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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 more moronic thing for a motorcyclist to say. It's always



seemed to me that when people say this, they mean "I don't know how to control my bike, and I'm an idiot, so I locked up the rear brake and crashed on purpose."

But that's a little too judgmental. Hopefully, what they really 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 no one knows what a moron I am.]" The rider could use a nice frosty can of Attitude #1 (see Rider State of Mind, Part One, in a previous issue) and pretend that, regardless who's right and who's wrong, he or she is ultimately responsible for other drivers' actions as well as his or her own.

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. It doesn't have to be that way.

A smart rider understands that people will pull out in front of motorcycles all the time. (In fact, a smart rider is way beyond that—remember Attitude #2? You are expecting that everyone else on the road is deliberately trying to kill you. This mindset sets you up to assume that people will pull out in front of you!) An intelligent rider positions the bike carefully in traffic and draws attention with brightly colored protective gear. And a smart rider did spend his or her time in a safety course and learned how to use the brakes properly, and can get the bike stopped quickly without laying it on the ground. Riders who have never taken a basic or advanced rider training course tend to be afraid of the front brake and overuse the rear brake, which is almost exactly opposite of what they should do.

Crashing on purpose is NOT an option to any semi-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 (learn), 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 is the author of How to Ride a Motorcycle, Ride Hard Ride Smart, and a co-author of Track Day Handbook. He lives in south Minneapolis. You can e-mail Pat at reader-response@hedonistic-enthusiasm.com or visit his Web site at www.debaucheryball.org.

[PHOTO CAPTION] Many times when someone "lays it down" they never even hit the car they were trying to avoid. Riders who knew how to use their brakes could have stopped the bike without crashing and continued on their way. This rider has made a bad decision, but will forever be blaming someone else for the mistake. Photo courtesy Evans Brasfield.

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