

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY • • • • Continued

ments, a glance to the left, ahead and to the right, maintain safety and also provide a means to counteract boredom. As pilots like to quote, flying is hours of boredom punctuated with seconds of pure terror, or in other words the flying is standard routine practice until an "incident" is in the making. Those incidents do not occur that often, but when they do, they have your undivided attention. Good pilots fly ahead of their plane to stay ahead (and alert) to "incident." Good motorcycle riders should do the same. *

VISION ON THE ROAD

Learning to ride defensively with optimum vision should be every motorcyclist's goal. The American Optometric Association offers several tips that can make your motorcycling safer in all weathers and seasons.

To lessen eye fatigue on long trips, try blinking frequently or shifting your eyes periodically in quick, continuous movements. These exercises will help sharpen your field of vision and free it from monotony.

FIGHTING GLARE

There are ways to fight headlight glare when riding at night. A "three-point scanning" technique with the eyes will help avoid being temporarily blinded by oncoming headlights, while permitting you to see dangers on the road. Fight the temptation to look directly into the lights. Keep your eyes running along an imaginary triangle from the right side of the road as the first point; to a point to the right of an oncoming car; then to the road in front of your cycle to complete the triangle. The rod area of the sensors, which is the portion of the eye's structure most sensitive to low light conditions, functions best when you keep your eyes moving. Remember, the ability to cope with glare and recover from its effects declines with age. During daylight, prescription sunglasses may help if you have a refractive error, but they should never be worn at night as they cut down on much-needed light.

If you find yourself tense and squinting, deliberately relax your face muscles and take several deep breaths. The extra oxygen will help you relax and increase the eyes' ability to adapt to light conditions.

DON'T STARE

To avoid the hypnotic effect that lulls many motorcyclists into becoming disoriented, don't stare at a single point of light for more than a few seconds. If you stare at an object too long, you may slip into a semi-hypnotic state, lose control of the cycle and run off the road. Staring at moving traffic can produce the same effect. To keep your perception sharp, keep your eyes moving.

Coping with an unpredictable road condition like fog requires. Drive slowly and keep your eyes moving. Learn a simple equation from the American Automobile Association and you can decide the proper speed in fog. Pick out a reflecting surface, such as a house or a road sign, and divide its approximate distance from you by four. That's how far away you'll be able to see something that doesn't reflect light - like a pedestrian in dark clothing or an animal. Lower your speed so that you will be able to stop within that distance. You should figure on allowing one car length for every ten miles an hour you are traveling to be able to come to a complete stop.

Drugs, alcohol and smoking not only affect your reflexes, but also affect your vision, especially at night. Alcohol can cause "tunnel vision," a narrowing of the width of your visual field, impairing your peripheral or side vision, which is particularly dangerous for motorcyclists. Smoking can cause eyestrain coupled with dimmed vision. Nicotine may cause blood vessels in the eyes to become smaller and this reduces the oxygen supply. Smoke may be irritating to the eyes as well. Be sure not to ride if you're taking medication, such as antihistamine, which can make you drowsy.

The faster you are riding, the further ahead you need to see. This in turn affects the time available for decision making. A driver with 20/20 visual acuity has little more than three seconds to clearly read, interpret and begin reacting to a road sign containing letters five inches high, when traveling

55 miles per hours. Therefore, even with what is generally considered good vision, the faster you're traveling, the less time you have to see and react.

Because the eyes are sensitive and complex organs, they are susceptible to many types of weaknesses and impairments that can make riding even more hazardous. If you have not had a complete vision examination recently, you may have visual problems you don't even suspect. Sometimes vision deteriorates very slowly, and you may have a vision impairment that can interfere with your riding without realizing it. If you ride a motorcycle, be sure to have your eyes thoroughly examined at least once a year by an optometrist, especially if you're past forty. Consult your local or state optometric association if you need more information.

Most of your driving decisions are based on what you see - or fail to see. Safe motorcycling depends on good vision as well as good reflexes. **

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