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Skill Impairment at .03 and Greater BAC

We've all heard that combining drinking and riding is a bad idea. But what are the consequences of a few drinks? The following information is presented to better understand what critical riding skills are impaired by alcohol, and how these skills come into use in traffic environment. These examples will show how riding skills are impaired as a rider moves up the ladder of blood alcohol concentration from zero to .10--from one or two drinks up to four or five, which, for some riders in some states, may still be within the legal limit. Even on his or her best of days, riding is still a challenge for a sober, experienced rider. Riders make mistakes in traffic all the time. Alcohol compounds and intensifies those mistakes and is likely to bring about dire consequences for the impaired rider.

Complex Reaction Time .03 BAC

This is the amount of time it takes for the brain to process multiple environmental inputs and prepare and execute multiple responses, and is one of a rider's most critical skills. Motorcycle riders have to operate the bike and react to various hazards constantly. Example: A rider approaching a yellow light with an oncoming vehicle waiting to turn across his or her path. This is a triple hazard. 1) The oncoming vehicle could turn into the motorcyclist's path, 2) The motorcyclist has to decide whether to proceed through the light or to stop, and 3) A vehicle following the motorcycle has to make that same decision. If the rider does not take all three factors into account and react to them all within a second or two, he or she may be in great danger. This critical skill is impaired by alcohol at a modest .03 BAC.

Simple Reaction Time .03 BAC

This is the amount of time it takes to process an environmental factor and prepare and execute a response. Even one risk factor can jeopardize a rider's safety. Example: A country road with deer lurking in the bushes at the roadside. A rider who fails to recognize the deer in the ditch in time may be in for a big spill. Riders faced with this situation often don't know whether to stop, swerve, or slow and then swerve. Doing both at once (stopping and swerving) can cause the bike to crash on its own. Also, if a rider decides to swerve, he or she must also choose a direction, remain on the road, and not cross into oncoming traffic. What seems simple enough when sober can be a big problem just at a .03 BAC.

Tracking .05 BAC

Tracking is monitoring the progress or movement of an object. Riders need to constantly judge other road users' speed and direction. Expert riders can use peripheral vision to help track other road users while focusing on something else. Example: A motorcyclist is traveling and has the right of way while a car approaches from a side street. Imagine an impaired rider who doesn't realize the car approaching from the side is not slowing, but accelerating to try to beat the rider through the intersection, or the rider who doesn't realize that the dog that appears stationary is actually racing directly toward the rider, or that the train that appears stopped is actually moving. At .05 BAC, a rider's ability to track objects properly is compromised.

Skilled Psychomotor Tasks .05 BAC

This is your mind and body working together. For a motorcyclist, this is their mind's ability to tell the body what to do and how to do it--and for the body to react appro-

priately. Example: A rider on a country road who realizes a turn is getting tighter uses skilled psychomotor tasks to slow down and/or steer harder in order to keep the bike on the road. A rider at a .05 BAC may not be able to react to simple changes in curve radius--such as a decreasing-radius turn on an off ramp.

Oculomotor Control .05 BAC

This is eye movement, scanning and focusing on the environment: near, far, mirrors, right side, left side, and instruments/gauges. Vision is a rider's primary source of information. Riders need to collect hundreds of bits of information every minute to evaluate their environment and adjust their speed and position accordingly. Consider this example. Which rider would live longer in traffic: 1) A sober rider with 20/20 vision riding in traffic where every other driver was blindfolded, or 2) A sober rider who is blindfolded riding in traffic where every other driver has perfect 20/20 vision? A rider's oculomotor control is compromised at .05 BAC.

Divided Attention .08 BAC

To divide your attention is to focus on multiple tasks simultaneously. Keeping the bike balanced, keeping it between the lines, scanning the road surface and road signs, and watching other traffic are all required constantly on a motorcycle. At .08, a rider may have trouble doing everything at once, and spend too much time or attention on one thing (watching his or her speedometer, for example) while neglecting others (the light that just turned red, for example).

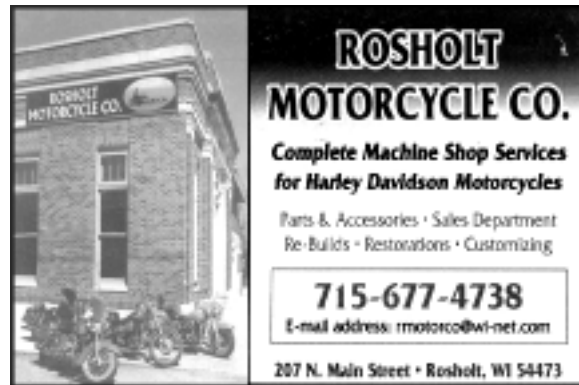
Information Processing .08 BAC

Environment, observation, perception, and decision. Riders must scan the environment and be aware of everything, observe those factors which are important, perceive how those factors can affect his or her safety, and make decisions to keep the motorcycle moving forward, upright, on two wheels. Example: The "abandoned" car on the opposite shoulder is actually moving and about to do an illegal U-turn. Riders must constantly play the "What If?" game. Without accurate information processing, a rider cannot ride defensively or spot hazards before they become disasters. "Is the shiny patch on the road water? Coolant? Oil? An asphalt patch? Is the tree stump in the ditch actually a deer? Did that sign say there was a 50 mph corner or a 30 mph corner coming up?" At .08 BAC, a rider's ability to process vital information is severely compromised.

Driving-Related Tasks .08 BAC

These are the simple driving components such as throttle control, braking, turning, shifting, and signaling. When a rider is impaired, simple motorcycle controls like the throttle or brakes become difficult to use.

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