



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

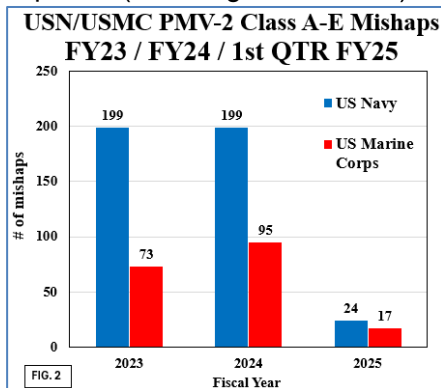
SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-03

Motorcycle Mishaps V

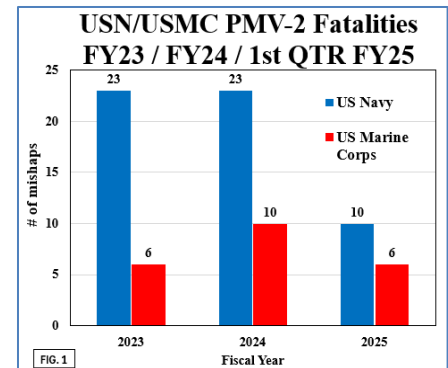
This dispatch focuses on motorcycle mishaps, but before the non-motorcycle riders stop reading, this dispatch is for you too. **Both motorcycle riders and vehicle drivers are part of the problem.** The motorcycle mishap numbers are sadly staggering and continue to climb. We usually include a photo of a motorcycle accident, but the compelling, i.e., bad statistics for the past few years warrant showing them in this dispatch. Figure 1 shows the number of Navy and Marine Corps PMV-2 fatalities and Figure 2 shows the number of class A-E PMV-2 mishaps reported (including the fatalities). Please take a moment to look at the



charts, remembering that each incident represents one of our fellow

Sailors or Marines. Some escaped with only scrapes and bruises (the lucky ones), others change lives and our Navy/Marine Corps team forever.

What's causing the high mishap rate? Here are the top few: drivers not seeing motorcycle riders, distracted driving and riding, riding beyond skills, road hazards (road debris/gravel/rain), and the list goes on. The added risk of riding can be mitigated through proper training, licensing, proper gear and the right mindset. So, before your next ride, read and share these examples of when the ride did not go as planned. It may save your life.



- **At Least He Raced Safely.** Rider 1 had legitimate motorcycle racing experience. His command approved his request to participate in an upcoming race after verifying his licensing, advanced training, enrollment in and knowledge of motorcycle safety program requirements. At the track, race officials inspected his motorcycle, and he attended the track safety brief. Throughout the day, rider 1 raced in multiple races without incident. When racing was over, he and another rider (Rider 2) had dinner and consumed several beers and other drinks at his camp area. Riders 1 and 2 then hopped on their motorcycles (*terrible idea*) to go socialize with riders on the other side of the raceway grounds. Later that night, after consuming additional drinks, (*here's where things took a "hairpin" turn for the worse*) they attempted to ride back to the campsite by way of the racetrack. Unable to negotiate a hairpin turn, Rider 1 lost control and contacted the pavement with his head, knocking him unconscious. His injuries required extended hospitalization and were caused from riding after dark with low visibility (he used light from Rider 2's headlight, Rider 1's was taped off from the racing day), lack of proper PPE/DOT approved helmet (he later stated it was cold outside, so he chose to wear a hat instead), and consumption of alcohol/intoxication. —*While we'd rather you not race motorcycles, doing it in a controlled, supervised location is way safer than the interstate. This rider was an experienced rider...laden with over confidence and poor decisions. You know that alcohol and riding are a potentially fatal combination, so don't do it!*

- **Have an Out.** The rider was traveling in the right lane on a four-lane divided highway (two lanes in each direction). He noticed a car was traveling next to him (in the left lane) at roughly the same speed. As the rider and car approached a highway onramp, a van entering the highway merged into the rider's lane colliding with the rider's motorcycle and causing it to slide out from under him. The motorcycle and rider slid to a stop near the shoulder of the highway, while the van kept going. The rider was unable to change lanes due to the car next to him. He did not apply time critical risk management to gain space from the car. —*Had he slowed or sped up to create spacing from the car next to him, he would likely have had room to change lanes. Not riding defensively increased his risk, but wearing proper PPE certainly lessened his injuries. PPE doesn't make you invincible, so drive to survive too.*

- **TOO Fast and Furious.** Here's a case where the rider hit the water barriers (barrels filled with water) at a highway exit ramp due to excessive speed while taking the exit, causing him to fall forward and slide on the pavement. This rider never attended a level one basic rider course, had minimal riding experience and the

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motorcycle he wrecked on was purchased that same day. He wore no jacket, no long pants and no gloves; instead, he opted for shorts and a T-shirt while riding down the highway (*at highway speeds*). The report didn't mention footwear. He was hospitalized and received treatment for road rash and wounds on his arms and legs and reconstructive knee surgery. —*This rider was undoubtedly excited to get his new bike on the road, but recognizing your own skill level and riding within your abilities needs to be part of the thought process before ever hitting the starter. At least he had the good sense to wear a DOT rated helmet.*

- **Know Your Limits.** This rider was traveling on a multi-lane divided interstate and was unable to brake in time, before impacting Vehicle 1 directly ahead. He was ejected from the motorcycle into the next lane over, where he was struck by Vehicle 2 traveling in the same direction. His injuries were fatal. The police report indicated the crash was caused by the rider's excessive speed and following too closely. He had completed the Basic Rider Course and wore required PPE but was unfamiliar and inexperienced on the motorcycle purchased earlier that day. —*Having the basic training and equipment required isn't enough. Riders must recognize and ride within their limits, and practice/learn the features and handling of their equipment to remain safe while riding.*
- **Be Noticed.** A motorcycle rider traveling on a two-lane road was slowing to approximately 15 mph to make a left turn up ahead. A car that had been traveling well behind the rider, failed to reduce speed and collided into the rear of the motorcycle at an estimated 55 mph (posted speed was 45 mph). Upon impact, the rider was ejected from the motorcycle, both rider and motorcycle came to rest on the shoulder of the road. The rider suffered serious permanent injuries. Although the driver of the car had a BAC level below the legal limit, the report noted the driver may have also been impaired from drugs resulting in decreased reaction times. —*It's hard to say what this rider may have done differently to minimize risk when there are people on the road impaired. Riders tend to use down-shifting to slow down; this action does not activate the brake light. While the report didn't mention this aspect, tapping the brake will bring more attention than not, and being seen is key.*
- **Plan for the Unexpected.** This seasoned rider was traveling on a divided highway (two lanes each direction) at approximately 65 mph (the posted speed limit). The intersection ahead required cross traffic to stop until the highway traffic was clear, then proceed (highway traffic had right-of-way). As the rider approached the intersection, a vehicle waiting at the stop sign pulled out in front of the rider, attempting to cross the highway and enter the median. The rider momentarily noticed the vehicle and attempted to avoid impact. He slowed as much as possible, swerved into the left turn lane, collided with the auto and was ejected from the motorcycle. The rider suffered serious permanent injury; the vehicle driver was not injured. The rider wore required PPE and had extensive training to include basic and experienced rider courses. The report said the vehicle driver did not see the rider and it was the driver's responsibility to ensure the highway was clear and safe to enter. —*While not deemed a cause of this mishap, had the rider worn a brightly colored / reflective outer garment, it may have been the one detail that caught the inattentive driver's attention.*

Key Takeaways

In our examples, you see mishaps with unsafe riders, with unsafe drivers, and where both driver and rider shared some responsibility. There's plenty of room for improvement for **drivers and riders**, but ultimately, the safety of the motorcycle ride rests with the rider. Riders must ride like their life depends on it, because it does. Do everything right **and** ride defensively. Here's a few other tips:

1. **SEE and be seen!** **SEE** is an acronym promulgated by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF). It stands for a **Search–Evaluate–Execute** strategy to assess and respond to hazards **BEFORE** you must react to an emergency. **Be seen** – We've said it before – there are scientific reasons why drivers don't see motorcycles, inattentive blindness, saccadic masking, and plain ole not looking to name a few (*read LL 18-18 and SA 24-27 for an overview*). To increase the probability of being seen: **Riders** – wear bright reflective clothing and if possible, flash your brake light when slowing down or stopping. **Drivers** – look for motorcyclists with intention.
2. **Ride within your limits and abilities.** Rush hour traffic (in San Diego or Hampton Roads for example) is not the best place to develop riding techniques such as emergency braking or swerving maneuvers. Two of our examples above occurred on the same day the rider purchased the motorcycle. Even experienced riders need to add extra caution after not riding for a while. More traffic = more risk. Riding skills are perishable over time.
3. **Ride like no one sees you.** Riders – Avoid riding in the blind spots of cars and trucks. Don't get boxed in (as in our example above). Position yourself in traffic to where you have an 'out', when a driver doesn't see you. Drivers – always check your blind spots. An extra look can save a life.

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