

Crossroads HOG, Safety Minute August, 2006

YOU'RE GONNA' GET WET ! No doubt about it; if you ride a motorcycle, you are eventually going to ride it in the rain. Even though the vast majority of motorcyclists use the weather forecast to help them make that final decision to ride or drive or stay put, everybody gets to experience the fact that the weather is not perfectly predictable.

Recognize also that there are some (very few) motorcyclists who willingly, even eagerly, accept the challenges of riding in the rain – and enjoy it. What do you suppose they know that most of us do not?

Here are a few tidbits for you to add to your knowledge base about riding in the rain. I hope they are helpful to you.

1. **CLOTHING** is a real key element to riding in the rain. Your clothing selection will have a positive effect on your experience in several ways. Properly chosen garments will keep you dry, warm, and visible.

First fact = you need it. Sure you can show us all how tough you are by just getting soaked and laughing it off as “part of the experience.” But; remember, that wetness is evaporating in the wind and it is drawing heat from your body. Even if you don't mind being wet, you surely will mind being cold. And, as your body loses heat, you lose your ability to move, think, and function your best. This situation can lead to hypothermia, which is potentially deadly.

Always carry a rainsuit. Today's selection includes very functional suits that are lightweight and pack very small. Make sure your suit fits properly and snugly around your neck, wrists and ankles. Make sure it is waterproof not water-resistant and that it is made of a material that “breathes” so you don't end up trapping moisture under the suit. Make sure you have a rainsuit that is made for motorcycling. Those that are not typically will not last long in the wind. You'll spend a little more and get a lot more comfort and safety.

Dress in layers so that you can shed or add clothing, worn under your rainsuit, as you find necessary to maintain a comfortable body temperature. It is wise to make sure the layer closest to your skin is a wicking fabric so that the moisture you generate is pulled away from the skin. Avoid bulky clothing as it will restrict your movement.

With the proper clothing, you remain dry from the outside in and from the inside out and you prevent evaporative cooling from dragging your body temperature down. That's a good start.

2. RIDING techniques have to be “tweaked” to get you home safely. The rain effects the bike’s tires’ ability to grip the road surface (traction). You need to adjust your riding style to reduce the amount of traction you need to maintain control.
 - a. Slow down.
 - b. Increase the “space cushion” around you so you have more time to make changes in speed or direction. Don’t make sudden changes in either.
 - c. Sit out the first few minutes of a rain. Let the roads’ surface wash clean of deposits that accumulate. A hard rain can clean rather quickly but a drizzle will take a much longer time.
 - d. Ride in the portion of the road that does not show accumulated water. Stay out of puddles as they can lead to hydroplaning.
 - e. RELAX. Be conscious of the fact that, if you are tensed and tight, it can be detrimental to the bike’s ability to maintain traction. If you find yourself getting tense, find a safe place to pull off the road and take a break.
 - f. If you have a passenger, make sure they are comfortable and confident. If they are not, take a break. A nervous passenger will add to the difficulty and danger.
 - g. Do not seek shelter at the side of the road or under an over-pass. If you are going to get off the road, really get off. Use a rest area, gas station, restaurant, etc.
 - h. Be visible. Your rainsuit should have reflective accents, your lights should be on, and you should be positioned in the most visible portion of the roadway.
 - i. Make sure you can see. RainX type product will help you windshield and face shield shed the water. Be sure to use a RainX type product that is made for plastics.
 - j. Be aware of paint and vinyl as it is applied to the road surface for stops and driving directions. These are extremely slippery when wet as are railroad crossings, wooden bridges, and metal gratings. At stops and toll booths you will find the center of the lane to be very slippery as well.

With a little bit of care and intelligent riding, you will find riding in that inevitable rain is not so bad after all. And, maybe, you’ll not have to leave your riding plans in the hands of the meteorologists.

That’s my list. I’m sure you can add more and I would like to hear from you. Catch me at a meeting, on a ride, or contact me through crossroadshog.com. as you wish.

Mike – the Safety Guy.