

Regarding Rider Responsibility

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INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a responsible rider? This is certainly not a question that can be answered in a few simple words and not a question that is likely to have an answer agreed upon by all riders. It is, however, a question that deserves analysis.

DEFINING RESPONSIBILITY

What does rider responsibility mean? What are some elements of rider responsibility? Can we implement what we believe about rider responsibility? Will we implement what we believe about rider responsibility?

Before proceeding, it might be helpful for readers to think about their personal definition of rider responsibility. Try to formulate your definition in few phrases. Write it down. If you have the opportunity before continuing reading, have a conversation with another motorcyclist or two about rider responsibility.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation provides us with one definition of a responsible motorcyclist.

“Choosing to accept the challenges of being a responsible motorcyclist means to think about the consequences of your riding behavior in traffic. It also means accepting personal responsibility for the results of your decisions and actions, as well as developing good skills and judgment.” (MSF Basic RiderCourse Rider Handbook, page 6). MSF also address being a “good motorcyclists” and says “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” (Basic RiderCourse Rider Handbook, page 9).

Below are three of several elements of the dictionary definition of responsible that seem to apply directly to our motorcycle rider decisions and actions.

1. Responsibility is based on or characterized by good judgment or sound thinking
2. A responsible person is able to make moral or rational decisions on one's own and therefore a responsible person is answerable for one's behavior
3. Responsibility involves personal accountability or the ability to act without guidance

In order to make these definitions usable, motorcyclists need examples of what might be “good judgment” or “sound thinking” or “rational decisions” or “personal accountability.” This is where some difficulty arises because riders will NOT all agree on some of the examples.

THE RESPONSIBILITY CONTINUUM

One tool, suggested by Jon DeVecchio (<http://streetskills.net/>), which will help riders discuss and define the elements of rider responsibility, is the idea of a continuum. At one end of the spectrum is the "absolutely irresponsible" rider. This rider is someone who habitually violates the law, never wears full riding gear, has never taken any training and scoffs at the idea that he/she could learn anything, doesn't prepare for hazards up ahead, offends people with noise or

bad traffic manners, repeats myths and mantras without researching thereby spreading false or misleading information to new riders, the general public and to policy decision makers.

And while even the most experienced riders and safety professionals are not exempt from either risk or irresponsible behavior, we can ride closer to what we could call "absolute responsibility" if we think about it and put some effort into it. Absolute responsibility would be a level of consideration for consequences where a rider is managing risk to the best of their ability and representing all motorcyclists in a positive way. Think of the "absolutely responsible" rider as one that follows every law perfectly, rides fully protected, has completed rider training and utilizes a mental riding strategy. Additionally, this rider expresses utmost courtesy in traffic. This rider also actively confronts myths about motorcycling and motorcyclists, works to present a positive image and mentors others regarding riding skills as well as image.

All riders fall within this spectrum.



ARE YOU A RESPONSIBLE RIDER?

Given the opportunity to self-rate driving/riding behavior most individuals report they are better than average so it is not likely many riders would answer “No” to the above question. Based on the above idea of a “responsibility continuum” maybe a “yes” or “no” answer is not an appropriate response to this question. Responsible riders will likely want to explain their answer, provide examples or ask question. Many aspects of being a safe and responsible rider are mental and attitudinal, as opposed to physical. Experienced riders often say, riding is more a task of the eyes and mind than of the hands and feet. This is most certainly true when it comes to being a responsible rider. It is relatively easy to create assessment documents to provide information to help self-assess where a rider might place her or his self along this continuum of rider responsibility.

SELF-ASSESSMENT - three easy scales

An easy way to self-assess is simply to list words with opposing meanings and then give yourself a score. Three easy scoring methods are:

- 1. Yes, sometimes, no
- 2. Select a number from 1-10 to represent yourself
- 3. Place an X on the line to represent yourself.

For example:

Yes, sometimes or no. Select a number from 1-10 to represent yourself. Place an X on the line.

Irresponsible	Responsible.
No Training	All the training I can get
Habitually violate the law	Always obey the law
Distracted rider	Attentive to the task
Street clothes	All the gear
Aggressive	Cooperative

IMPLEMENTING RESPONSIBLE RIDING HABITS

Being a responsible rider is all about attitude, judgment and making choices. Implementation is about choices and decisions riders make. When people get on motorcycles absolute responsibility is just as uncommon as absolute irresponsibility. But, the individual motorcyclist, motorcyclists as a whole and the general public are better served when riders make decisions closer to absolute responsibility. Every rider has the opportunity to make responsible decisions.