

What Makes a Good Road Rider?

Gregg McLeod

Gregg McLeod is a former Army Commando (Green Beret) who has served all over the world, including Afghanistan. He ended his 15-year career working with United Kingdom Special Forces in London, England before moving to the United States of America in 2018.



Gregg learned to ride at 29, while in the Army and completed several courses and track days. He also completed his advanced car and motorcycle tests before departing the UK. Gregg has ridden all over Europe, the UK and North America and lead groups of riders from 3 to 38 strong.

Gregg's bike collection has included a Triumph Daytona 675, Triumph Sprint ST, Suzuki Bandit 600, and BMW R1200RT. He also spent a lot of time on Harley-Davidsons while touring the USA.

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I am often asked “*What makes a good road rider?*” The answer, like the question, is very subjective. What is meant by “*good?*” Is “*good?*” the ability to get your knee down on roundabouts and wheelie along the highway? Is it all about being the fastest in the group? Or is it simply about making sure you get home safe at the end of every ride?

The question always makes for a good debate. The answers usually change with age, maturity, and experience. You can tell a lot about a rider by their answer.

My answer has always been the same one word...

ATTITUDE: Attitude is a psychological construct, a mental and emotional entity that inheres in, or characterizes a person.

You may think this is a weak answer because it doesn't narrow one particular element down, but that is exactly why it is so important. Attitude encompasses so much of your life, on and off the bike, at work and home. Without the ‘correct’ attitude you are unwilling to conduct critical self-analysis. If you can't make an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses then how do you know what you need to (or want to) improve?

Your attitude will decide how you react to situations. It will influence your opinion of yourself and your opinion of others around you. Attitude is determined by psychological factors like ideas, values, beliefs, perception, etc. From this knowledge point we can understand why every rider takes a different path through motorcycling. Attitude will determine what bike you buy, what brand of kit you purchase, how much training you believe you need, and how you want to be perceived by other bikers.

Now you've passed your test, how can your attitude influence you?

'The Car Driver Error'

YouTube is full of videos with bikers and cars clashing and the resulting 'exchange.' These videos are interesting to watch because very often you will find the biker could have preempted the situation and/or been in a better position.

Once the offending maneuver has happened, the reactions are comical (and dangerous). The biker usually blasts the horn for a longer-than-necessary period before giving the car driver a wanker sign, or the middle finger, or riding next to them shouting through their helmet. Why? Psychologically there are two predominant reasons for our reactions - fear and anger. Our command over these emotions and our reactions to them is controlled by our attitude.

Research suggests aggressive reactions have a negative effect on rider and drivers (Health & Safety, Feb. 2006) and they lose focus on driving for up to an hour after the event. For the biker it can be far more dangerous. They take a hand off the handlebars, their eyes off the road, then move their hand and focus on a vehicle next to them. Blood pressure increases, concentration on task (riding) drops, and total control is lost. There is no benefit from an aggressive reaction, even if the act is deliberate. Bikes will always come off worse, in every instance.

My attitude tells me a better way would be to sound my horn, react to the hazard (position, speed, gear), then move away from the hazard. The driver will know they have done something foolish or dangerous and would feel bad if it resulted in a crash. If a crash was avoided, then you'll live to ride another day and keep your blood pressure down.

'Where attitude meets ego'

Group riding is probably the best and worst place to see attitudes and egos and males are almost always worse than females when it comes to large egos.

Most of us have been there. We are out with a group of riders, some we have ridden with before, and others we haven't. The conversation gets around to riding and someone makes a comment or joke about slower riding or poor riding and some get defensive. The comment eats away at them and they feel they must prove themselves so they try to play "keep up" with the more experienced riders. We have all been there. Or you have always ridden alone.

The ability to know when you are riding for yourself/your enjoyment or riding to show off/keep up is a life-saving talent. The attitude and maturity to slow down, assess the situation and realise you have nothing to prove is vital, and rare.

I would guess that attitudes and egos cause almost every motorcycle crash. This could be due to the lack of training because he thought he was amazing and training is for losers. Or because she wanted to show she could keep up with the boys. Or maybe he didn't like that driver pulling in front of him so he focused on smashing the mirror and didn't see the dog in the road.

So, to finish at the start, my answer is attitude: it is the most important thing in making a good road rider.

If you ask my riding friends, they will tell you my mantra: ***"I don't want to be the fastest; I want to be the best."***

Reference

Health and Safety, The Effects of Road Rage, Feb. 2006.
<http://health-faq.com/heety/the-effects-of-road-rage/>