



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of STATE MOTORCYCLE SAFETY ADMINISTRATORS

SMSA Spotlight Magazine

Fall 2017

The views and opinions of the articles and authors in the SMSA Spotlight Magazine do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the SMSA or their members. The articles are intended to provide a wide range of views on motorcycle safety. Any questions regarding articles should be addressed directly to the author(s).

How Do We Create a “Culture of Safety” in the U. S. World of Motorcycling?

What is a “Culture of Safety?” A “Culture of Safety” exists when the participants in an activity (like motorcycle riding) take responsibility for their own safety. In all our experiences in the U. S., we have only witnessed a change in the culture of motorcycle safety once before. We worked with a company which provided traffic and motorcycle training classes for the U. S. Military Services. The U.S. Military was concerned in 2005 and 2006 that its motorcycle fatality rate for Service Members riding their own personal street motorcycles recreationally was very high. And, to boot, they knew that those riders had all taken the Basic Rider Course required by the Services. In a desperate attempt to reduce motorcycle fatalities, the Military Services decided to require intermediate and advanced training on the rider’s own motorcycle, in addition to the Basic Rider Course.

The U. S. Marine Corps really jumped on the band wagon. It produced a 45-minute video on motorcycling which addressed how dangerous riding is and promoted practice on the track and in the dirt. The Marine Corps rolled the video out at Motorcycle Safety Days which featured motorcycle freestyle shows and stunt riders to “get riders there”



and see the safety video. The video was spot on, realistic, believable and featured top spokespeople in the industry. The video made riders feel that leadership “got it” about why they rode motorcycles—the excitement, the danger and the fun! Finally, leadership understood why they rode and offered them solutions for keeping themselves safe—higher level training and an understanding of the dangers of the sport. The Marine Corps went “over the top” with training.

The Marine Corps offered the MSRC, the MSF ARC, AMOS (Advanced Motorcycle Operator School developed by CA Superbike School), Total Control ARC, cornering clinics and track practice; and experienced a 43% reduction in fatalities between 2008 and 2009. The Navy required all its sport bike riders to take the MSRC (MSF’s Military SportBike RiderCourse) and experienced a 61% reduction in motorcycle fatalities. The Army provided the MSF ARC (Advanced Rider Course) and more engaged leadership and experienced a 34% reduction in fatalities.

Where we really witnessed a difference in the Marine Corps riders was in the attitude of the Marines with whom we interfaced during classes. When participating as trainers with the CA Superbike School, in one of its track practices, we saw the Marines coming into class for the first day with eyes glazed over, staring out at the flight line, where they thought they were going to ride and whispering, “I feel the need for speed.”



SMSA Listserv

Please take advantage of the SMSA Listserv hosted by Oregon State University. The SMSA Listserv is an easy and efficient way to contact your fellow SMSA members with questions relating to Motorcycle Safety and Rider Education. To sign up, visit the SMSA website Members Only section and choose the tab for Listserv. Summaries from past postings are also listed under the Listserv tab.

The next day, however, when they rode, they were perfectly content with their many laps of a small, twisty road course which only permitted them to reach a top speed of 80 mph.



After a couple years of these advanced classes, we started to notice a huge difference in new Marine Corps riders who came to their second course, usually the BRC2. They had taken only the BRC, but they were riding their own motorcycles like pros and behaving very responsibly. We asked, if they had other formal training. They said no. Then we asked “How did you get so good on your own bikes having had just one course on training motorcycles?” They all said, “Well, we didn’t just go to the street when we bought our first bike.” More than half the 12 riders said they had a friend pick up their bike and take it to a parking lot. There they rode for two whole days, practicing skills, before hitting the road. The remaining riders said they did pick up their bike, but they rode directly back to their Base then rode there for three months, under a 35-mph speed limit restriction, before taking to the street. These two scenarios were not a requirement; so, “Why did you do that?” we asked. They thought a bit and then said, “We had to. The Marine Corps expects us to be good, smart motorcyclists. We can’t be the one who crashes. We just can’t!” A true change in the Culture of Safety in which the participants take responsibility for their own safety and the norm is to perform in a responsible manner.

In California, where Total Control Training manages the CMSP (California Motorcyclist Safety Program), we don’t have the luxury of requiring riders to take the Intermediate and Advanced Riding Clinics. We encourage it, but we can’t require it as the Military Services can. Therefore, we have “upped the ante” in our beginner course, the CA Motorcyclist Safety Program Motorcyclist Training Course (CMSP MTC). We make it clear to motorcyclists that riding a motorcycle is extremely dangerous. We require our Instructors to wear a motorcycle-specific jacket, in addition to the typical PPE, when riding demonstrations and to and from class. We also require them to take an additional training class above the course they are going to teach, so their skill level and level of understanding exceeds that of their students.

We require that students wear a full-face helmet for the MTC. The MTC includes more riding time than other beginning rider classes. We raised the standards for braking and require that students meet the higher

standards. We have included information on motorcycle handling dynamics which helps students to understand that it is a big deal to ride a motorcycle.



Early on, we noticed that we were receiving higher level comments from students on Student Surveys; comments that indicated riders were leaving the MTC a more responsible motorcyclist. Some examples:

“The motorcycle is not just another form of transportation, but comes with its unique set of limitations, safety concerns and boundaries.” “I’ll never ride a motorcycle unless I am fully geared, sober and free of distractions.” “I became more interested in safety equipment and wanting to be a better rider.” “Before the class I was careless and not ready for the outside world of riding.” “If I had to take one thing away from the experience, it would be to ‘Ride within Your Means.’ Riding is dynamic; it’s not just me I have to worry about, it’s others on the road too.”

In addition, after our first year of our new curriculum implementation, NHTSA data showed that California experienced an 11.5% reduction in motorcyclist fatalities in 2015 while California experienced a 4% increase in overall traffic fatalities. This is while the rest of the nation experienced an average 10% increase in motorcyclist fatalities. While driving a car in California was becoming more dangerous, riding a motorcycle was becoming less dangerous.

We continue to monitor these trends and the increased responsible attitudes of trained riders. We also feel that CHP and Total Control in partnership are moving toward establishing that elusive “Culture of Safety” in the motorcycling community in California!

Creating a “Culture of Safety” requires motorcyclists, as well as automobile drivers, to take responsibility for their own safety and education—thinking, living, and breathing safety—which is facilitated by all of us in the motorcycle safety and rider education fields.

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Graceful Exits

As program managers, we are at a critical juncture in our industry. For four decades, rider training has been the go-to measure for states trying to reduce motorcyclist fatalities. We've devoted great resources to making training affordable and accessible. And, as we commonly believe, our efforts have led to a better informed, better skilled, and better equipped rider population. In spite of this estimable work, respected figures in our field have begun to question training altogether, scrutinizing fatality whole numbers and raising the alarm over their persistence. If rider training was supposed to be the silver bullet, why is the wolf still at the door?

The truth is, rider training is not a silver bullet, nor was it ever meant to be. Professionals in our field know that reducing motorcyclist injuries and fatalities requires a comprehensive effort; training is only one important piece of the puzzle. In Oregon, where rider training is now mandatory, the importance of this puzzle piece isn't theoretical. TEAM OREGON sees real results tied to fundamental skills and knowledge acquisition. And we are not alone: In the years before compulsory training, our students voluntarily chose training in equal or greater numbers as they have in the post-mandatory environment. But while we're sold on training, we're also frustrated by some perennial problems. These positions aren't mutually exclusive. The real question before us is, how do we build on what we've got?



I'd like to share with you some realizations I have had upon a lot of reflection on the state of motorcycling four decades ago, the tremendous progress in comprehensive safety efforts, and the vast potential such efforts still hold. These factors have influenced the initial steps my team and I are poised to take to reshape conversations around training and motorcycling as a sustained activity.

First, for all its successes rider training has failed to set proper expectations. The most common perception of a student enrolled in one of our basic or intermediate classes (alternative paths to endorsement) is that successful completion is an official statement of proficiency. The numbers say it all: A mere two percent of the total number of students we train returns for further education; a staggering 98 percent, it appears, is content with the most basic requirement.

The more alarming conclusion is, almost every rider views more training as a remedial measure – why should they consider further training if they've passed? Too often, particularly at the beginning and end of class, we have chimed positive. As essential as praise is in an educational setting, we are missing out on key opportunities to leave students with a lasting and honest impression of a sport that requires constant care and continual learning.

Second, we have assumed all who pass (as well as those who don't) want to ride. A bigger trap is to believe all students should be able to ride. In reality, not everyone is ready to ride, and they are telling us so. On average, every year 15 percent of our basic and intermediate graduates (those who receive completion cards) choose not to get endorsed. What this says to me – what we've overlooked – is that basic training serves a double function: It ensures exposure to fundamental skills and knowledge, and, perhaps more importantly, it provides prospective riders a less-risky arena to test their commitment. We can do a much better job underscoring a rider's decision not to ride as a legitimate and honorable outcome of training.

In light of these two takeaways, we have added a new introduction to our classroom that expresses a candid position on the realities of motorcycling and what it takes to become a successful motorcyclist. An excerpt follows. (You can find the entire piece on our website: team-oregon.org/about/director.) My hope is to recalibrate expectations about riding right out of the gate. Do you have what it takes to ride? Do you know what it takes to ride? It's incumbent on us to lay out the facts and to provide graceful exits.

...Basic and intermediate training do not make you an expert. At best they provide rudimentary tools that enable a graduate to critique his or her own riding. And while experiential learning is critical to a rider's growth, far too often a near miss or a minor crash becomes the teacher. Expert motorcyclists do not rely on emergencies to further their growth. Instead, they embrace more training. They challenge what they know (or what they think they know) in formal settings and in exchanges with better riders. They invite feedback and are open to periodic resets in their assumptions and habits. Above all, they continue to hone their judgment.



I salute you for taking the first steps in educating yourself about riding. But let me stress – basic and

intermediate training are first steps on a long path to proficiency. Perhaps this course leaves you excited by the commitments motorcycling asks of you. You value more training, practice, and knowledge, and you can hold yourself to the discipline and self-control riding requires. You are a champion. Instead, maybe you learn through this course that you are not ready for the rigors of motorcycling. You, too, are a champion!

Whatever the outcome of your short time with us, let honesty and humility guide you. Motorcycling is an activity that is not kind to those who disrespect it.

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Have your article featured in the next edition of *Spotlight Magazine*. Please submit articles to the SMSA office at office@smsa.org. Articles can showcase your state safety campaigns, state programs, best practices, teaching techniques, new motorcycles; anything motorcycle safety related.

For a copy of the SMSA Guidelines for submitting Spotlight Magazine articles, please email the office at office@smsa.org.

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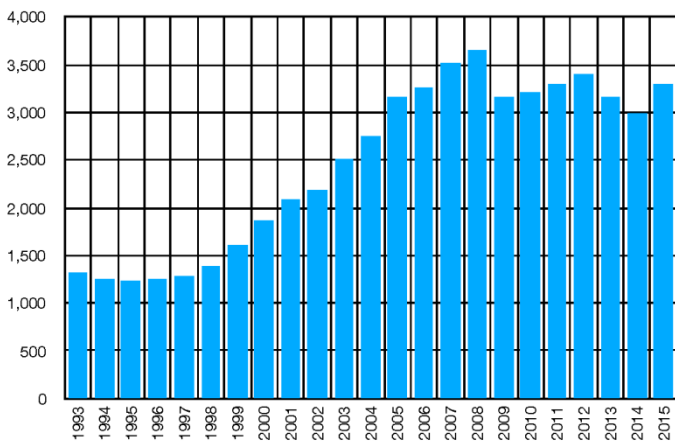
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It is Time to Change Rider Education to Focus on Mental Qualities, Emphasizing Respect and Judgment

For the past 25 years, the central focus of motorcycle safety in the USA has been on license endorsement, personal protective equipment, conspicuity, and the physical skills training of braking, cornering, and swerving. I am able to directly query the Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS) database to obtain scientifically correct statistics. The most recent results based directly on FARS data shows that motorcycle drivers, with a license that was both endorsed for motorcycles and valid (i.e. not suspended or expired), dominate motorcycle crash fatalities. The fatality count in this group has more than doubled since the 1990s.

USA Endorsed (excluding suspended/expired) Motorcycle Driver Fatality Count



Source: NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)

"To put this in perspective, let's compare motorcyclists to persons riding in cars (motorists). A motorcyclist in the USA in 2014 was 38 times more likely to be killed than a person riding in a car, mile for mile. Let's be clear that this is not 38 percent, but 3,800 percent. Even if we just simply compare the fatalities per vehicle (motorcycle to car) the factor is 27 times more likely to die per vehicle. This apparent "reduction" from 38 times to 27 times is because there are, on average, more people in cars, per vehicle, than on motorcycles."

In the vast majority of motorcycle crashes, the motorcycle driver has both a compliant endorsement and valid status. We have (correctly) believed that personal protective gear (especially a high-quality, properly fitting, approved helmet) will reduce the potential for fatal injuries, but based on the FARS numbers, the advantage is disappointingly small.

Conspicuity is intended to capture the attention of other drivers, with the intent of causing them to stay out of the way of the motorcyclist. Psychological quirks (that have been discovered since the 1980s), especially "inattentive blindness," explain why about half of drivers won't see something even if it's dramatically conspicuous, and that applies to motorcycle drivers sometimes not seeing what they should, too.

So, my question is; "What could reduce the motorcyclist fatality count?" If we intend to bring about a real reduction in the fatality count, we need to gain more understanding of and be sure to use accurate data.

After 25 years of getting the same results, it is time for us trainers to stop doing the same thing over and over again. Based on current models, we can predict that the motorcycle crash fatality results for 2017 will turn out to be just as bad as recent years. Urgently, we need to do more than just repeat the failed tactics and expect a drop in fatalities. May I suggest that it is time to change training from the old physical skills emphasis to an approach that focuses on mental qualities, especially respect and judgment.

In my opinion, a motorcycle driver of average skill, driving carefully, will experience less danger than a skillful motorcycle driver being careless. On public roads, "careful" beats "careless" every time, no matter the licensing status and endorsement, protective gear, conspicuity or physical skill level! And that concept is key to reducing the fatality count.

We trainers can change the focus from physical training (braking, cornering, swerving) to improving mental qualities that develop respect and judgment.

RESPECT: Courses that help students learn to reduce mishaps focus the students on their understanding of and respect for the:

Danger of riding upon motorcycles on public roads.

Motorcycle.

Situation, meaning:

- Riding within the posted and suggested speeds.
- Being courteous to ALL other roadway users.
- Understanding how the roadway system is designed and engineered.
- Remembering that public roads are intended for transportation, not for sport or recreating while driving the vehicle-in-transport.

JUDGMENT: Courses that help students learn to reduce mishaps by using better judgment to choose:

- To ride alert, healthy, and unimpaired.
- When to “opt-out” of the ride. (If, in your judgment it’s time to opt-out, and you discontinue that ride, then you can’t be injured in a motorcycle crash on that ride.)
- The appropriate venue for aggressive riding. Rather than taking an aggressive machine out onto public roads to have fun, it would be less dangerous to trailer a sportbike to the track, or to transport an off-road bike to an OHV area and then recreate.

Scientifically, if we trainers continue the same old physical skills approach, we will see the same motorcyclists’ fatality results. If trainers change to the new approach, focusing students on mental qualities such as respect and judgment, motorcyclist fatalities will decrease. It is time to change.

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