



Matt DeWald, RA #43635

EXPLORING HORIZONS

BALANCE OF FREEDOM AND SAFETY

The freedom-loving side of me wants the Federal government to shrivel up into a tiny ball and get its tentacles out of the motorcycle industry. My pragmatic side realizes that motorcycle riding is risky and poor decision making can put people's lives in danger.

Within our own riding group, we have riders searching for the latest ATGATT and lighting elements that can be seen from the moon. Others love their classic Airheads with rudimentary effects, down to their drum brakes.

In reality, everyone is right. There is no perfect balance of gear, technology, or safety equipment. No matter what we do or how we try to protect ourselves, we are still engaged in a dangerous sport. And equally so, the decisions we make every time we get on our favorite machines can impact the lives of the people around us.

NTSB SAFETY REPORT

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) understands this and issued a Safety Report on "Select Risk Factors Associated with Causes of Motorcycle Crashes" following its public meeting on September 11, 2018 (<https://ntsb.gov/news/events/Documents/MC-study-Abstract.pdf>).

In the Safety Report, the NTSB noted that in 2016 "5,286 motorcyclists died in traffic crashes in the United States," representing a 28-times higher rate of occupant fatalities in traffic crashes compared to passenger vehicles, per mile traveled.

To substantiate this Safety Report, the NTSB evaluated all the motorcycle crashes that resulted in at least one injury sustained by a motorcycle rider or passenger in Orange County, CA between 2011 and 2015. Because helmets were worn by almost 100% of the motorcyclists included in the study and because no data was available on blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the report excludes these variables from its discussion.

In the Safety Report, the NTSB identified the following safety issues:

- › Cars' crash-warning and connected technologies (vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure systems) are not always designed to detect / fully integrate motorcycles.
 - › Since more than a third of the crashes analyzed involved a loss of control that contributed to crash causation, more widespread availability of enhanced braking and stability control systems on motorcycles could improve safety.
 - › There is a limitation on the most recent data collected on motorcyclist alcohol and other drug use and its effect on motorcycle crashes in the United States. The NTSB recommended that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) examine the influence of alcohol and drug use on motorcycle crash risk and develop guidelines to assist the states in implementing strategies and countermeasures.
 - › With a widespread variation in motorcycle licensing procedures, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of motorcycle riding licensing procedures.
- Based on the safety issues noted above, the NTSB provided recommendations to the NHTSA, Motorcycle Industry Council, American Motorcyclist Association, and Motorcycle Safety Foundation that included the following:
- › Incorporate motorcycles in the development of, and performance standards for, passenger vehicle crash warning and prevention systems, connected vehicle-to-vehicle systems, and vehicle-to-infrastructure systems.
 - › Require all new on-road motorcycles be manufactured with ABS.
 - › Conduct or sponsor research to evaluate the effectiveness of stability control systems on motorcycles.
 - › Evaluate the effectiveness of state motorcycle licensing procedures for reducing motorcycle crashes, injuries, and fatalities among novice and unlicensed riders.
 - › Inform the riding community about the findings of this safety report, and promote the safety benefits of advanced motorcycle antilock braking and stability control technologies.

RECENT TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS

Facebook lit up in mid-July when KTM issued a press release about their upcoming adaptive cruise control and blind spot detection system.

Perhaps not to be outdone, BMW subsequently released a video of a new self-driving bike <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JIYE6nSNJI>. The significance of these advancements is that the underlying technologies might one day save our lives while also increasing our riding comfort.

I'm pleased to see that KTM and BMW are already years ahead of the NHTB's recommendations, meaning they will not need government mandates to bring better products to our sport.

As BMW riders, we look at the recommendation to include ABS brakes on all motorcycles as old news. BMW has been doing this for about 30 years, and even their sub-\$5,000 offering (G 310 R) includes ABS.

So while we may shrug our shoulders at this Safety Report, it's important that we not overlook other key elements and undertones related to equipment and training.

EQUIPMENT CHOICES

I, for one, strongly believe that before investing in a good motorcycle, riders should invest in great equipment. Nylon-based materials can shred and melt upon impact and may not be reliable when sliding on pavement. Instead, riders should gravitate to Kevlar and Cordura products where possible. See, for example, Chris Parker's story on how his KLIM equipment saved him in a crash with a deer.

Helmets that do not provide full-face protection may provide little protection in the event of a collision. Quality gloves and boots are just as important. While the price of appropriate equipment can easily run into the thousands of dollars, our lives are worth a whole lot more.

I realize that this is a tough pill to swallow, especially for younger and newer

riders, but there are alternatives worth considering. Purchasing high-quality used equipment (except for aged helmets) or finding similarly sized riding mentors who are willing to provide "hand-me-downs" to a newer rider.

When given the choice between getting a great bike or great gear, I always pick the latter.

TRAINING AND PRACTICE

In my last Exploring Horizons column, I talked about the importance of training and practicing fundamental techniques regularly. We see the same themes coming from the NTSB report, where enhanced braking systems, stability control, and improved training are evaluated as possible means to offset poor rider techniques.

The best I can do is practice what I preach. For instance, in a recent trip to a nearby state park, I used an empty parking lot to practice aggressive braking techniques. Raising the speed to about 35 mph, I experimented with hard braking and feeling the ABS engage. Each time, I kept the rear brake engaged, which freed up my left foot to stabilize the bike when I reached a complete stop. This is the same exercise I developed in my first riding course, Basic Rider Course at the Motorcycle Safety Foundation.

To improve my technical skills, I recently signed up for the one-day on-road course offered by the BMW Performance Course in Spartanburg, SC. After completing the class, I will report on its effect and what I do to maintain the skills learned.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

It's important that all riders maintain a positive outlook and remain resourceful about the options available to them to afford appropriate training. Joining motorcycle clubs, the BMW RA for example, provide member discounts for various gear, accessory, and training providers.

All BMW RA members receive a 15%

discount at the BMW Performance Center. Additionally, the Paul B. Scholarship is available through the MOA Foundation and provides scholarships worth up to \$250 for BMW MOA members and \$100 for nonmembers. After considering the BMW RA discount and Paul B. Scholarship, this training course becomes much more affordable to many riders.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Whether or not we like it, the motorcycle business is evolving quickly. We are seeing pressures to improve the safety of riding coming from within the industry (with the likes of BMW's self-driving experiment) and from outsiders (such as NTSB).

While we still have the ability to choose what makes and models we buy, we can expect an upward pressure on the pricing of new motorcycles in order to meet the technological requirements of the future. But in the meantime, the decisions we make now can affect the industry, the people around us, and our own lives. I believe it's better to make our own self-determined path to improving our riding techniques, training, and gear before someone else forces us to do so.

