

Safety Tips #34
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**“Where DID You Get Those
SHOES?”**

Do you like the music of Steely Dan? I love it. They have a song which goes, “I stepped up on the platform. The man gave me the news. He said, ‘You must be joking, son. Where did you get those shoes?’” So, what does this have to do with motorcycle safety? And, no, it’s not about protective footwear; we’ve already talked about that in a previous article. It’s about *image* this time.

Does your *image* affect your safety when you’re on a bike? I’ve been thinking about this lately, especially since I read an article on this subject by David Hough. Mr. Hough has some definite opinions about this; frankly, I’m not sure where I stand on this issue, but it seems to be worthy of thought and the exchange of ideas. So here goes. (Sound of can of worms opening. Can you hear it?)

Let’s start out with a nice, potentially inflammatory statement by Mr. Hough: “Face it – if your image evokes distaste or loathing in other drivers, you are sending the message that you are not worthy of their respect – and therefore not worthy of your road space.” He’s talking

about, “Lots of black, scraggly, sinister clothing with prominent spikes, chains, floppy braid, and assorted nasty weapons.” Sound like anyone you know? Do you look like that when you ride? Even a little bit? When you are out on the road and see a biker dressed like that, what do you think? Does that person get more or less respect from you? Do you think that if that person had a clean, quiet bike and was dressed in some other colors beside black it would elicit a reaction that would make him/her safer?

I find this topic very interesting. Almost all my riding gear is black. My bikes seem to sound louder than stock. And they are very rarely clean, as I would rather ride ‘em than clean ‘em. Am I getting less respect on the road than I should be getting? And am I putting myself at higher risk than is necessary? I have one of those black denim riding vests with all the patches and pins on it, but I almost never wear it. Am I safer because I tend to leave it at home? Or is it the other way around?

Years ago when I started riding I thought it was *cool* to look like a road tramp. I assumed that if my image evoked a certain level of fear or trepidation among other motorists, they would stay away from me, and I would be safer for it. Excellent! I could look cool *and be safer at the same time*. But does it work? I really don’t know. There are so many bad drivers out there that sometimes I would think it just doesn’t matter what I would wear while on the bike.

Years passed, and colorful textile motorcycle clothing was introduced, the stuff with Kevlar, padding, breathable

liners, vent zippers, etc. I got some, a nice bright yellow Joe Rocket jacket and pants. It was very practical. And HIGHLY visible, and priced right, too. I wore it a lot, and it got worn out. I decided to go back to my good ol' (black) leathers, which I still had from way back when. And that's what I wear these days. Is that a good thing?

Time changes everything, like the types of vehicles being driven on the road today, the things drivers of those vehicles are doing (or not doing) while they're behind the wheel. The population is increasing, so the number of vehicles on the road is increasing; and this results in worsening road conditions as proper road maintenance gets more difficult and expensive. So the riding environment is different than it was decades ago. Should my choice of my riding image change as well? Hough says, "...the motorcycle you ride and the gear you wear have an effect on others." Do you agree? Are you getting the result you want from others on the road? Can we change our image in order to be safer? Talk amongst yourselves.