

RIDER SAFETY TIPS FOR THE RIDE

Motorcycle enthusiasts are hitting the road already as the summer season approaches. In preparation for riding season, VFW Michigan Riders Group Director Charlie Cline shares some safety tips for operating a motorcycle this summer.

1. Take a safety course

A safety course will teach you the rules of the road for motorcycles. You will also learn the appropriate actions to take in unpredictable riding situations that can arise. Driving a motorcycle requires skill and good judgment and a safety course can help you practice these.

2. Check the weather before heading out

Rain, ice and snow can compromise your ride. Driving in these elements is hazardous for bikers because you have less traction than a car and visibility is lower. Choose a different day if inclement weather is in the forecast.

3. Wear motorcycle gear

Motorcycle gear protects you from the elements, debris and road rash. Appropriate gear includes a DOT-approved helmet, goggles, leather jacket, leather pants or chaps, over the ankle boots and non-slip gloves. Dress in layers to adjust to any changing weather throughout the day.

4. Inspect your motorcycle before each ride

It's a good idea to inspect your bike before you ride to ensure it is as safe as possible. Check your headlights, taillights, turn signals, brakes, fuel, oil, tire pressure, mirrors, handlebars and horn.

5. Obey traffic rules, use your signals and drive the speed limit

This may sound remedial, but it's important to follow traffic rules, use signals and drive the posted speed limit to avoid accidents. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, in 2009 48% of motorcyclist deaths were caused by excessive speed.

6. Be visible

You cannot assume you are visible to other drivers. According to The Hurt Report published by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration in 1981, 75% of accidents involving motorcycles are due to the fact that other drivers did not see the motorcycle. Here are some ways to remain visible: Avoid other drivers' blind spots; Drive with your headlights on even during

the day; Wear reflective or bright clothing, and; always use your turn signals and hand signals.

7. Be observant and watch for road hazards

Driving defensively enables you to anticipate traffic problems and road hazards. Sand, oil and gravel can make you lose traction. Bumps and potholes are equally dangerous and should also be avoided. Cross railroad tracks at the appropriate angle.

8. Stay at a safe distance

Tailgating is not safe. It is recommended to stay at least four seconds away from the vehicle in front of you. This will allow you to stop in an emergency situation. Also, it is good to have an escape route in mind such as moving to the shoulder should you not be able to stop in time.

9. Carry a first-aid kit

Keeping a basic first-aid kit with your motorcycle is a good idea in case of injury. It should include: disinfecting wipes, bandages, hand sanitizer, gauze, adhesive tape and Band-Aids.

10. Take an advanced riding course

Practice and increase your skills by taking an advanced riding course. You will learn collision avoidance maneuvers, advanced turning, control tips and braking techniques.