

Riding During the Fall

Not to be confused with

Falling During the Ride

Here in the Midwest we have 4 seasons to ride in – Spring (wet and green), Summer (hot and humid), Fall (colder and colorful) and Winter (white, cold and slippery) – each presenting the motorcyclist with its own challenges. As I write this Safety Thought for Crossroads HOG, I can reflect on really beautiful Spring and Summer riding seasons recently passed and can look forward to Fall with hopes that it will last long and be followed by a really short Winter.

Fall does present some interesting challenges to us as motorcyclists. Some are quite obvious and others, perhaps, not so. Here is a list of “concerns” for you to consider as you, too, enter your Fall riding season.

Grass on the road – a holdover from Summer. Grass cut near the road typically ends up on the roads’ surface. We all know that reduces our ability to get maximum traction. Be aware that, in the Fall, its effect is even more dangerous because of the temperature of the roads’ surface. Avoid riding in the grass covered roadway. If you do have to, don’t make any sudden changes in speed or direction.

Leaves on the road – present a very obvious danger. When they are dry they are slippery enough. When they are wet, they are worse. And, remember, they can hide a layer of moisture between them and the road – very dangerous. Avoid riding in the leaves whenever possible. If you have to, don’t make any sudden changes in speed or direction.

The Road Itself – is colder than it is in the summer. Be aware that traction diminishes with temperature – even without moisture or ice. Shaded roadways will be noticeably cooler than roadway in direct sun.

Your tires – are colder. That means they are able to give you less traction. Slow down and corner a little more conservatively.

The sun – is lower later in the morning and earlier in the evening. During those times we are most likely to riding in the Fall, the sun is lower in the sky. If you are riding with your back to it, the oncoming traffic has a problem seeing you. If you are riding into the sun, you have problems seeing traffic, items, and situations that may be a danger to you. Slow down, make yourself conspicuous through dress and lights, use sun glasses, and be very aware.

Fall temperatures are generally dramatically cooler in the morning and evening. Warmth only comes with direct sunlight. Make sure you can keep warm when that temperature drops and you can keep cool on that surprisingly warm day. Pack clothes

that you can layer. A rain suit, always a good idea, is a great tool for keeping the cool air from chilling you without adding bulk while you ride home a bit later than you thought you would be.

Distraction is prevalent as the Midwest gets near the end of the Fall riding season. Our Fall scenery is both a blessing and a curse in that manner. Remind yourself often as you ride that you must give up some of the scenery for safety. If you are the passenger, try to refrain from pointing out particularly beautiful views to the rider. As the rider, take in the beauty in front of you more and less of that along side of your path.

Your Bike, along with the traction issues discussed above, will show you a few changes in the Fall, too. It's a good idea to have a cover or a towel to wipe it off with in the morning as there will be considerably more "dew" to deal with. You will also want to check your tire pressures more frequently as the temperature drops.

AND – if you are the type to leave your helmet with the bike overnight, you might want to reconsider that in the Fall as you might find the "morning helmet" less than comfortable as you slip it onto your head.

That's my list for now. I hope there are a couple of items new to you or that it, at least, reminded you to watch for some you already knew. If you have others, please share them with your riding friends. The more we know, the better it gets. (I've heard that somewhere before!!)

Now, go have fun riding in the Fall.

Mike – the Safety Guy