and will happily demonstrate how to scrape a circle on the ground inside two parking spaces with either footboard. A Life Member of Harley Owners Group and a member of Sons of Liberty Riders, he has participated in numerous charity group rides of all sizes, including the Guinness Book of World Records "Bikers On Parade" ride of 2009, the "Largest and Longest Veterans' Day Motorcycle Parade in the USA".



The leader – often a qualified Road Captain – is really the only rider in the group that is imbued with a feeling of responsibility for any other rider besides himself.

PPE Testimonial: THE DARK KNIGHT

BY AZ1(AW) ANTHONY T. CURRY, FRCWDF

Saturday morning ... Who wants to come in and work?

Well, I must say that I wasn't one of them, but nevertheless I support the Chain of Command on decisions. I woke up, looked outside and checked the temperature and as forecasted it was another cold day around NAS Fallon. It was just shy of a month after I completed the Advanced Riders Course and I decided to take my 2006 Kawasaki 636 on the journey to work.

It rained the day before, was cold out, and I figured my leather jacket and extra pair of sweatpants under my NWU's would help take the chill off. I started the bike, let it warm up, and throttled my way to work. The roads looked wet in a usually dry climate but, I was halfway there and nothing unusual was happening.

I made my turn onto Crook Road and just then I heard my Senior Enlisted Leader's voice blaring, "Cool your jets!!" inside my head. He had good reason to be in my head, since I'd had a prior speeding violation so I looked down to make sure I was minding the speed limit.

I took the left onto Wildes Road and thought to myself, "Second to last turn and soon I can warm up in the office."

I prepared to take the right turn prior to base and saw the normal debris on the right. I prepared my path of travel for outside middle outside. This turn approached gives you avoidance of the debris, a view of traffic, and room to maneuver.

Unfortunately, I entered the turn too fast at around 30 mph and as I completed my turn the back tire slid and off I went chasing the bike on my hip.

Holy Sailors Batman! The black ice known as the "Dark Knight" claimed my bike's right side frame sliders, mirror and tail fairing.

But wait!

The PPE saved my arms, legs, and hands. My jacket with impact pads was broken but my arm wasn't. I lost a pocket off my NWU's and my gloves were torn but hands are fine other than a bruised pinky.

Great choices in PPE but my entry speed was too fast. I may have been able to apply front brake to straighten the bike; however, inattention to skills and complacency doomed me. I should have chosen a safer speed, a safer route, and made it a much more enjoyable ride. Instead, I was towed to work and suffered the embarrassment of crashing.

Still much better than suffering broken bones or worse. Take it from me: Don't neglect your training and PPE! ■



Gear Up for the Ride!

BY: DON BORKOSKI

GET 25% OFF YOUR MOTORCYCLE PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT PURCHASE AT PARTICIPATING NAVY EXCHANGES!

The Navy Exchange is looking out for our riders. This spring the NEX will again roll out a new coupon for riders who complete required motorcycle training. The older coupons are gone and were a huge success. More than 20,000 coupons were issued and used from 2010 to 2012! Let's face it, 25 percent off is quite a bit of savings for gear that can get expensive.

The NEX has catered to riders by setting up valuable merchandise isles for Motorcycle Safety equipment. Check it out! And if there is something you want and don't see, let the manager know. They have added many items simply because riders have asked. The gear is cheaper and tax-free for authorized customers.

How do you get a coupon? Satisfactorily complete a required Motorcycle Safety Course on participating bases

Coupons are good for 90 days from issuance.

Individuals who "plan to ride" may also be issued a coupon when taking the BRC before purchasing a bike.

Coupons are not transferrable. Your name, completion date and the instructor's signature must be on the coupon

You must have your training completion card with you to redeem your coupon

The Navy provides quality training for motorcycle riders. We want you to be as professional on your bike as you are on your ship. That professionalism includes managing your risk and wearing all the gear, all the time. It might sound like a cliché, but it's true: Dress for the crash, not for the ride.



FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS ...

LISA JOHNSON
NAVAL SAFETY CENTER
MOTORCYCLE SAFETY SPECIALIST

THE SAILORS AND MARINES YOU TRAINED
AND HELPED THANK YOU FOR YOUR
EFFORTS. BEST OF LUCK IN THE FUTURE!

