



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-15

### *Motorcycle Mishaps (Edition III)*



May is motorcycle safety awareness month, but you don't need a particular month to be safety-minded. Part of your de-winterizing process should be to take stock of your safety equipment and riding behavior before you head out on that first ride. If your location allows year-round riding, this is an excellent time to take a time out and consider your driving habits. Why? Because in FY 2022, there were 25 motorcycle mishap fatalities in the Department of the Navy, and there have been 11 fatalities in 2023 as of the writing of this dispatch. If you've seen one of our motorcycle mishap dispatches before, thank you! This third edition is one instrument in our constant drumbeat about motorcycle safety. Please read and share widely with your riding community.

- **Cruisin' for a Bruisin'**. On a Sunday afternoon, a Sailor decided to go for a ride on his cruiser-style bike. About halfway into the ride, the Sailor entered a snaking road and noticed wet pavement. The report says he proceeded with caution, but apparently not enough. As he took a left curve, the motorcycle's footrest caught on the pavement and the Sailor lost traction. The Sailor and bike slid 20 feet at a speed of approximately 15 MPH, coming to a complete stop on the side of the road. Fortunately, he received only a road rash on his knee and hip. Why? He wore all his PPE, including long pants, a jacket, gloves, over-the-ankle shoes, and a helmet. Even with the PPE, he spent one day sick in quarters (SIQ) and 14 days on restricted duty, but it could have been much worse. —*Good on this Sailor for wearing his PPE, but knowing the cornering abilities of his bike would've saved him from painful road rash and two weeks of restricted duty to heal.*
- **Shop Till You Drop**. A Sailor went to the local bike shop to purchase a motorcycle (with no riding experience, training or license). Somehow, the bike shop staff allowed the Sailor to buy a motorcycle and try it out in the rear parking lot (*drum roll, please*)—where he promptly ran into a fence. He was taken to the local emergency room (ER), where he was diagnosed with fractures of two vertebrae in his lower back. Four days SIQ and 21 days restricted duty. —*This one baffles us for a couple of reasons. 1) How, in good conscience, could a sales staff allow someone with zero motorcycle riding experience or training to get on one of their expensive machines? And, 2) Why would someone get on a motorcycle with no PPE, training, or experience? If you have the motorcycle itch, seek professional instruction first, get your PPE, get the proper license, and then get your bike...in that order, please.*
- **♪"If He Catches You, You're Through."** (Forgive the old Roadrunner cartoon reference, but we thought it was a good fit). At approximately 2300, a Marine was returning from a scenic overlook at a park on his motorcycle when a coyote ran across the road in front of him. He swerved to avoid the coyote and went off the road into the open desert at approximately 40-45 mph (the speed limit was 30). Thankfully, a friend who was following him in a car, saw the crash and transported him to the ER. With two broken ribs, two bruised ribs, and a fractured lower leg, he was placed in SIQ for one day and on restricted duty for 60 days. The report noted that the area where the Marine was riding is known for having an abundance of animals at night. —*Riding late at night at 10-15 mph over the speed limit through a high animal-trafficked area is just asking for a mishap. You never know what Wile E. Coyote may have planned for you.*
- **In a Split Second**. A Sailor was lane splitting while riding to work (*you probably know what happens next, but we'll continue*). An oncoming car turned left in front of the Sailor, causing him to swerve, but he couldn't swerve enough to avoid striking the car's bumper and dropping the motorcycle on its side. Fortunately, he

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escaped with only superficial injuries and could return to work the next day. —*While lane splitting was not illegal where this incident occurred, it is a risky maneuver. Motorcycles are difficult to see already, so lane splitting adds to the problem. See LL 18-18 “Why Don’t We See Motorcycles?” for more on the topic.*<sup>1</sup>



- **Test UNSAT.** While a Sailor was op-testing his motorcycle after making repairs, he lost control and was thrown off—*did we mention he was drinking alcohol and wasn’t wearing any PPE? SMH!* Neighbors heard the accident and called 911, and the ambulance transported him to the hospital. The Sailor suffered numerous internal hematomas in the brain, a fractured skull, a broken clavicle, and abrasions to his back, arms, face, and hands. He was kept in the intensive care unit for 10 days and transported to an inpatient rehabilitation facility for another four months. —*Drinking and op-testing is drinking and driving. Don’t do it! Alcohol aside, which probably influenced the Sailor’s decision not to put on a helmet, consider how few injuries he would have sustained if he had worn a helmet. Let’s recount; a broken collar bone and several abrasions—that’s it. Instead, this Sailor spent 120 days in rehab for his traumatic brain injuries. Wear your helmet! We’re begging you!*
- **A Decision That Can’t Be Undone.** A Sailor was riding his sport bike on an eight-lane, divided interstate and “weaving through traffic at a high rate of speed” (100+mph) when he lost control of the motorcycle, struck the center concrete median, was ejected onto the left lane, and was struck by a vehicle. The Sailor was transported to the hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. —*This mishap was tragic and needless. The Sailor was wearing a helmet, but sometimes no amount of PPE can protect you when you’re riding dangerously. Motorcycle riding is already riskier than car driving, so don’t raise the risk higher by weaving through traffic. High-speed riding reduces your reaction time, reduces the ability of others to see you, and means your body will be moving very fast when it hits something. Let this example be a sobering reminder of the dangers of risky behavior. This tragedy was completely avoidable.*

### Key Takeaways

The takeaways may seem familiar because we are compelled to repeat them. In the six examples (a tiny sample of many), there were a total of 221 lost workdays plus a fatality. Those lost days add to your teammates’ workload, and the tragic loss of a service member isn’t just heartbreaking; it also results in a gapped billet. Mishaps degrade our warfighting readiness. We need all of you on the team.

1. **Motorcycle training isn’t a one-and-done event.** Besides being **required** for Sailors and Marines, even the most “experienced” riders can learn something from a formal rider’s course. There are courses for seasoned riders to improve their riding safety and awareness of their riding behaviors. Only the right mindset will make you a safe rider, even with proper training. 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 significant factor. Your reaction time significantly decreases if you approach a turn too fast or travel faster than the traffic flow. The faster you hit something, the more it’ll hurt you. If you have the need for speed, there are tracks for that, with courses from beginner to expert level. Learning and riding in a specialized, controlled environment is much safer than the interstate.
3. **Control yourself and your machine.** If you heed takeaways 1 and 2, this takeaway should be much 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 your skill level or the machine’s capability. 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. 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”**

<sup>1</sup>This product and more are posted on the NAVSAFECOM public site at <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil>