

What you do before you start a trip goes a long way toward determining whether or not you'll get where you want to go safely. Before taking off on any trip, a safe rider makes a point to:

1. **Wear the right gear.**
2. **Become familiar with the motorcycle.**
3. **Check the motorcycle equipment.**
4. **Be a responsible rider.**

WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR

When you ride, your gear is “right” if it protects you. In any crash, you have a far better chance of avoiding serious injury if you wear:

- **A DOT-compliant helmet.**
- **Face or eye protection.**
- **Protective clothing.**

HELMET USE

Crashes can occur — particularly among untrained, beginning riders. And one out of every five motorcycle crashes results in head or neck injuries. Head injuries are just as severe as neck injuries — and far more common. Crash analyses show that head and neck injuries account for a majority of serious and fatal injuries to motorcyclists. Research also shows that, with few exceptions, head and neck injuries are reduced by properly wearing a quality helmet.

Some riders don't wear helmets because they think helmets will limit their view to the sides. Others wear helmets only on long trips or when riding at high speeds. But, here are some facts to consider:

- **A DOT-compliant helmet** lets you see as far to the sides as necessary. A study of more than 900 motorcycle crashes, where 40 percent of the riders wore helmets, did not find even one case in which a helmet kept

a rider from spotting danger.

- **Most crashes happen** on short trips (less than five miles long), just a few minutes after starting out.
- **Most riders** are riding slower than 30 mph when a crash occurs. At these speeds, helmets can cut both the number and the severity of head injuries by half.

No matter what the speed, helmeted riders are three times more likely to survive head injuries than those not wearing helmets at the time of the crash. The single most important thing you can do to improve your chances of surviving a crash is to wear a securely-fastened, quality helmet.

HELMET SELECTION

There are two primary types of helmets, providing two different levels of coverage: three-quarter and full-face.

Whichever style you choose, you can get the most protection by making sure that the helmet:

- **Is designed to meet U.S.** Department of Transportation (DOT) and state standards. Helmets with a label from the Snell Memorial Foundation also give you an assurance of quality.
- **Fits snugly**, all the way around.
- **Has no obvious defects** such as cracks, loose padding or frayed straps.

Whatever helmet you decide on, keep it securely fastened on your head when you ride. Otherwise, if you are involved in a crash, it's likely to fly off your head before it gets a chance to protect you.

EYE AND FACE PROTECTION

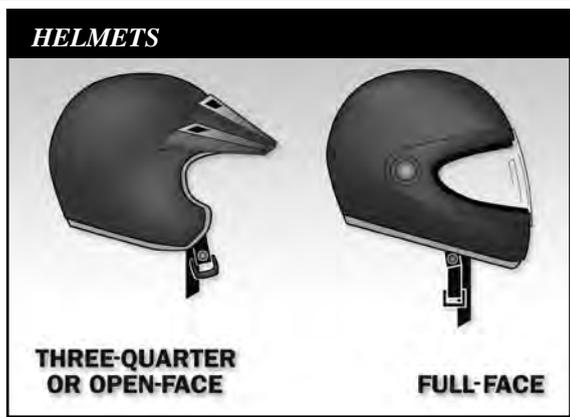
A plastic impact-resistant faceshield can help protect your whole face in a crash. It also protects you from wind, dust, dirt, rain, insects and pebbles thrown up from cars ahead. These problems are distracting and can be painful. If you have to deal with them, you can't devote your full attention to the road.

Goggles protect your eyes, though they won't protect the rest of your face like a faceshield does. A windshield is not a substitute for a faceshield or goggles. Most windshields will not protect your eyes from the wind. Neither will eyeglasses or sunglasses. Glasses won't keep your eyes from watering, and they might blow off when you turn your head while riding.

To be effective, eye or faceshield protection must:

- **Be free** of scratches.
- **Be resistant** to penetration.
- **Give a clear view** to either side.
- **Fasten securely**, so it does not blow off.
- **Permit air** to pass through, to reduce fogging.
- **Permit enough room** for eyeglasses or sunglasses, if needed.

Tinted eye protection should not be worn when little light is available.



CLOTHING

The right clothing protects you in a collision. It also provides comfort, as well as protection from heat, cold, debris and hot and moving parts of the motorcycle. It can also make you more visible to others.

- **Jacket and pants** should cover arms and legs completely. They should fit snugly enough to keep from flapping in the wind, yet loosely enough to move freely. Leather offers the most protection. Sturdy synthetic material provides a lot of protection as well. Wear a jacket even in warm weather to prevent dehydration. Many are designed to protect without getting you overheated, even on summer days. Some riders choose jackets and pants with rigid "body armor" inserts in critical areas for additional protection.
- **Boots or shoes** should be high and sturdy enough to cover your ankles and give them support. Soles should be made of hard, durable, slip-resistant material. Keep heels short so they do not catch on rough surfaces. Tuck in laces so they won't catch on your motorcycle.

- **Gloves** allow a better grip and help protect your hands in a crash. Your gloves should be made of leather or similar durable material.
- **Hearing protection** reduces noise while allowing you to hear important sounds such as car horns or sirens. Long-term exposure to engine and wind noise can cause permanent hearing damage even if you wear a full-face helmet. Whether you choose disposable foam plugs or reusable custom molded devices, be sure you adhere to state laws regarding hearing protection.

In cold or wet weather, your clothes should keep you warm and dry, as well as protect you from injury. You cannot control a motorcycle well if you are numb. Riding for long periods in cold weather can cause severe chill and fatigue. A winter jacket should resist wind and fit snugly at the neck, wrists and waist. Good-quality rainsuits designed for motorcycle riding resist tearing apart or ballooning up at high speeds.

KNOW YOUR MOTORCYCLE

There are plenty of things on the highway that can cause you trouble. Your motorcycle should not be one of them. To make sure that your motorcycle won't let you down:

- **Start** with the right motorcycle for you.
- **Read** the owner's manual.
- **Be familiar** with the motorcycle controls.
- **Check** the motorcycle before every ride.
- **Keep** it in safe riding condition between rides.
- **Avoid** add-ons and modifications that make your motorcycle harder to handle.

THE RIGHT MOTORCYCLE FOR YOU

First, make sure your motorcycle is right for you. It should "fit" you. Your feet should reach the ground while you are seated on the motorcycle, and the controls should be easy to operate. Smaller motorcycles are usually easier for beginners to operate.

At a minimum, your street-legal motorcycle should have:

- **Headlight, taillight and brakelight.**

CLOTHING



Test Yourself

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A plastic shatter-resistant face shield:

- Is not necessary if you have a windshield.
- Only protects your eyes.
- Helps protect your whole face.
- Does not protect your face as well as goggles.

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- **Front and rear brakes.**
- **Turn signals.**
- **Horn.**
- **Two mirrors.**

BORROWING AND LENDING

Borrowers and lenders of motorcycles, beware. Crashes are fairly common among beginning riders — especially in the first months of riding. Riding an unfamiliar motorcycle adds to the problem. If you borrow a motorcycle, get familiar with it in a controlled area. And if you lend your motorcycle to friends, make sure they are licensed and know how to ride before allowing them out into traffic.

No matter how experienced you may be, ride extra carefully on any motorcycle that's new or unfamiliar to you. More than half of all crashes

involve riders with less than five months of experience on their motorcycle.

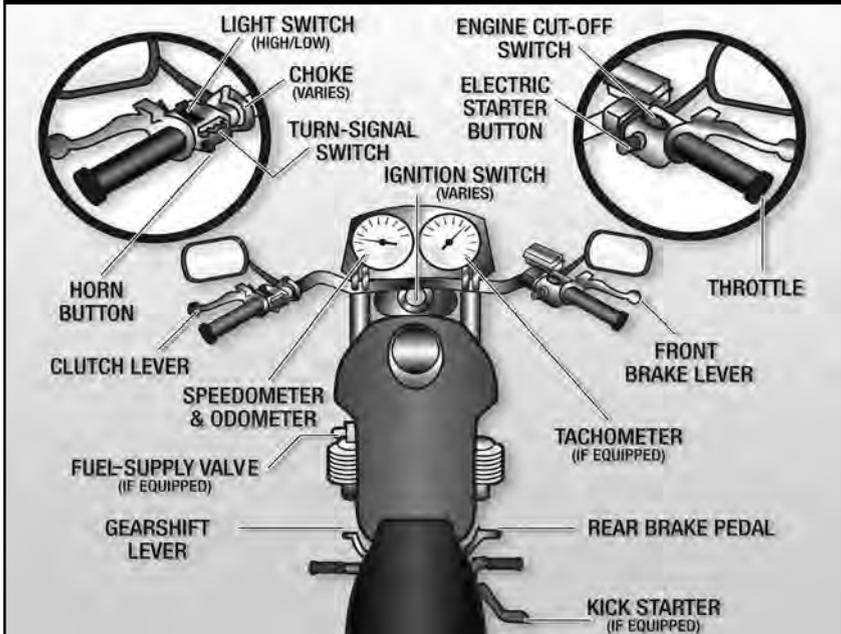
GET FAMILIAR WITH THE MOTORCYCLE CONTROLS

Make sure you are completely familiar with the motorcycle before you take it out on the street. Be sure to review the owner's manual. This is particularly important if you are riding a borrowed motorcycle.

If you are going to use an unfamiliar motorcycle:

- **Make all the checks** you would on your own motorcycle.
- **Find out where everything is**, particularly the turn signals, horn, headlight switch, fuel-supply valve and engine cut-off switch. Find and operate these items without having to look for them.

MOTORCYCLE CONTROLS



- **Know the controls.** Work the throttle, clutch, brakes, and shifter a few times before you start riding.
- **Ride very cautiously** and be aware of surroundings. Accelerate gently, take turns more slowly and leave extra room for stopping.

CHECK YOUR MOTORCYCLE

A motorcycle needs more frequent attention than a car. A minor technical failure on a car is seldom more than an inconvenience for the driver. The same failure on a motorcycle may result in a crash or having to leave your motorcycle parked on the side of the road. If anything's wrong with your motorcycle, you'll want to find out about it before you get in traffic.

The primary source of information about how a motorcycle should be inspected and maintained is its owner's manual. Be sure to absorb all of its important information. A motorcycle will continue to ride like new if it is properly maintained and routine inspections become part of its maintenance cycle.

A pre-ride inspection only takes a few minutes and should be done before every ride to prevent problems. It's quick and easy to check the critical components and should be as routine and automatic as checking the weather forecast before heading out for the day. A convenient reminder developed by MSF is T-CLOCSSM. There is a T-CLOCS "tear-out" sheet at the back of this manual for you to keep with you when you ride. A T-CLOCS inspection should be conducted before every ride, and includes checks of:

T — TIRES AND WHEELS

- Check tire inflation pressure, treadwear and general condition of sidewalls and tread surface.

- Try the front and rear brake levers one at a time. Make sure each feels firm and holds the motorcycle when fully applied.

C — CONTROLS

- Make sure the clutch and throttle operate smoothly. The throttle should snap back to fully closed when released. The clutch should feel tight and should operate smoothly.
- Try the horn. Make sure it works.

L — LIGHTS AND ELECTRICS

- Check both headlight and taillight. Test your switch to make sure both high and low beams work.
- Turn on both right- and left-hand turn signals. Make sure all lights are working properly.
- Try both brakes and make sure each one turns on the brake light.
- Clean and adjust your mirrors before starting. It's difficult to ride with one hand while you try to adjust a mirror. Adjust each mirror so you can see the lane behind and as much as possible of the lane next to you. When properly adjusted, a mirror may show the edge of your arm or shoulder – but it's the road behind you and to the side that are most important.

O — OIL AND OTHER FLUIDS

- Check engine oil and transmission fluid levels.
- Check the brake hydraulic fluid and coolant level weekly.
- Be sure your fuel-supply valve is open before starting out. With the fuel-supply valve closed, your motorcycle may start with only the fuel that is still in the lines, but will stall once the lines are empty.
- Look underneath the motorcycle for signs of an oil or fuel leak.

C — CHASSIS

- Check the front suspension. Ensure there is no binding. The rear shocks and springs should move smoothly.
- Be sure the chain or belt is adjusted according to the manufacturer's specifications and that the sprockets are not worn or damaged.

S — STANDS

- Ensure the side stand operates smoothly and that the spring holds it tightly in the up position. If equipped, the center stand should also be held firmly against the frame whenever the motorcycle is moving.

Additionally, regular maintenance such as tune-ups and oil changes are as important for a motorcycle as routine checkups by your doctor are for you. Wear and tear is normal with use; routine maintenance will help prevent costly breakdowns. The schedule for regular upkeep for motorcycle parts and controls is contained in your motorcycle's owner's manual.

KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

"Accident" implies an unforeseen event that occurs without fault or negligence. In traffic, that is not the case. In fact, most people involved in a crash can claim some responsibility for what takes place.

Consider a situation where someone decides to drive through an intersection on a yellow light turning red. Your light turns green. You pull into the intersection without checking for possible traffic. That is all it takes for the two of you to crash. It was the driver's responsibility to stop, and it was your responsibility to look before pulling out. Both of you are at fault.

Someone else might be the first to start the chain of events leading to a crash, but it doesn't leave any of us free of responsibility.

As a rider you can't be sure that other operators will see you or yield the right of way. To lessen your chances of a crash occurring:

- **Be visible** — wear proper clothing, use your headlight, ride in the best lane position to see and be seen.
- **Communicate your intentions** — use the proper signals, brake light and lane position.
- **Maintain an adequate space cushion** — when following, being followed, lane sharing, passing and being passed.
- **Search your path** of travel 12 seconds ahead.
- **Identify and separate hazards.**
- **Be prepared to act** — remain alert and know how to carry out proper crash-avoidance skills.

Blame doesn't matter when someone is injured in a crash. The ability to ride aware, make critical decisions and carry them out separates responsible riders from the rest. Remember, it is up to you to keep from being the cause of, or an unprepared participant in, any crash.

Test Yourself

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More than half of all crashes:

- Occur at speeds greater than 35mph.
- Happen at night.
- Are caused by worn tires.
- Involve riders who have less than five months of experience on their motorcycles.

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