



## Night...

### Reprint from Motorcycle Excellence

There are times when you must continue riding at night, or times when you choose to go for a ride after the sun goes down. You may find yourself miles from home as it gets dark, or you may choose to ride cross the desert and avoid the daytime heat. Whatever the reasons for riding at night, there are some special considerations for motorcyclists.

Vision is one of our most important considerations. If you can't see where you are going, you can't stay on the road. If you can't see the hazards ahead, you can't take evasive action. The human eye is not well adapted to nighttime vision, and it is sensitive to chemicals such as alcohol and carbon monoxide. Human eyes take several minutes to adjust chemically from very bright surroundings to dim light levels. Consider what happens when your photograph is taken with a flash. You are momentarily blinded until your eyes can adjust. The same thing happens when going from brightly lit restaurant to a dark parking lot, or when you stare at the headlights of an oncoming vehicle. There are several tactics you can use to maximize your nighttime vision:

- Use clear eye protection, and keep it clean and free of scratches.
- Avoid alcohol and smoking before or during a night ride.
- Wait a few minutes after leaving a bright area before riding away. Allow your eyes time to adjust to the low light level.
- Practice avoiding bright light sources as you ride along. Look to one side of street lights, signs, or headlights. For example, as a car approaches, shift your vision from the headlights to the white line along the edge of your lane.

Another consideration is protective gear. Since you can't always see the condition of the road surface, you are more likely to have a spill at night. And, since the air temperature usually drops significantly after dark, you need more insulation. So night riding demands the best riding gear. A full-coverage helmet provides much better insulation and facial protection.

Fatigue is a common problem at night, especially on longer rides. It is easy to get weary while riding but procrastinate in taking a rest break. Yet failing to deal with fatigue can create a situation that leads to an accident. Smart riders take more frequent breaks at night. They get off the machine and do some exercises to get the blood flowing again.

As a minimum, consider walking briskly to the other end of the parking lot and back. Coffee stops are beneficial, not only for the beverage, but also for the change of pace. If you just can't stay awake find a suitable spot and take a short nap, or even stop at a motel and check in for some sleep. A room for the night is cheaper than a crash.



Wild animals are more likely to be roaming the highway at night, especially during the spring and fall. Animals like deer are difficult to see at night, and hitting a deer with a motorcycle can be disastrous for both animal and human. The correct tactic for avoiding a deer strike is to brake quickly to a slow speed when a deer is seen ahead. Deer eyes reflect light as much as a glass reflector. If a “reflector” alongside the road winks off and on, it is very likely a deer or other small animal. Remember that deer travel in families, so one deer indicates that others are nearby.

Of course, it helps to spot wild animals if your headlight is bright and correctly aimed. Your high beam should strike the road surface at its maximum range, yet allow the low beam to be below the eye level of approaching motorists to avoid blinding them. If you make frequent night time trips, consider an auxiliary driving light, wired into the high beam circuit. Remember, all vehicle light must conform to the equipment laws of the state you are riding in.

You will also help yourself to be more readily seen by adding reflectors or reflective tape to the rear panels of tail trunks and saddlebags, or adding extra taillights. The human eye has trouble judging distance of red light, which may contribute to an increase in rear-end collisions at night. Reflective clothing and added lights can help other drivers to judge your distance.

When riding in traffic, try to maintain more space around you, and be especially wary of vehicles approaching from behind. Adjust your riding tactics to avoid having to stop in the middle of the street waiting for traffic signals. When approaching a stop signal, adjust speed so you don't have to wait a long time for the light. When making a left turn, consider going around the block to the right, rather than waiting in the left lane where a sleepy driver could pick you off.

You may decide to follow another vehicle at night to take advantage of the additional lights, or to help avoid animal strikes. By observing when the lights of the vehicle in front of you bounce up and down, you can get an idea of where potholes are. If you do follow a car or truck, increase your following distance to at least 4 seconds to allow space for braking. Make a point of counting out your following distance in seconds, rather than just guessing. When the car ahead passes by a stationary object such as a street light, start counting, “one-thousand-and-one”, one-thousand-and-two...” If you can count to four before passing the same street light, you are at the minimum distance.

Be aware of other vehicles that seem to pace you at night. Some drivers are merely curious, but others are “weirdos” looking for a little entertainment, and you could be the victim.

Change speed or lanes to create space around you and separate yourself from possible problems. When pulling into rest areas or restaurant parking lots, scrutinize the night life there before shutting off your engine. If you don't like the looks of the place, move on, and find someplace more friendly.

Some riders enjoy night riding, some tolerate it occasionally, and some motorcyclists can't stand it at all.



If you have reservations about night riding, or can't seem to keep your eyes open after dark, don't do it. For more helpful riding tips, you can purchase this book from Whitehorse Press at: 1- 800-531-1133 or take an Experienced Riders Course (ERC), call the Rider Ed. office for schedule and application at 732-572-0800.