

Old Riders, Bold Riders

by Richard Bennett, SWC Safety Officer



Old Rider



Bold Rider

You know the adage: “There are Old Riders, and Bold Riders, but there are no Old, Bold Riders.” There are reasons for the adage.

We have all been “Rookies” at everything we learned to do; play an instrument, drive a car, or any number of other skills. As police Rookies we went through an Academy, and most of us who ride motorcycles had some basic instruction to start us on our riding adventures. There is a beginning to everything, and a learning curve that follows.

I am no spring chicken, but I have been riding motorcycles under all conditions for more than 50 years. I was a Municipal Motorcycle Officer, a “dirt” rider, a commuter, and long-distance tourer. I have ridden a variety of two-wheeled vehicles from a 50cc moped to the largest Harley Davidson motorcycles. In all those years, and under all those adverse conditions, I am proud to say I have never had a serious collision. Sure, some parking lot tip-overs, but you know the kind of collision I mean: The “Oh My God, this is going to hurt” kind.

I know there is a tendency to cite good luck or “Karma”, which I admit is part of the equation. But safely surviving a long history of eclectic motorcycle riding is more than that.

In my early years I rode 60’s and 70’s style motorcycles. If you never experienced these machines, suffice it to say they were substandard in every way to modern motorcycles of today. Engines were unreliable, flats and broken chains were common. Drum brakes were hard to apply and inefficient in emergency stops. Today’s motorcycles give you more safety and reliability, but they still need your attention. Part of rider survival is to know your machine’s limitations.

California didn’t mandate motorcycle helmets until 1992. Before then I wore a helmet to keep cold and rain off my face, but otherwise nothing more than a backward ball cap. Sure, I wore a helmet during my Motor Officer days, but on my own time my protective gear was lacking. Karma and good luck was on my side, but I wouldn’t depend upon that today. Another part of survival is to try and avoid crashes and start wearing protective gear.

As the years passed, I gained experience. Some of the experience came from investigating collisions of other motorcycle riders. My Traffic Officer days were an education in the cause of collisions, and I applied those lessons to my own riding habits.

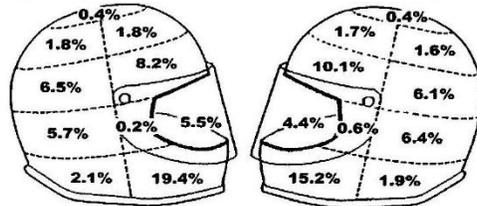
Some of my experience was from “close calls”. You know the kind; the unexpected hazard that you somehow survived without serious consequences.

Years of safe riding experience is like a college education in the motorcycling world. The trick is to survive long enough to get your “Old Rider” degree. To that end, I offer these suggestions to the less experienced riders who want to grow old enjoying the joy of motorcycling.

- **Recognize and manage risk.** Don't take unnecessary chances. There are already plenty of risks to avoid, so don't add to the list. If you want to drink, either drink *or* ride, but don't do both. Insurance companies tell us a large percentage of motorcycle collisions are single-vehicle.



- **Wear a helmet.** Not the plastic beanie helmet, but quality head protection. Studies show the most often impacted part of the head is the chin, followed by the forehead. If you are going to wear a helmet, wear a good one.



Distribution of impact locations on motorcycle helmets, all collisions based on information collected by Dietmar Otte, Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Abteilung Verkehrsunfallforschung, Germany



- **Dress for the crash.** You can be stylish, but understand Karma may toss you onto the pavement without notice. (If we had notice, we could change clothes before we hit the ground.) Invest in a good jacket, protective pants and ankle-covering boots. You are worth it.



Bad Example



Good Example

