

Motorcycle Safety

News Release

Each year, the onset of warmer weather inspires hundreds of thousands of Michigan residents to get their motorcycles out of the garage and onto the streets. Few pastimes capture the carefree nature of the season quite as well as motorcycling. But, as you prepare to ride, Lt. Tim Parker of the Hillsdale County Sheriff's Office would like to share a few tips which will help ensure your biking season is both safe and enjoyable.

For riders in Michigan, motorcycling is not a year-round pursuit. As such, your abilities might need some fine tuning after taking the winter off. Consider taking a refresher motorcycle skills course, even if you are an experienced rider. Those riders who have taken a safety course drastically reduce both their odds of a getting in a crash and of being seriously injured if they are in an accident.

It is also important to complete a thorough maintenance check before hitting the streets. Test the brakes, turn signals, and headlight, check the fluid levels, and ensure that the chain is properly lubricated. If reflective strips and decals have faded or fallen off (or if you have never had them on your bike), apply replacements to increase your visibility to other motorists.

This may also be a good time to update your equipment. **While Michigan has just eliminated their mandatory helmet law, there are proven safety benefits of using a DOT approved helmet.** The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) encourages riders to wear helmets with full face shields at all times, whether you're going on a long trip or just a short ride up to the store. A helmet is not the only piece of riding equipment recommended by the MSF, riders should also check the condition of the following items and repair and replace as necessary:

- **Eye Protection** - A windshield on a motorcycle is not eye protection; a bit of sand or tiny piece of glass can whip in behind it and get in your eye. Proper eye protection means an approved shield on your helmet, a pair of goggles, or shatterproof glasses. Make sure your eye protection is clean and not scratched. If you use a tinted lens or shield for riding in the bright sunlight, take a clear one along as well, in case you are riding after dark.
- **Motorcycle jackets** are made in many sturdy materials: denim, nylon in its various guises, corduroy, and leather. The hide of a cow, or any other commonly used leather, offers you the most protection when it comes to abrasion. You can buy leather jackets with zippered vents, which are comfortable to wear even in hot weather as they allow a breeze to flow through.

- Pants - These should be made of a thick material, such as leather. They resist abrasion and provide protection from the elements. A pair of loose, light cotton pants that flap in the wind is not very good riding gear. A number of companies sell leather riding pants, and you can get pants and jacket combinations that zip together.
- Gloves - Always wear gloves. Even on a hot day. The car in front of you may throw up a stone that hits your fingers. Also, bare hands cannot withstand abrasion in the event of a fall.
- Boots - Over-the-ankle boots, please. Preferably made of strong leather. Your ankles are very complicated; protect them. A boot with a slippery sole could cause embarrassment when you put your foot down at a greasy gas station. Rubber soles, with a good tread design, offer better gripping possibilities.
- Hearing Protection - 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, proper protection reduces noise, while allowing you to hear important sounds like car horns.

Lt. Parker advises any time you are riding, it is important to be constantly aware of your surroundings. Scan the road for potential dangers, and allow yourself plenty of time to react by keeping space between your motorcycle and surrounding vehicles. Never ride in another vehicle's blind spot.

As animals become more active in the summer, collisions with wildlife are increasingly common. Take some time to practice your stopping skills by applying both brakes simultaneously with slow and steady pressure. Animals can be unpredictable, so if you do encounter one anywhere near the road, begin to slow down at once.