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What People Say and What People Mean #5: "Laying It Down"

"I was out ridin' and this car pulls out in front of me. I had to lay'er down." I have heard this statement so many times, and I can't think of a dumber thing for a motorcyclist to say. What people really mean when they say this is "I don't know how to control my bike, so I locked up the rear brake and crashed on purpose."

Or what they mean is "This car pulls out in front of me. I had no warning, no time, and no room to stop. And since I don't know how to use my brakes, I accidentally locked them up and crashed. And because it was someone else's fault, I refuse to take responsibility for it, so I'm going to pretend that I did it on purpose so everyone thinks I'm smart."

These people are fooling themselves. They do not, and probably never will, understand that there is something more they need to learn about riding. They'll spend the rest of their life blaming some dumb driver for forcing them to crash. How about just not crashing in the first place?

A smart rider understands that people will pull out in front of motorcycles all the time. A smart rider positions themselves carefully in traffic and draws attention to themselves with brightly colored protective gear. And a smart rider read a book or took a safety course and learned how to use the brakes properly, and can get the bike stopped quickly without laying it on the ground--with practice. This is the sort of thing you need to practice for ten or twenty minutes, at least once a month. Your feel for emergency braking deteriorates over time, so you need to keep it fresh.

Riders who have never taken an MSF course tend to be afraid of the front brake and overuse the rear brake, which can easily lead to a crash. Fact is, 75-90% of the bike's stopping power comes from the front brake. The trick to using the front brake is to squeeze the brake

progressively--imagine you're squeezing the juice out of an orange--lightly at first, then increasing pressure, squeezing harder and harder as the front end compresses and the front tire bites into the asphalt. Your goal is to get that front tire to almost lock up, but not quite. If you "grab" the brake, the tire will want to lock up immediately. Work on using one nice, smooth, progressively harder squeeze and see if your stopping distance gets better.

Crashing on purpose is NOT an option to any intelligent rider. The bike will stop a lot quicker with its rubber on the ground, rather than sliding along on its side. If

you don't know how to use your brakes there's an easy solution (take an MSF course!) but don't fall into the trap of blaming another motorist when your skills-if you had learned and practiced them-could have prevented a crash.
Pat Hahn
Author of Ride Hard, Ride Smart

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