

## 11 Big Motorcycle Safety Myths

Consider these myths busted

By Art Friedman June 27, 2016

Get a group of motorcyclists talking about crashes and safety, and you will almost always hear some popular misconceptions, incorrect assumptions, and common-sense explanations that turn out to be wrong when you actually check out what happens.

Maybe you know BS when you hear it, or maybe you have heard some myths repeated often or by people whose expertise you respect and you think they are actually true. Unfortunately, there are a lot of motorcyclists who do believe them. We wanted to bring some of these fallacies into the light of day so riders have the right information, and also don't repeat the wrong information to riders who turn to them for advice. These are the myths we hear the most:

### If You Are Going to Crash, Lay It Down

I suspect this line was developed by riders to explain why they ended up flat-side-down while trying to avoid a crash. They over-braked or otherwise lost control, then tried to explain it away as intentional. You can scrub off more speed before impact with effective braking than you will sliding down the road on your butt. And if you are still on the bike, you might get thrown over the car you collide with, avoiding an impact with your body. If you slide into a car on the ground you either have a hard stop against it or end up wedged under it. Remember that the phrase "laid it down to avoid a crash" is an oxymoron, often repeated by some other kind of moron.

### Other Drivers Don't Care About Motorcyclists

Other drivers really don't want to hit you, but they don't always know you are there, even when you are right in front of them. You can be obscured or completely hidden by glare, by other things on or along the road, by the roof pillars of the car, or by other traffic. Of course, not all drivers "think motorcycles" and make the effort to look for one.

To make yourself more visible, wear bright colors, especially on your helmet and jacket. Run your high beam during the day. Think about things that can hide you from other drivers—things as common as the sun behind you or a couple of roadside poles that line up in the driver's line of sight toward you.

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### Loud Pipes Save Lives

Yeah, there are a few situations where full-time noisemakers might help a driver notice you, like when you are right next to someone who is about to change lanes. However, all that noise directed rearward doesn't do much in the most common and much more dangerous conflict in which a car turns in front of you. Maybe it's the fatigue caused by the noise, maybe it's the attitudes of riders who insist on making annoying noise, or perhaps loud bikes annoy enough drivers to make them aggressive. Whatever the reason, research shows that bikes with modified exhaust systems crash more frequently than those with stock pipes. If you really want to save lives, turn to a loud jacket or a bright helmet color, which have been proven to do the job.

### Helmets Break Necks

It seems logical—you put more weight out there on the end of your neck and when you get thrown off the bike, that extra weight will create more force on your neck. Turns out, it doesn't work that way. In fact, the energy-absorbing qualities of the helmet also absorb the energy that breaks necks in impacts. Studies show that helmeted riders actually suffer fewer neck injuries when they crash.

### Helmets Block Your Ability to See or Hear Danger

The thing you learn when you dig into the research is that riders who use helmets crash less frequently than those who don't. Maybe that happens because they have a better or more realistic attitude about riding. Maybe it's because putting on a helmet is a reminder that what you are about to do can be dangerous and the act puts you in the right mindset. Maybe it's because a helmet provides eye protection and cuts down wind noise so you can actually see and hear better. Whatever the reasons, wearing a helmet clearly does not increase your risk of having an accident.

### A Helmet Won't Help in Most Crashes

People look at the seemingly low impact speeds used in helmet testing and assume that if you are going faster than that, the helmet will no longer be up to the job. That ignores a few critical facts: 1) Most accidents happen at relatively low speeds; 2) Most of the impact's energy is vertical—the distance your head falls until it hits; 3) Helmets (or at least helmets that meet DOT standards) perform spectacular life-saving feats at impact speeds far above those used in testing; 4) When a helmeted rider suffers a fatal head injury, it rarely matters, since he had to hit so hard that he would have had other fatal injuries; 5) The numbers clearly say that riders using DOT helmets simply survive crashes more successfully than those without them.

### A Helmet Will Leave You Brain Damaged When You Would Have Simply Died

Of course that's possible—your helmet attenuates the impact energy enough to keep the injury from being fatal but not enough to keep all of your eggs from getting scrambled. But that's rare, and if you hit that hard, you are likely to get killed by some other injury. It's actually the un-helmeted rider who is likely to cross from animal to vegetable kingdom, and often from a relatively minor impact that would have damaged nothing but his ego if he'd been wearing a DOT helmet.

### A Skilled Rider Should Be Able to Handle Almost Any Situation

The sharpest, most skilled rider in the world isn't going to be up to the task when a car turns or pulls out in front of him and stops directly in his path. Believing that your superior skills will keep you out of trouble is a pipedream, even if they are as good as you think. No matter how skilled you are, it's better to ride to avoid situations that can turn ugly. And dress for the crash.

### One Beer Won't Hurt

Maybe not while you are drinking it, but if you get on your bike after that, it can hurt for life. No matter how unaffected you believe you are, all the studies say you increase your risk and that to others when you have even one drink and hit the road.

### It's Better to Stay in Your Lane than Split Lanes

In most parts of the world, motorcycles split lanes all the time, everywhere traffic is heavy. Here in the U.S., people often act as if lane-splitting is insane. But when someone actually studied it in the only place in the U.S. where it's legal (California), they discovered it's actually safer than

staying in the lane in heavy traffic. Still, many motorcyclists berate others who do it, when they should in fact be endorsing it.

I'm Safer on the Street than on an Interstate

The thinking is that slower is safer, but that's only really true after the accident begins.

Controlled-access roadways are inherently safer because all the traffic is going the same way and there are no side streets from which someone can pop into your path, no pedestrians, and, often, less roadside obstacles to hit if you depart the roadway. Running down the road at 70 mph side-by-side with the whirling wheels of a semi may feel hairy, but you are actually safer than at half that speed on a city street or even a country road.