



Naval Safety Command

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-08

MOTORCYCLE MISHAPS II

“Be afraid, be very afraid.” – Veronica Quaife (Geena Davis) in The Fly

For many of our riders across the country and around the world, motorcycle season never ends, but for those in the more northern latitudes, riding season is right around the corner (*or, more appropriately, “S” turn, in the case of this topic*). As you meticulously run down your spring motorcycle checklist like the trained military professional that you are, we ask that you add “keep a safety mindset” to your list as you set out on that first ride (*and every ride, for that matter*). A little bit of healthy fear can keep you safe.



Why the emphasis on safety? Besides the fact that “it’s what we do,” the 26 motorcycle accident fatalities in the Navy and Marine Corps last year were once again second only to car accident fatalities. Putting that tragic number in perspective, the total number of fatalities in all other off-duty activities was 16, and 19 for all on-duty. And given that there are far fewer motorcycle (PMV-2) riders in the naval services than automobile (PMV-4) drivers, 26 is a huge number! Not all motorcycle accidents end in tragedy, but our data show that many do, and most are preventable. Please read the following examples and ask yourself, “what would I have done differently in that situation?” Remember and take action to avoid a similar outcome. Your safety, and possibly your life, could depend on it.

- A Marine entered a curve in the road too fast and drifted to the outer shoulder onto loose gravel and other debris that wasn’t in the driving lane. He eventually lost traction and crashed (*known as a side-out to experienced riders*), breaking his collar bone. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, half of single-vehicle motorcycle fatal crashes are related to difficulty negotiating curves in the road. — *Highways aren’t prepped and cleared like Motorcycle Grand Prix tracks. And you probably aren’t a trained Grand Prix driver. Slow down in the turns, please.*
- A Sailor was riding his motorcycle in a foreign country when the traffic ahead slowed to a halt. He decided to split the lanes and, as he was passing the traffic at approximately 15 MPH, a car turned left in front of him. The driver didn’t see the Sailor, so the car clipped the Sailor’s bike and caused him to lose control and fall. Thanks to his wearing of full PPE (well done, sir!), the Sailor escaped the incident with only a strained muscle and road rash. — *Even if lane splitting is legal in a foreign country, we disapprove. As shown in this case, motorcycles are difficult to see already, so lane splitting only adds to the problem. See LL 18-18, “Why Don’t We See Motorcycles?” for more on the topic.¹*
- A Marine took a friend with him to buy a motorcycle in a city about three hours away. The plan, which was approved by the Marine’s chain of command, was to have the friend – who had the training and certifications to operate a motorcycle – drive the motorcycle since the Marine did not yet have the appropriate training. The Marine would drive the car back. On their return trip, the Marine and his friend stopped for a break, where the Marine decided to drive the motorcycle the rest of the way home against the recommendations of his friend. Minutes into the remaining trip, the Marine lost control, veered off the road, and crashed. He died on the scene from his injuries. — *Naval aviators have a saying, “Brief the flight, fly the brief.” If only the Marine stuck to the plan, we wouldn’t be telling the tragic story here. The Marine had a plan for a reason: He didn’t know how to operate a motorcycle. Tragically, we will never know what changed his mind that day.*

¹LL 18-18 and many others like it are posted on the Safety Awareness page of the NAVSAFECOM public website at <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil/Safety-Promotions/Safety-Awareness/>

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- A Sailor and his friend were riding on a boulevard when the Sailor struck another motorcyclist who was stopped at an intersection in front of him. According to the report, the Sailor was going approximately 60-70 mph on a 35 mph speed limit road. The Sailor suffered a broken wrist and severed his leg below the knee. — *While the Sailor had two years of riding experience and completed the Basic Motorcycle Rider's Course four months before the accident, no amount of experience or training can eliminate bad decision making. Riders must **want** to adhere to the safe riding practices they were taught. There is no technique for approaching an intersection at 30 mph over the speed limit. We will risk speaking plainly and harshly: Riding like that is reckless and just plain dumb. It ended horribly for this Sailor. Please learn from this mishap.*

- A Marine and his civilian friend were riding their motorcycles northbound on a four-lane roadway, when the Marine suddenly sped up, lost control, and crashed into a center divider wall. He was hurled into the southbound lane, where he was struck by a sport utility vehicle. He was pronounced dead at the scene. According to the Marine's friend, he sped up to make it on time to an accountability formation at his unit on base. Tragically, he never made it. — *We've often said that being in a hurry only gets you to the emergency room faster, but this mishap was the worst case. And it was a completely avoidable scenario. We beg you to read and learn from this event.*

- A Sailor was on his way to work on his motorcycle "at a high rate of speed," when the traffic in both lanes ahead of him stopped to allow a pedestrian to cross the street at an intersection. Since his speed



gave him no time to stop, he tried, to no avail, to avoid the car in front of him by changing lanes and then laid the motorcycle down. He collided with the rear of the vehicle in front of him and was transported to a local emergency room in critical condition. He suffered multiple fractures and traumatic brain injury, which led to permanent partial disability. — *He is alive today mainly because he wore his PPE, including an approved helmet, but PPE doesn't make you indestructible. Please, ride at a safe speed for the traffic situation and conditions around you.*

Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

1. Motorcycle training isn't a "check in the block." Motorcycle riding requires significantly more skill than driving a car. Besides being **required** for Sailors and Marines, even the most "experienced" riders can learn something from a formal rider's course. There are also courses for experienced riders to improve their riding safety and awareness of their riding behaviors. Your choice to embrace what you've learned or not may have deadly consequences. Choose wisely. Even with proper training, only the right mindset will make you a safe rider. Unlike your favorite motorcycle video game, there's no "respawn" button.

2. Speed kills. In many motorcycle accidents, including some described in this SA dispatch, excessive speed was a big factor. Your reaction time significantly decreases if you're approaching a turn too fast or traveling much faster than the traffic flow. And the faster you hit something, the more it'll hurt you. Slow it down.

3. Control yourself and your machine. If you heed takeaways 1 and 2, this takeaway should be a lot easier. Loss of control is a major causal factor in motorcycle mishaps. Sometimes the causes are speed-induced, and sometimes it's riding outside of one's skill level. Traffic, road conditions, weather, time of day, and (*again*) your skill level, all contribute to the level of risk you assume on your ride.

4. Don't drink and ride! Yes, we used an exclamation point. Adding to the list of things not to drink and do, we see alcohol as a factor in motorcycle accidents all too often. Don't do it ... period.

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

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