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Think ahead before you take your motorcycle on the road

Dear editor:
Having already ridden this spring I can tell you the roads are loaded with sand and other debris which will have the unwitting rider off if not careful of conditions. The following safety riding tips are from my own experience but I highly recommend you take Rider Training if you are a new rider or haven't ridden for some time.
? Early spring riding: Winter salt and sand spells upset for the non observant motorcyclist. You should still be aware of such highway contaminants through spring and early summer. Use brakes smoothly and progressively, don't accelerate hard out of corners.
? When country riding: Slow down, in particular in the corners where vehicles tend to throw sand and stones back onto the road surface all year. Never go into a corner faster than you are prepared to go around it comfortably and safely. Entering corners toward the outside of the bend with a safe margin to the shoulder is the best position for visibility and set up to lean into the corner apex (close to but not over the center line). This will allow you a safer margin with more room to exit the corner without drifting out onto the soft shoulder. The less experienced rider should remember to have their motorcycle under full control through corners adjusting speed with brakes while your leaned over should be refrained from unless absolutely necessary and then apply smoothly with prudence. Braking in corners is a learned technique which you will get better at with more experience, otherwise all braking should be performed while the bike is upright and under control prior to entering a corner. If you inadvertently hit the soft shoulder going wide on a corner, don't panic, keep both feet on the foot pegs, grip the tank with your knees, hold the bars steady, move your weight forward over the tank, don't touch the brakes and gradually steer the bike back onto the road. Your front brake is your main stopping brake, normally; application pressure should be 70 per cent front and 30 per cent rear bias. The front brake should be applied slightly before the rear with brake pressure adjusted for best effect. Most modern sport bikes come from a race proven background and generally utilize the latest braking technology. By design they have more brake bias to the front wheel for high speed stopping (the wedge effect) making the rear wheel weight very light under extreme braking, the brake bias in this case I estimate would be closer to (90/10 per cent). So learn to apply your motorcycle brakes properly, learn the full potential of your brakes by carefully and safely practicing on a clear dry area void of traffic, you will be amazed how quickly your motorcycle will stop! Highway riding: Simple, stay away from traffic! I'll clarify, don't allow you're self to be closed in by vehicles, always find the open spaces move up ahead or drop back from traffic. If you can't do either move to the inside lane and take up as much space as possible using the left wheel track, always leave yourself ?an out?! Normal cruising, keep in the left third of the lane this gives you good heads up visibility, aggressively defend your space, be seen, let traffic know where you are by moving in to their line of sight! Cars will overtake you ?in your lane? if you ride to the right side of the lane, cars will also pull out in front of you if you are overtaking or in the overtaking lane, they don't see you. High beams and load pipes are good for letting car drivers know where you are but don't count on it!
? In the city: My number one rule is: ride as though every car at an intersection or in a driveway will pull out in front and in full view of you. Watch every drivers face check their view as you get closer, do they see you or not? This is the number one cause of motorcycle accidents in Canada I believe. Stay towards the center of the road to give yourself a little extra margin of safety to react if necessary, keep your eyes sweeping the road way ahead at all times for movement. City streets are particularly slippery in the wet, try to ride without having to rely on your brakes as much. Motorcycles typically have good engine braking power, remember your front brake is best and if needed in an emergency even when slippery will stop you quickly. Due to weight and loading bias to the front, typically, using rear brake only will cause the back end to swap with the front (do not take your feet off the pegs when breaking).
By the way I have met a number of MC cruiser drivers who have just passed their M2 and after all the training revert back to using the rear brake only! Apparently, their peers have steered them back to this folly which is typically an old rider mentality myth. Last but not least don't drink and ride a motorcycle, this should be obvious for two wheels but you would be surprised that deaths do occur from riding and drinking.
? Protection: Always wear the right equipment, wear proper riding boots with good ankle protection, wear pants, jackets and gloves designed to protect you in the event of an unplanned fall. Most important, invest in a good helmet designed for optimum protection. See your local Motorcycle Dealer for advice; don't buy gear for looks only.
? All Terrain vehicles: As an aside note, I hear of to many kids being injured because their parents didn't take the time out to understand the ramifications of owning and allowing their children to operate either 4-wheelers or dirt bikes without proper equipment, instruction or supervision. These vehicles can maim or God forbid even kill your child. The most common injuries are ankle, shoulder and head. The typical steel, ?saw tooth foot rests? are designed to grip off road competition boots and will rip

through the ankle tendons of your child in a tip over, I know of many kids ?two close to my own family? that may never walk properly again! Good gloves, full face helmet and chest/shoulder protector are a must. There are some very good off road training camps for children not far away which I highly recommend, they will also learn basic maintenance skills (see your local dealer). Some schools allow dad or mom to go along to help out; it's a great time for all. These are just a few suggestions from my own experiences I hope somebody finds these tips useful. Ride safely and enjoy motorcycling for many years to come.
Alan Masters,
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