

Safety Tips #24
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What Can We Learn From This?

On Thursday, March 25, 2010 there was a horrible crash in Phoenix. A dump truck driver lost control of his vehicle and plowed into 8 motorcycles with 9 people aboard them. Four cars were involved as well. As of the following day, 4 of motorcyclists had died and 4 were injured, 1 critically and 3 seriously, from the crash.

Clearly, this was not the fault of the motorcyclists. But, as riders, we know that “it’s not who’s right, it’s who’s left.” In other words, being in the right is not the motorcyclist’s first concern; staying safe is.

When we ride we are often facing the same risks that these unfortunate riders in Phoenix faced. Trouble can come from any direction; the Motorcycle Safety Foundation tells us that only 3.2% of crashes occur from factors directly behind. Of course, that’s no comfort for the riders that were hit in Phoenix. I, myself, have had to evade vehicles from the rear while I was stopped at an intersection on two separate occasions during my riding career (so far). Both situations would have resulted in very bad injuries or death had I not gotten out of the way of the errant drivers. In one situation I had to ride onto the sidewalk to get out of the way, and in the other situation I had to jog over into the oncoming traffic lane (luckily there was no oncoming traffic!).

Sometimes there is nothing we can do to avoid this type of crash. But there are ways to mitigate the level of risk.

One thing we can do is to keep an eye on the rear-view mirrors, to see if there is a vehicle approaching at a rate of speed too high to get stopped.

Another thing we can do is to leave an out (escape route) in case we have to move out of the way quickly. When riding in a group, as the Phoenix riders were, everyone riding in the group must understand before the ride begins that when we come to an intersection or other stopping point, we should not be bunched up so tightly that some of the riders have no escape route.

And finally, we should leave the transmission in first gear, holding the clutch in, so we can move as quickly as possible if need be. I see lots of riders shift the bike to neutral at stops; this is not a good technique.

Did the riders in Phoenix do any or all of these things? I don’t know. This crash can’t be blamed on them. But this unfortunate circumstance gives us an opportunity to learn how to be safer. Let’s take the opportunity.