

Safety Tips #36

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A Minor Milestone?

This is Article #36 in the series; and, at one per month, my calculator tells me that this marks three years of Safety Tips. So let's try something different to mark the occasion: a recap, and some reflections.

Looking back over what I have chosen to write about, I am trying to see if there are any trends to the topic list; and, if so, what they mean, if anything. These articles have contained some very basic tips especially useful to the beginning rider (looking where we want to go, counter-steering), some advanced riding tips for very experienced riders (other ways to steer the bike, trail braking), some tips that can be useful to anyone out there on two or three wheels (the riding environment, ergonomics), and some tips on some peripheral topics (like bike theft, lights, and the rider's image).

The very first Safety Tips article, #1, (on Visual Directional Control) and the last one, #35, (on Riding Posture) are so closely related that it seems like it might have been planned that way and that a circle has closed. I note that this was not done intentionally. But, was it total coincidence? I think not....

Why would my 35th installation be so closely related, three full years later, to the 1st one? I think there just may be a good reason, whether or not I realized it last month when I wrote the last article. A motorcycle tends to go where the rider is looking. And where a rider is looking is affected enormously by his or her posture. Now

that we know that a very high percentage (some studies say half or more) of rider crashes are single-vehicle incidents, characterized by the rider running wide in a turn, it starts to seem extremely important to remember to focus our eyes on the end of the turn (where we want to go), as opposed to somewhere we don't want to go (like the shoulder of the road, or the guardrail, or cliff). Maybe if more riders concentrated on directing their vision to a safe place we could put a dent in this horrible statistic.

Articles # 3, 4, 5, 6, 13 all deal with turning issues, which is where we seem to be having an inordinate number of problems. Pick an appropriate entry speed, counter-steer (unless you're on a 3-wheeler), and look where you want to end up!

Articles # 2, 18, and 23 all deal with use of brakes and stopping. Hey, I guess it's important! The brakes are the single most effective control for accident avoidance. Can you believe that there are still some folks that are afraid of using their front brakes, even though most of the stopping power of the bike comes from there?

Articles # 7, 9, 11, 12, 20, 22, 24, 27, and 30 discuss road and traffic conditions, things we have to confront on each ride.

Articles # 16, 21, 25, and 31 – 33 involve how to treat your bike for certain riding circumstances (loading it, carrying a passenger, lighting improvements).

So there are recurring themes. And one of them is education and skills practice, covered in Article # 17, 28 and 29. At my desk at ABATE of Colorado's Rider Education Division I still get many calls from people who *just need to take a test to get their motorcycle driver's license endorsement, but don't have any interest in taking a class along with the required testing*. Some folks seem to believe that just because they have been riding (X) number of years they must already know how to do it right. But I'm not buying that line of reasoning. It reminds me of that old song, "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)" by Merle Travis and Tex Williams, which says, "I don't reckon it'll harm your health. Smoked all my life and I ain't dead yet." We can keep making the same mistakes unknowingly and have no problem for

years, until it finally catches up with us and then the unthinkable happens. The current issue of Motorcycle Consumer News has an article by Ken Condon, in which he says, “A lack of knowledge can allow a mistake to go unnoticed so that the same mistake is repeated over and over. Not knowing better, we can continue to ride in a way that increases risk. Depending on the severity of the mistake and the luck of the rider, the significance of the mistake may not become apparent for quite some time.” ABATE of Colorado is now offering our most comprehensive line of training courses ever. Of course we still have the Basic RiderCourse, but now we also have Intermediate and Advanced RiderCourses as well, not to mention the police motor officer-style riding course (taught by Don “Top” Gunn). If you think you’re a pretty good rider with lots of experience, try this course. It can be humbling... but it will also be rewarding!

O.K., it’s Springtime and great riding weather is here! Watch out for sand and gravel on the road, and for car drivers that, over the winter, forgot that motorcycles exist.

See you on the road!