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A Rider State of Mind, Part One

Motorcycle riders, if they want to survive, have to abandon their old notions of what it means to "drive" and learn new ones.

There are four underlying approaches to safe riding. In this issue of MMM, I'm going to outline two key attitudes that safety conscious riders all seem to have in common, and the next issue I'm going to outline the other two.

I should warn you: you may disagree with the following two theories. That's good. You should disagree—in your heart. (These theories are, admittedly, Nattering Nabobs of Negativism—repeat them too loudly and even your best riding friends will smack you.) You don't have to agree with these theories, but you do have to pretend as if you do. Adopt them as guidelines. Ride as if they are the unassailable truth. Act as if you believe them and make all the difference in your riding career.

Attitude #1 Motorcyclists are responsible for everything that happens on the road. Not only is a rider responsible for his or her own safety (gear, skills, and strategy), a rider is also responsible for everyone else's actions and everything else as well. Forget about riding around in an SUV where if you make a mistake, it's a matter of trading insurance information or calling a towtruck and heading off on your merry little way. On a motorcycle, if you make a mistake, your day—or your life—is pretty much over.

In the big scheme of things, whenever anything goes wrong on the road, it's the rider who suffers the consequences. It doesn't matter whose fault it is or who had the right of way: if a car leaps out in front of a motorcycle in an intersection, the motorcycle is going to lose. Curve too tight? Rider's fault. (Should've slowed more.) Dog ran out into the road? Rider's fault. (Should have seen the dog earlier and stopped.) Car pulled out in front of you? Rider's fault. (Should have anticipated it and taken evasive action.) Train fell off a bridge trestle and crushed the rider? Rider's fault. (Rider chose to be on his or her motorcycle that day.) Any rider with an aversion to expensive repairs, pain, and missing body parts has to take the world onto their shoulders.

(This is not to imply that everything is the rider's fault! There's a "legal" way to look at it and a "safe" way to look at it. What I'm saying here is that this is the attitude riders should take in order to survive in the big traffic game. There are courtrooms and armchairs from which to sort out just who is liable for what. But if you'd rather be out riding than stuck in a courtroom with a pair of broken wrists, collar bones, and thumbs, best make an attitude

check. Being ultra-paranoid can make your life much, much easier.)

Attitude #2 All other drivers are deliberately trying to kill you. They're not merely arrogant yuppies or brain-dead zombies who can fog a mirror and get their driver's license; their goal is to run you over, smash into you, run you off the road, or otherwise find a way to wreck your day. Your job, on the other hand, is to make sure they can't touch you.

Other drivers are wild cards: unpredictable and totally random in their little man-made world of seat belts, air conditioning, and cruise control. The best you can do is expect the Other Guy to make the worst possible decision at the worst possible time—and try not to be there when it happens. Expect the worst and hope for the best so all of your surprises are happy surprises. Patrick J. Hahn

www.motorcyclesafety.state.mn.us

Coming next month: attitudes #3 and #4


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[PHOTO CAPTION] Ride as if every other person on the road is trying to kill you. Thankfully, they're not, but riding as if this were true will allow you to find places on the road where absolutely no one can touch you—even if they wanted to.

Photo courtesy Evans Brasfield.



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