

Safety Tips #45

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“You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows”

That’s a great line from the amazing Bob Dylan (who happens to be a motorcycle rider). I rode to ABATE’s Last Brass Monkey Run, which happens every year on New Year’s Eve day. Great event! But the ride - let’s just say it was a tad breezy out. I’m being understated here; it was downright blustery, with many major-league wind gusts.

Riding in heavy winds can be very challenging. Some bikes are affected more than others, and some riders have greater challenges with wind than other riders; but it’s a factor for every bike and every rider, so it bears discussion.

The wind tries to push you in the direction it’s blowing (duh), so you have to resist, or compensate, by leaning into it. Leaning is accomplished by pressing on the handlegrip of the direction the wind is coming from. So far, so good, but the problem with wind is that it’s usually variable; in other words, it might stop blowing, or be blocked by something like a building, hill, tunnel, or other vehicle. In this case you have to be ready to stop compensating (leaning) for the wind, *quickly*. Riding in a gusty situation can be a ride full of these maneuvers. It can get tiring. More on that later.

When dealing with windy conditions, it is recommended that we ride in the middle of the lane. This gives us some maneuvering room for the extra space we might need when leaning/not leaning, over and over again, in short periods of time.

Back to the fatigue issue. Riding in the wind presents more challenge than just staying on the road. Being ready for gusts, as well as for when the gusts end, repeatedly, is mentally tiring. And the physical action needed to make the necessary steering inputs takes additional effort, of course. But wait – there's more! Wind is very noisy. High noise levels cause fatigue. Wind moves your riding clothing around, causing it to flap, etc., and that can be distracting. Drafts can get into your riding gear, causing you to become cold. (High quality riding gear mitigates these things to a great extent.) And all that stuff makes one tired more quickly.

As with any ride, it's a good idea to check the weather prior to starting out. If it's going to be windy, decide in advance whether or not you actually want to ride. If you do, be ready for additional challenges, and plan on riding fewer miles than if conditions were calm.