



Gray Matter

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It's that time of year again. It begins in the evening and continues until mid morning. That misty gray stuff that covers the landscape and coats the road with a thin film of moisture. Carl Sandberg wrote poetry about it; motorcyclists curse it. It's fog.

Fog can turn the best road into a slippery beast whose breath blinds the rider. While there are some techniques to control the monster, there are times when it's wise simply to get off the road.

Some riders measure the density of the fog by how far they can see ahead. They use the stripe method. If they can see twenty stripes ahead, the fog is only moderate. Ten stripes mean a fairly nasty fog. When it gets down to two or three

stripes, it's time to pull off the road.

One technique some riders use it to tuck in close behind the vehicle ahead. This is great unless the car suddenly slams on the brakes and gives the biker a tour of his trunk and back seat. And what does it mean when those tail lights suddenly vanish? Perhaps that he's closed the garage door. It is better to increase following distance to four to six seconds. This will allow the rider to react to any unexpected hazards.

Since visibility is limited, it would seem better to use high beams to see further. However, fog is composed of millions of tiny droplets of water, and each of these is like a minuscule mirror, throwing

the full power of the high beams right back into the rider's eyes and further limiting his ability to see. Low beams allow the rider to see.

It is easy to overdrive a motorcycle's headlight under the best of circumstances. When it is foggy, there is only one thing to do—slow down!

Fog is made of water, and that gets on the road, making it very slick. Riders should avoid sudden changes in direction and speed. Braking and acceleration should be done slowly. Corners and turns should be made as close to vertically as possible. And keep the gray matter in the brain working at full power.

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How Was Harry Hurt?

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Perhaps the most renowned study of motorcycle accident causes and countermeasures was done for the University of Southern California by researcher Harry Hurt. He investigated 900 motorcycle accidents and analyzed another 3600 motorcycle traffic accident reports. The Motorcycle Safety Courses developed by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation are designed largely to build the skills that the Hurt Study found to be missing in the accident-involved rider.

Looking at just a few of the Hurt findings allows us to see the essential things we can do to avoid an accident.

Who hits us? Most accidents involve a car violating our right-of-way. Most frequently, the car turns left in front of the motorcycle.

Where do we get hit? Intersections are the most likely place for the motorcycle accident, with the car not only violating our right-of-way, but often traffic controls as well. Most accidents are on short

trips such as shopping, errands, visiting friends, entertainment or recreation. Most accidents happen close to the trip origin. More than three-fourths of the hazards are within 45° of straight ahead.

Why do we get hit? The main reason is that the driver of the other vehicle does not see us in time to avoid the collision. Alcohol is involved in almost half of the fatal accidents. Most motorcyclists are smart enough to separate riding and drinking. Unfortu-

nately, too many car drivers on the road are more mentally challenged.

Why aren't we seen? Conspicuity of the motorcycle is the most critical factor. Conspicuity is most critical from the front.

How can we be seen? Accident involvement is significantly reduced by the wearing of high visibility yellow, orange or bright red jackets. It looks as though we need to take extra care to make sure that we are seen. This means both the helmet (white or bright colors in the day and reflective material at night) and jacket should be highly visible. It also means positioning our motorcycles where we can be seen in traffic.

How else can we avoid accidents? Just paying attention to our driving improves our odds. We should use extra care on any motorcycle on which we have less than five months experience. Motorcycle rider courses reduce accidents and injuries in accidents. The courses teach the braking and swerving skills found to be lacking in many accident-involved riders. In many states, the Basic Rider Course also allows us to omit the on-street exam when we obtain our motorcycle license. Proper eye protection prevents the impaired vision which delays hazard detection.

How can we prevent injuries in an accident? Heavy boots,

jackets, and gloves reduce or prevent road rash. Full coverage helmets increase protection and reduce face injuries.

Knowledge is power. Now we know where and why we get hit. We know how to make ourselves seen and how to avoid both accidents and injury. It's up to us to put this knowledge to use.

