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### Motorcycle Safety Tips

#### “Older is not Necessarily Smarter”

*by Ron Shepard*

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The headline grabs your attention: “Boomers, big motorcycles can be deadly combination.” It’s happening all over the country. For the last ten years, the number of motorcyclists over the age of 40 involved in fatal crashes has been on the increase. How could this happen? Aren’t older riders more mature? More responsible? More knowledgeable?

Many older riders are those who are returning to motorcycling after a hiatus of 20 or so years while raising a family. They are now using their discretionary time and income to return to riding. In all probability, most of the new (and returning) 40-something riders did not have the benefit of any formal rider training in their youth and would most likely reap great benefits from taking a motorcycle safety course now. However, they may be relying on a (perhaps faulty) memory of how good of a rider they thought they were and how easy they perceived it to be.

While motorcyclist fatalities among “baby boomers” increased 16 percent nationally between 2002 and 2003, the largest increase actually involved those under age 20 (up 27 percent) according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). However, Idaho’s experience is much better than the national trends. Those under age 20 have reduced their fatality rate and their crash rate by about half over the past 8 years. Why the disparity? Because in Idaho, the state requires those under age 21 to obtain rider education. Fortunately, Idaho takes motorcycle safety very seriously. The Idaho Skills Training Advantage for Riders (*STAR*) has been training new and experienced riders since 1996. Could this be why the younger rider is less involved in crashes? Could it be that the older rider is unaware of the value of rider education?

A recent evaluation funded by NHTSA singled out our *STAR* rider-training program as one of the best in the nation. In addition, a national safety expert who formerly served as NHTSA’s Associate Administrator for Research and Development recently reviewed all motorcycle crashes in Idaho from 1996-2003. Using this data, he concluded that the program is associated with a remarkable 64 percent reduction in crash risk and a 69 percent reduction in fatal crash risk. He also estimated that if the 108 “untrained” fatalities had received *STAR* training, 75 would not have died.

These are stunning performance results and good news for Idaho’s riders and would be riders alike. It is indicative of a state program that is working very well. Moreover, every crash prevented by *STAR* training saves taxpayers money in terms of social, medical, and economic costs that are avoided.

Riding a motorcycle in Idaho is not a dangerous proposition, with training. But it does require good judgment and skills. Motorcyclists who complete the Idaho *STAR* program, avoid alcohol, wear protective gear and ride responsibly can look forward to an exciting and safe time riding in the most beautiful state in the union.

Idaho *STAR* Motorcycle Safety Program

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