

How Well Do You Stack Up?

Introduction

What does it mean to be a “good motorcyclist”? What does it mean to be an “excellent motorcyclist”? The purpose of this brief article is to invite every rider to self-assess their riding behavior and attitude. *SMARTER* members invite you to use the information provided here as a benchmark. Where do you stand compared to the statements listed? Do you ride with your mind closed and take unnecessary risks that keep you from even being considered “good”? What changes do you need to make to move from “good” to “excellent”? Is “excellent” the top? What characteristics would you add to the list?

What is a “good motorcyclist”?

What are the characteristics of a “good motorcyclist”? Is it someone who obeys the law? Is it someone who has great riding skills? Is it someone who has never been in a crash? In the Motorcycle Safety Foundation’s *Basic RiderCourse Rider Handbook*, the question “What is a Good Motorcyclist?” is addressed as follows:

Whatever your definition of a “good motorcyclist,” a key element for a good rider would be to have the desire and motivation to choose to reduce risk while riding. It takes superior riding skill; and of course, a positive mental attitude helps. But a fundamental trait of all good riders is that they have a strategy, a way of thinking and planning to avoid trouble.

A good motorcyclist reduces factors that lead to problems by applying a STRATEGY. Responsible riding is more than just having good skill, and more than simply having a good attitude. It means thinking before acting. It means considering the consequences of actions.

What is an “excellent motorcyclist”?

This question was posed on the Motorcycle Safety Foundation’s Curriculum List in October of 2008. The MSF Curriculum List is a forum for exchange of ideas by MSF-certified RiderCoaches and RiderCoach Trainers. The initial question “What is an excellent motorcyclist?” was posed by **Chris Hancock**, from Evansville, Indiana. Some answers to that question that were submitted by other curriculum list users follows. The answers have been edited some, and where possible the person responsible for the initial characteristic has been identified.

Michael Davis

1. Excellent riders don't take foolish chances, but they don't ride fearfully either.
2. No matter how many accolades they receive, excellent riders don't think they're better than anyone else; they just focus on being the best rider they can be.
3. Excellent riders don't give unsolicited advice to prove how smart they are, but when asked they are a wealth of sound information.
4. Excellent riders have good instincts combined with a commitment to training.
5. Excellent riders walk their own talk without harshly judging people who do things differently.

Roger Gonzalez

6. Excellent riders do not avoid weak areas. Areas they identify as weak are practiced.
7. When excellent riders have a close call, they always treat it as an opportunity for learning and growth rather than blaming some external factor.

Bob Frank

8. Observed control. Excellent riders don't ride beyond their limits. They ride to the lowest common denominator in a group ride so as not to push less experienced riders. They walk the talk.
9. Safety gear. Excellent riders ride with the right gear.
10. Good MC citizen. Excellent riders ride in a manner that encourages public respect for our activity. They don't focus on exhibitions: burn outs, wheelies, excessive speed, unsafe operation.
11. Excellent riders keep their ride in great shape. Cleanliness and maintenance are a top priority.
12. Excellent riders ride. They don't just talk about it, they ride. They ride a lot. They have lots of experience in lots of scenarios: varied climates, varied terrains, varied surfaces, and various rides made by various manufacturers.
13. Trust. Time has allowed me to trust them and their riding skills. I trust them to do what is right, what is safe. I'm comfortable with them leading a ride.
14. Fun. Excellent riders have fun when they ride. That fun is contagious. They would rather ride than do almost any other activity. Given a choice between riding and almost any other leisure activity, they choose to ride. They ride to work, they ride on vacation, they ride to dinner, they ride to church, they ride in the rain—they just ride.

Thomas Walsh

15. One word: Attitude. The best riders are the ones who don't need to show that they are the best and are the ones willing to pass on tips and tricks rather than talk of how great he/she is.

Lynn Harris

16. Excellent riders are people that inspire others to be better whether in life or riding, by helping new riders and setting examples for seasoned riders.

Roger Egley

17. The right mindset and attitude. Excellent riders are those who know their full limits, and those who have great depth perception are the most skilled riders.

Bo Scott

18. An excellent rider understands the nature of the forces that work for and against him. He knows what factors go into the physics involved with motorcycling and how environmental or mechanical factors impact on them. He knows the dynamics of suspension and traction and how the rider controls them. In short, he not only knows what to do, but why he should do it. He then applies that knowledge to physical action when he rides, understanding what the bike is telling him and using that feedback as he rides to obtain optimal performance and safety.

Stan Rosen

19. An excellent rider is an ambassador from our community to the nonriding public and he/she exercises opportunities to be courteous to not only other 2/3-wheelers but also to 4-wheelers and pedestrians.
20. A good rider respects others, advocates on behalf of motorcyclists, and sets a good example through actions.

Summary

This list of characteristics of an “excellent” motorcyclist is presented to provide riders with a possible means to perform a self-assessment of their ability as a street motorcyclist. Ask yourself, How well do I “stack up” against the characteristics listed? How can I improve? What do I need to do to change? Is it attitude? Is it skill? Is it implementing a strategy? Some of all three?

To enjoy a long life as a motorcyclist, become a lifelong learner.