

Safety is All in the Mind

By Mark Caldwell

Your safety while riding is really all in your mind. Oh, sure, there are things that you can do to impair your safety physically, but it really starts in the mind.

Everyone would agree that your chances of surviving an incident are greater if you are wearing proper riding gear. But why do or don't you wear it? Because of what you value and think about. If you think your safety is important, you tend to wear more gear and ride safer. On the other hand, perhaps you're the rider in denial: "It'll never happen to me." But if that's you, you probably aren't even reading my articles. Or perhaps you have convinced yourself that safe clothing is uncomfortable. If so, you obviously haven't tried very hard to find proper fitting riding gear in this modern age. Don't wear Big Joe's hand-me-down that is 20 years old and never even fit him properly. Go get yourself some current, properly fitted riding gear.

"What about physical impairments," you ask. You mean like alcohol? Well it was your mind that made the decision to drink and ride. My brother and I have a pact to follow the airline pilots' rule of thumb: 8 hours from bottle to throttle. You can make your own decisions on the subject, but it's still **your** decision to make. And fatigue? Same thing. It's your decision whether to get on the bike and ride in the condition you're in. It's your mind that is in charge.

But the area that has tripped me up the most and I continue to work on is what David Hough, in his book *More Proficient Motorcycling*, calls Wimp-O-Phobia. It's that male-ego response to another rider or vehicle where we push ourselves and our bikes to their outer limits. You know, like when you fall behind your group and you decide to whip around a couple of cars at high speed to catch up. I'm guilty of doing that. I even bragged a couple of times about how I pulled it off before I realized what a stupid maneuver it was and how lucky I was that I didn't get killed in the process.

Or maybe some rider on a sport bike comes zipping up behind you and then whips out into the next lane and screams past you, not even bothering to give you a courtesy wave. Feel your muscles tense and the bike seems to accelerate all on its own? That's Wimp-O-Phobia rearing its ugly head. And it's all in your mind. It's up to you to calm your mind down and thus calm down the rest of your body and bring yourself back to safe riding practices.

One of the greatest risks to your safety is denial that you're in charge and you're responsible for your own safety. Listen to the way people talk about their accidents and you know right away whether they have taken responsibility for the things they could have done differently, and avoided the incident, but did not; or if they are just laying the blame on their mechanic, the bike manufacturer, the road or weather conditions. John Maxwell, a well-known author on business leadership, has a saying that, "You can't learn anything from something you make excuses for." We all make poor decisions from time to time. Let's just learn from them instead of excusing them away.

It's up to each of us to choose to ride safer so that we can ride more. You decide.