



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-07

Motorcycle Mishaps IV

If you're reading this as a motorcycle rider, congratulations, you're not one of the 29 naval service members who died on their motorcycles in Fiscal Year (FY) 23, or the 13 Sailors and Marines who've died while riding as of late February this FY. We want to keep you that way. Those tragic numbers tell us there's still work to do in promoting and enforcing rider safety, and we'll continue to beat the rider-safety drum until we get real and get better on it. In this fourth edition of motorcycle mishaps, we'll spare the national statistics except one: **You are 28 times more likely to die** in a motorcycle crash than in other vehicle types. Before you blame other drivers for motorcycle accidents, bear in mind that the top five causal factors in motorcycle crashes are from poor decisions made by riders. Read and learn from the broken bikes and bones of your fellow Sailors and Marines, whose decisions landed them in the emergency room and worse.



- Trouble With The Curve. While making a left turn on his way to work, a Sailor didn't notice a patch of gravel on the road. When he hit the gravel in the turn, he couldn't keep control of the motorcycle and slid off the road onto the grass shoulder. He lost control of the motorcycle on the grass, fell off and both Sailor and bike slid about 100 feet. The Sailor called for a ride to the local ER for medical evaluation, where they treated him for contusions to his shoulder, foot and knee. —*Too much speed through a turn is one of the most common mistakes among motorcycle riders. In this case, our rider was fortunate to land on grass and not something harder like concrete or a guardrail. While this young Sailor completed the required training course, he had only 90 days of riding experience. The mishap investigator recommended the command assign the Sailor a mentor, and we support that because it's not just a good idea—it's required.*
- Not Like a Good Neighbor. In another inexperienced (*actually, zero experience*) rider mishap, a Marine's neighbor was teaching him how to ride a motorcycle....at 9:00 PM (*Ugh!*) The Marine started the lesson on his newly purchased sports bike with his neighbor in the residential area. After about 25 minutes he decided to try to ride on a nearby highway (*Double Ugh!*). As the Marine attempted to execute a left turn onto the highway, he immediately lost traction, falling on the road with the bike, impacting his foot and ankle. He spent two days in the hospital with a fractured foot and ankle, followed by four weeks on light duty. —*This Marine's neighbor may have been well-intentioned, but he wasn't a professional instructor. The neighborhood and, worse, the highway are no places to learn how to ride a motorcycle. Ask your unit's motorcycle safety coordinator where you can take an approved course in a designated training area.*
- Look What I Can Do. Late one evening, a Marine was "practicing" riding his motorcycle behind a department store (*another place not to be "practicing"*). The Marine "accelerated at a rate that was out of control," according to the report.—*That maneuver sounds like a classic "whiskey throttle" when you give too much throttle, then start to slip off the bike and your hand pulls the throttle even more.—*Sure enough, the Marine did not (*or could not*) let off the throttle and ran through a ditch, then a fence, and then into a pond. He was admitted to the base hospital intensive care unit with fractures to his pelvis, right femur (upper leg), right scapula (shoulder blade), left ulna (forearm), right elbow, right thumb, left big toe and an open comminuted right humerus fracture (open wound with the bone broken into pieces) with high infection risk (*Yeesh!*) —*The report noted that the Marine had little experience riding and was attempting maneuvers well beyond his skill level. It's good he wasn't practicing on the road, but the previous example's lesson points apply. Choose an approved course and designated training area – and don't try any stunts please.*
- Coulda Woulda Shoulda. A Sailor went out on his motorcycle for drinks at two local bars and decided to drive himself home just after midnight (*Seriously?!*). He attempted to avoid traffic on the way home by

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taking an unfamiliar but less busy road that paralleled the main highway (*presumably to avoid law enforcement*). He was rounding a sharp curve when a car entered the road from an intersection. The Sailor applied his brakes but overcorrected. He missed the vehicle but drifted off the road into gravel, then lost control and crashed into a ditch. He was airlifted to a hospital where he was treated for a broken collar bone, broken ribs and a concussion. Adding to the Sailor's winnings (*losings?*) from his night of bad decisions, the responding police officer charged him with driving under the influence. The Sailor claimed he knew better and recognized that he should have left his bike at home or gotten a ride home after they had been to the bar. —*Saying you knew better after a significant wrong decision won't heal your broken bones. To drink and ride or drive should never require a decision. It should be a non-starter. Don't do it!*

- **Not Wearing a Helmet.** A Sailor was out for a ride on his motorcycle on one of the first nice days of the year. A witness claimed the service member's hat flew off (*they weren't wearing a helmet!*). When the service member looked back at it, he lost control of his motorcycle, fell and struck the pavement headfirst. The Sailor was pronounced dead at the scene. —*There is no clearer message about the importance of PPE than this tragic story. By all accounts, the Sailor was not speeding or riding recklessly. He was just enjoying a spring ride and had a momentary loss of balance. We beg you, wear your helmet.*

- **Wearing a Helmet.** A Marine was riding home on his motorcycle on the interstate when an unknown motorcycle rider turned aggressively toward him and struck him on the helmet, causing the Marine to lose control of his motorcycle and collide with a third motorcycle rider who was in front of him. The collision knocked the Marine from his motorcycle, fracturing his left elbow. —*This collision could have been much worse if the Marine hadn't worn a helmet. As with the previous example, the Marine was tossed from his motorcycle in a split second. The difference was that he was wearing a helmet and only suffered a fractured elbow, which is minor considering he was traveling at interstate speed. Helmets are proven to save lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control, helmets save more than 1,000 lives each year and may have saved the lives of 800 riders who didn't wear one. Wear it!*



Key Takeaways

We didn't make up catchy new key takeaways in this fourth edition of motorcycle mishaps (plus our motorcycle fatalities edition). Why? Because our riders are hurting and killing themselves by making the same bad decisions. Please read and share these slightly updated but common takeaways with fellow riders and reflect on your riding habits.

1. Train and practice the right way. Besides being required for Sailor and Marine riders, rider safety courses are supervised by professionals in a controlled environment. Neighborhood streets and interstates aren't the place to learn to ride. And "practicing" (*read "stunting"*) is only going to get you some broken bones or dead. Even the most "experienced" riders can learn something from a formal rider's course (*and no, we don't mean wheelies*). There are courses for seasoned riders to improve their riding safety and awareness of their riding behaviors. Even with proper training, only the right mindset will make you a safe rider. Riding isn't a video game. There's no "respawn" button.

3. Control yourself and your machine. Loss of control is a significant causal factor in motorcycle mishaps. Sometimes, the causes are speed-induced; sometimes, riding outside your skill level or the machine's capability; and sometimes, just attempting dumb tricks. Traffic, road conditions, weather, time of day and (again) your skill level all contribute to the level of risk you assume.

4. DON'T DRINK AND RIDE! Yes, we are shouting it again because we continue seeing alcohol-related mishaps and fatalities from drinking and riding. Near the top of the list of things not to drink and do, alcohol is a factor in motorcycle accidents all too often. Don't do it ... period.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"