PREPARING TO RIDE

What you do before you start a trip goes a long way toward determining whether or not you'll get where you want to go safely. Before taking off on any trip, a safe rider makes a point to:

1. **Wear the right gear.**
2. **Become familiar with the motorcycle.**
3. **Check the motorcycle equipment.**
4. **Be a responsible rider.**

WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR

When you ride, your gear is "right" if it protects you. In any crash, you have a far better chance of avoiding serious injury if you wear:

- **An approved helmet.**
- **Face or eye protection.**
- **Protective clothing.**

HELMET USE

Crashes can occur — particularly among untrained beginning riders. And one out of every five motorcycle crashes result in head or neck injuries. Head injuries are just as severe as neck injuries — and far more common. Crash analyses show that head and neck injuries account for a majority of serious and fatal injuries to motorcyclists. Research also shows that, with few exceptions, head and neck injuries are reduced by the proper wearing of an approved helmet.

Missouri law requires all motorcycle or motortricycle operators and passengers to wear protective headgear at all times the vehicle is in motion on the highways of this state. Consider the following facts:

- **An approved helmet** lets you see as far to the sides as necessary. A study of more than 900 motorcycle crashes, where 40% of the riders wore helmets, did not find even one case in which a helmet kept a rider from spotting danger.
- **Most crashes happen** on short trips (less than five miles long), just a few minutes after starting out.
- **Most riders** are riding slower than 30 mph when a crash occurs. At these speeds, helmets can cut both the number and the severity of head injuries by half.

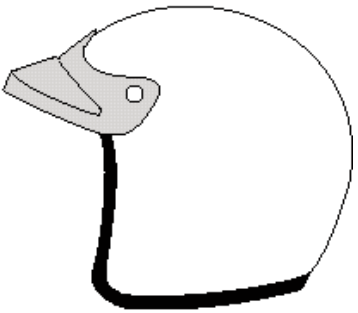
No matter what the speed, helmeted riders are three times more likely to survive head injuries than those not wearing helmets at the time of the crash.

HELMET SELECTION

There are two primary types of helmets, providing two different levels of coverage: three-quarter and full face.

Whichever style you choose, you can get the most protection by making sure that the helmet:

HELMETS



- **Meets U.S.** Department of Transportation (DOT) and state standards. Helmets with a label from the Snell Memorial Foundation give you an added assurance of quality.
- **Fits snugly,** all the way around.
- **Has no obvious defects** such as cracks, loose padding or frayed straps.

Whatever helmet you decide on, keep it securely fastened on your head when you ride. Otherwise, if you are involved in a crash, it's likely to fly off your head before it gets a chance to protect you.

EYE AND FACE PROTECTION

A plastic shatter-resistant faceshield can help protect your whole face in a crash. It also protects you from wind, dust, dirt, rain, insects, and pebbles thrown up from cars ahead. These problems are distracting and can be painful. If you have to deal with them, you can't devote your full attention to the road.

Goggles protect your eyes, though they won't protect the rest of your face like a faceshield does. A windshield is not a substitute for a faceshield or goggles. Most windshields will not protect your eyes from the wind. Neither will eyeglasses or sunglasses. Glasses won't keep your eyes from watering, and they might blow off when you turn your head while riding.

To be effective, eye or faceshield protection must:

- **Be free** of scratches.
- **Be resistant** to penetration.
- **Give a clear** view to either side.
- **Fasten securely,** so it does not blow off.
- **Permit air** to pass through, to reduce fogging.
- **Permit enough room** for eyeglasses or sunglasses, if needed.

Tinted eye protection should not be worn at night or any other time when little light is available.

CLOTHING

The right clothing protects you in a collision. It also provides comfort, as well as protection from heat, cold, debris, and hot and moving parts of the motorcycle.

- **Jacket and pants** should cover arms and legs completely. They should fit snugly enough to keep from flapping in the wind, yet loosely enough to move freely. Leather offers the most protection. Sturdy synthetic material provides a lot of protection as well. Wear a jacket even in warm weather to prevent dehydration. Many are designed to protect without getting you overheated, even on summer days.
- **Boots or shoes** should be high and sturdy enough to cover your ankles and give them support. Soles should be made of hard, durable slip resistant material. Keep heels short so they do not catch on rough surfaces. Tuck in laces so they won't catch on your motorcycle.
- **Gloves** allow a better grip and help protect your hands in a crash. Your gloves should be made of leather or similar durable material.

In cold or wet weather, your clothes should keep you warm and dry, as well as protect you from injury. You cannot control a motorcycle well if you are numb. Riding for long periods in cold weather can cause severe chill and fatigue. A winter jacket should resist wind and fit snugly at the neck, wrists, and waist. Good-quality rainsuits designed for motorcycle riding resist tearing apart or ballooning up at high speeds.

KNOW YOUR MOTORCYCLE

There are plenty of things on the highway that can cause you trouble. Your motorcycle should not be one of them. To make sure that your motorcycle won't let you down:

- **Read** the owner's manual first.
- **Start** with the right motorcycle for you.
- **Be familiar** with the motorcycle controls.
- **Check** the motorcycle before every ride.
- **Keep** it in safe riding condition between rides.
- **Avoid** add-ons and modifications that make your motorcycle harder to handle.

THE RIGHT MOTORCYCLE FOR YOU

First, make sure your motorcycle is right for you. It should "fit" you. Your feet should reach the ground while you are seated on the motorcycle.

1 Test Yourself

A plastic shatter-resistant face shield:

A. Is not necessary if you have a windshield.

B. Only protects your eyes.

C. Helps protect your whole face.

D. Does not protect your face as well as goggles.

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At minimum, your street-legal motorcycle should have:

- **Headlight, taillight and brakelight.**
- **Front and rear brakes.**
- **Turn signals.**
- **Horn.**
- **Two mirrors.**

BORROWING AND LENDING

Borrowers and lenders of motorcycles, beware. Crashes are fairly common among beginning riders — especially in the first months of riding. Riding an unfamiliar motorcycle adds to the problem. If you borrow a motorcycle, get familiar with it in a controlled area. And if you lend your motorcycle to friends, make sure they are licensed and know how to ride before allowing them out into traffic.

No matter how experienced you may be, ride extra carefully on any motorcycle that's new or unfamiliar to you. More than half of all crashes occur on motorcycles ridden by the operator for less than six months.

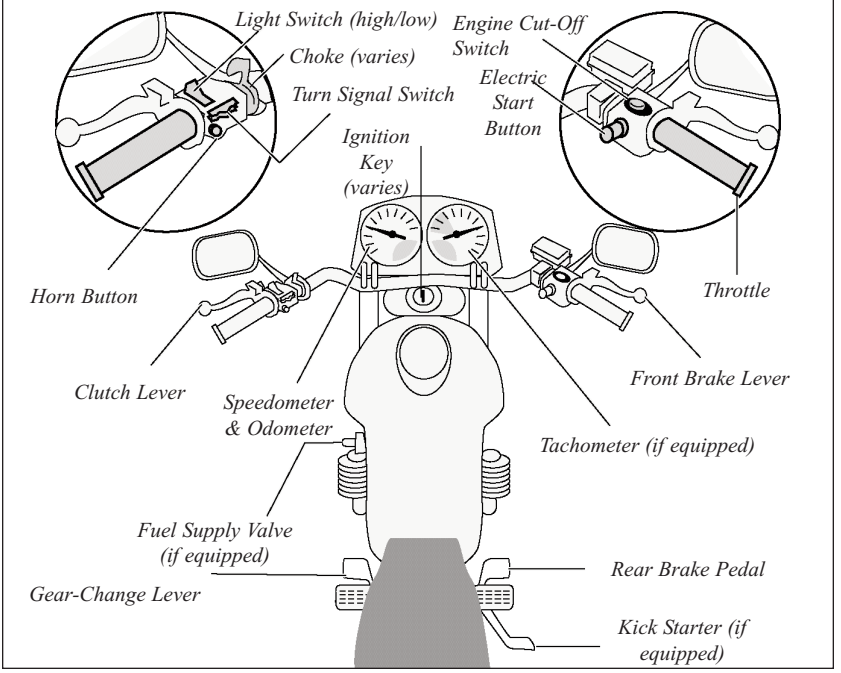
GET FAMILIAR WITH THE MOTORCYCLE CONTROLS

Make sure you are completely familiar with the motorcycle before you take it out on the street. Be sure to review the owner's manual. This is particularly important if you are riding a borrowed motorcycle.

If you are going to use an unfamiliar motorcycle:

- **Make all the checks** you would on your own motorcycle.

MOTORCYCLE CONTROLS



- **Find out where everything is**, particularly the turn signals, horn, headlight switch, fuel-supply valve, and engine cut-off switch. Find and operate these items without having to look for them.
- **Know the gear pattern.** Work the throttle, clutch, and brakes a few times before you start riding. All controls react a little differently.
- **Ride very cautiously** and be aware of surroundings. Accelerate gently, take turns more slowly, and leave extra room for stopping.

CHECK YOUR MOTORCYCLE

A motorcycle needs more frequent attention than a car. A minor technical failure in a car seldom leads to anything more than an inconvenience for the driver.

If something's wrong with the motorcycle, you'll want to find out about it before you get in traffic. Make a complete check of your motorcycle before every ride.

Before mounting the motorcycle make the following checks:

- **Tires** — Check the air pressure, general wear and tread.
- **Fluids** — Oil and fluid levels. At a minimum, check hydraulic fluids and coolants weekly. Look under the motorcycle for signs of an oil or gas leak.
- **Headlights and Taillight** — Check them both. Test your switch to make sure both high and low beams are working.
- **Turn Signals** — Turn on both right and left turn signals. Make sure all lights are working properly.
- **Brake Light** — Try both brake controls, and make sure each one turns on the brake light.

Once you have mounted the motorcycle, complete the following checks before starting out:

- **Clutch and Throttle** — Make sure they work smoothly. The throttle should snap back when you let go. The clutch should feel tight and smooth.
- **Mirrors** — Clean and adjust both mirrors before starting. It's difficult to ride with one hand while you try to adjust a mirror. Adjust each mirror so you can see the lane behind and as much as possible of the lane next to you. When properly adjusted, a mirror may show the edge of your arm or shoulder — but it's the road behind and to the side that's most important.
- **Brakes** — Try the front and rear brake levers one at a time. Make sure each one feels firm and holds the motorcycle when the brake is fully applied.
- **Horn** — Try the horn. Make sure it works.

In addition to the checks you should make before every trip, check the following items at least once a week: wheels, cables, fasteners, and fluid checks. Follow your owner's manual to get recommendations.

2 ***Test Yourself***

More than half of all crashes:

A. Occur at speeds greater than 35 mph.
B. Happen at night.
C. Are caused by worn tires.
D. Involve riders who have ridden their motorcycles less than six months.

Answer — page 40

KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

"Accident" implies an unforeseen event that occurs without anyone's fault or negligence. Most often in traffic, that is not the case. In fact, most people involved in a crash can usually claim some responsibility for what takes place.

Consider a situation where someone decides to try to squeeze through an intersection on a yellow light turning red. Your light turns green. You pull into the intersection without checking for possible latecomers. That is all it takes for the two of you to tangle. It was the driver's responsibility to stop. And it was your responsibility to look before pulling out. Neither of you held up your end of the deal. Just because someone else is the first to start the chain of events leading to a crash, doesn't leave any of us free of responsibility.

As a rider you can't be sure that other operators will see you or yield the right of way. To lessen your chances of a crash occurring:

- **Be visible** — wear proper clothing, use your headlight, ride in the best lane position to see and be seen.
- **Communicate your intentions** — use the proper signals, brake light, and lane position.
- **Maintain an adequate space cushion** — following, being followed, lane sharing, passing and being passed.
- **Scan your path** of travel 12 seconds ahead.
- **Identify and separate** multiple hazards.
- **Be prepared to act** — remain alert and know how to carry out proper crash-avoidance skills.

Blame doesn't matter when someone is injured in a crash. There is rarely a single cause of any crash. The ability to ride aware, make critical decisions, and carry them out separates responsible riders from all the rest. Remember, it is up to you to keep from being the cause of, or an unprepared participant in, any crash.