

And Now For Something Completely Different...

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And now for something completely different... for most of us, anyway. What's different is how many wheels the bikes have. I am thinking of three wheelers: trikes and sidecar rigs. House Bill 1050 was passed this year, and goes into effect on July 1. This new law allows for a 3-wheel motorcycle endorsement on Colorado Drivers' Licenses. Coinciding with this development, ABATE of Colorado will be offering 3-wheel motorcycle rider training and license endorsement testing. Many folks expect the number of 3-wheel riders to be increasing significantly in the near future. So what better opportunity to present a safety tips column on 3-wheelers?

Along with nine other ABATE of Colorado rider education instructors, I recently became certified by the Evergreen Safety Council (from Washington) to teach S/TEP (Sidecar/Trike Education Program) classes. I learned plenty, and what follows in this column is some of that. (Check out the Evergreen Safety Council web site at www.esc.org.)

Three-wheelers can tip over, not at a stop the way a 2-wheeler can, but in motion, when turning. But before they tip over they will raise a wheel on the inside of the turn. This is usually not desirable, but is not that uncommon, especially on sidecar rigs in right-hand turns. There is a technique for reducing the likelihood that a 3-wheeler will tip in a corner, and that is called "drifting."

Drifting, when done properly, causes the rear wheel of the sidecar rig, or the rear wheels of a trike, to lose a controlled amount of traction, and drift towards the outside of the turn. This accomplishes two things, both of which are desirable. One thing it accomplishes is to align the rig in the direction of the turn. The other thing it accomplishes is to reduce the traction which enables lifting the inside wheel, or, in a more extreme case, a tipover.

How does one cause a 3-wheeler to drift? The technique is accomplished by applying the front brake *as we roll on the throttle*. Sounds weird, but it works! The rear wheel is trying to accelerate the rig, but the front brake is holding it back. So it tends to slide towards the outside of the turn. This technique takes precision and control, especially since your right hand controls both the front brake and the throttle. The amount of front brake application and the amount of throttle application have to be in the correct ratio for the rider to have control of the drift.

Obviously, this takes practice. If you are interested in getting started in 3-wheel riding, or if you already ride a 3-wheeler, consider getting some training, in order to learn the basics along with more sophisticated techniques such as drifting. ABATE of Colorado will be offering this training in the very near future. Watch for announcements on the web site (www.abateofcolo.org) in the rider education area. Training will be presented in both the Denver and Colorado Springs areas this year. ABATE will have 3-wheel machines available for use in the basic course. Try it – you’ll like it! I did.