

AMERICAN MOTORCYCLIST

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THE THINKING RIDER

Applying Knowledge To Circumstances

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By Donald L. Green



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Riding a motorcycle gives a physical and emotional feeling unlike any other form of transportation and movement, one that, “If you have to ask about it, you wouldn’t understand.”

The wind pressing against our bodies and smells of the places we ride, a closeness to the road, the world, and other riders create a craving to get out there and do it again.

Most of us have clear mental pictures of our happiness formed by those extraordinary rides. Our souls are calmed and rejuvenated enough to push through another day of hard work to get back in the saddle to become one with our machines again.

One of the reasons we remember great rides is because we operate in the zone, managing the factors that come our way in the environment, the road and the machine. When problems arise, we adjust the ride by using our previous experiences, avoiding the sometimes-hazardous situations. All of this works nicely for a thinking rider.

What doesn’t work well is jumping on a motorcycle without considerable thought, experience and maturity. Knowing is half the battle, it takes predetermined thought and sound reflection.

Insight can be built in many ways: reading, taking a riding course, talking with other good and safe riders, or being cautious while learning how to manage motorcycle controls. The bottom line is it takes commitment and work to ride well and, more importantly, for loved ones – safely.

We can improve the ride through reflection. Reflection is no more than thinking through how we ride, then working towards improvement in our decisions. Thinking is instrumental to riding well – before, during and after riding.

Thinking during the ride is reflection-in-action, and it can be extremely valuable to respond to hazards based on previous experiences, before we need to react to them without thought. The challenge is comparing what you already know (a mind-map) to what is currently happening (the present circumstance) and responding appropriately.



Reflection-in-action is thinking during the ride to adjust your actions compared to the current situation, growing in knowledge and experience enough to modify your mind-map. Being able to change behaviors lowers risk, and helps us to enjoy the ride with far less fear of negative consequences.

The most capable motorcycle riders ride the streets and roads within their personal limits, leaving a significant margin to respond to hazards instead of reacting with old thoughts or what some Monday morning quarterback told them to do. Those who ride beyond their limits are not only dangerous to themselves but also dangerous to others on and off the road.

Displaying such un-thinking behavior should be considered entirely unacceptable by others willing to be responsible riders.

Riding within personal limits, using reflective thinking, will help ensure our own continued success in riding. Success creates great memories and allows us to share the pure joy of motorcycling with our loved ones, maintaining internal happiness for ourselves.

Donald L. Green is an AMA Life Member from West Point, N.Y., and a lifelong motorcyclist. He has more than 30 years' experience in training and management.

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