

Safety Minute
Crossroads HOG
July 2007

*(the majority of information for this presentation is paraphrased from **Proficient Motorcycling**, by David Hough)*

All Winter we wished for, dreamed about, and talked about how great it was going to be to be riding this Summer. So here it is. We don't need layer upon layer of clothing to keep from freezing to death while we ride. As a matter of fact, sometimes it seems we cannot get light enough cover to keep from overheating. That's what I want to talk to you about this month – overheating.

WHEN IT'S HOT – YOU'RE HOT and you better know how to identify it, the dangers it brings, and what you can do about it.

Your body will not tolerate much change in its core temperature. You come complete with automatic systems to keep your core temperature within a very small range. Since it's summertime now, we'll talk about keeping it from getting too warm.

The body, when it senses that the core is heating up, responds with three actions that allow your blood to carry heat away from your core - sweating, vasodilation, and increased heart rate & blood pressure.

Sweating promotes evaporative cooling at the skin; vasodilation (enlarging blood vessels) allows more blood to flow near the skin and be cooled, and your heart increases rate to move more blood through those blood vessels. (Blood pressure drops.) So long as the air outside is cooler than your core, and you give the body plenty of water to replenish what evaporates, this methodology will keep you working properly.

Your body will tell you when it's not getting enough cooling. Your arms will get tired; your leg muscles and/or your abdomen will begin to cramp; headaches are common; upset stomachs will follow. If you don't do something to correct the situation you will progress to being dizzy and may even black out – Heat Exhaustion.

Take a break. Find some shade and take sips of water. Drink water, exercise drinks are OK, soft drinks are acceptable but not so good, and alcoholic drinks are a definite NO.

If the cramps don't subside, mix ½ tsp of salt in a ½ glass of water and drink one every 15 minutes for an hour.

If you don't take a break and treat the symptoms noted above, you are cruising toward HEAT STROKE. Remember, your body is spending an inordinate amount of energy try to cool the core by pushing the blood to the skin. That means that blood flow to your muscles, organs, and brain is being reduced. HEATSTROKE means your body's self-protective mechanism shuts down because it was unable to keep the core cool enough. It requires immediate medical attention. Do what ever you can to cool the victim (they cannot help themselves at this stage) while you get medical help.

OK – that's all pretty scary. Now, what can we as riders do to prevent such a scenario?

Here are a few tips for you.

1. When the air feels cool on your skin.
 - a. Your body's system is working.
 - b. Allow air to flow over your skin by exposure or by wearing riding clothes that are designed for such. Newer mesh riding jackets are an excellent solution as they provide cooling air and protection.
2. When the air feels hot on your skin.
 - a. Your body's system is not enough. You are actually heating the blood as it comes to your skin. Remember, heat energy flows to the colder side. If the air is warmer than 99°F it will be heating you up, not cooling you down.
 - b. You need to augment your system by, at least, covering up all skin you can. Put your leathers back on! Sure, you'll be hot but not as hot as you would be without them.
 - c. Augment your body's ability to sweat. A wet kerchief or knit neckband applied to your neck and exposed to the air will act like sweating and cool your skin in that area. You will need to replenish the water frequently but as it evaporates it will cool. Your neck is a prime area to cool as there are large blood vessels close to the surface. (and they serve the brain – you need that functioning well to ride safely)
3. If you find that you are riding in serious heat often you might consider some of the cooling products now available to motorcyclists.
 - a. OSI sports Crown is a yarmulke-like fabric cap that you wear under your helmet. You soak it in water and the air ducted through your helmet's vents evaporates the water and cools your head. (www.osi-sports.com)
 - b. Chill Out design's Cool Vest is a vest that you saturate with water and allow evaporation to take place. (www.shangorider.com)
 - c. Neck Snakes are neck wraps that are filled with a highly absorbent crystalline material. Many sports shops carry them.

Yes, the warmth of summer is a welcome change from winter. As motorcyclists we can appreciate that more than many. Stay aware, however, that too much heat can be a dangerous thing for us. Pay attention to your body and use these tips to enjoy your ride.

Mike the Safety Guy