



Dispelling Motorcycle Myths

Bike Week – the unofficial launch of the riding season – kicked off Feb. 27 at Daytona Beach, Fla. Anticipating the new riding season, many of our Soldiers, Family members and civilians are gearing up to take to the open road. As I travel in this job, there are several statements I hear motorcycle riders repeating throughout the Army. Some of those are myths and some are facts. Before you let the wind fly through your hair, I would ask you to consider a few things.

- 1. Motorcycles are cheaper than cars. — True.** But you wouldn't look as cool driving a new car that only cost \$11,000 as you would on the bike for the same price. However, you must figure in the cost of insurance for the average 24-year-old rider on a sportbike at \$175 to more than \$500 per month. Then, if you "ride like you stole it" 50 percent of the time, that will cut your gas mileage and increase tire wear by a third. With those expenses factored in, now you're in the same monthly price range as a Jeep or Honda Civic.
- 2. Motorcycles are safe – it's the "other guy" that causes accidents. — False.** Although "cage drivers" (operators of four-wheeled vehicles) do pose a risk and are responsible for many accidents with motorcyclists, the "other guy" was at fault in only five of 51 Army fatalities in fiscal 2008.
- 3. Motorcycling provides freedom. — True.** Motorcycling can provide freedom and escape. It's just you and the road as you motor along, leaving your problems behind. But know the potential cost of that freedom. According to the National Transportation Safety Board, "Motorcyclists represented 2 percent of the traffic on America's highways in 2007, but they represented 12 percent of highway fatalities."
- 4. Army rules don't apply off post. — False.** A lawful order applies on and off duty, as well as on and off post. There are no military installations that allow service members to ride without the required personal protective equipment (PPE) outlined in Army Regulation (AR) 385-10. This applies to National Guardsmen both on and off duty and regardless of individual state laws. Army reservists also are required to wear PPE whenever they are in a duty status. However, you're a Soldier 24/7, and it would help build the case to get the same benefits as active duty personnel if the same rules are applied across the board.
- 5. If I have an accident, TRICARE will pay for it. — True.** However, if a Line of Duty determination, as covered in AR 600-8-4, finds misconduct on your part by not wearing your PPE, you could be held liable for your medical bills. In addition, you are still subject to local laws and the uniform code of military justice on top of that.
- 6. I've ridden on and off for years and don't need to take any training. Heck, I could teach the course. — False.** You may have ridden in the past; however, bike designs, handling characteristics and power-to-weight ratios have changed. Besides, if you're that knowledgeable, maybe you could share your experience with other riders through your local Motorcycle Mentorship Program.
- 7. Soldiers should be restricted from riding motorcycles, just like professional athletes are during their game season. — False.** Although some Leaders have advocated this, all it would do is drive motorcyclists underground and outside the gates, where we would have even more issues. In reality, we need to bring more high-energy and thrill-seeking activities and events back to installations, where we can ensure Soldiers, Families and civilians can enjoy these activities safely. Skateboarding, skydiving and riding ATVs, motorcycles and personal watercraft is no more dangerous than horseback riding when supervised. However, these activities aren't often found on post.
- 8. The dealership will help me pick the right bike for me. — False.** Reputable dealers will help you pick a bike; however, they are in the business of selling motorcycles. Most dealers will not refuse to sell you a motorcycle because they know if they don't you will shop elsewhere. Many first-time buyers purchase more bike than they're ready for – one

that fits their ego, not their level of riding experience. Get with your Motorcycle Mentorship Program or, better yet, attend the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Basic RiderCourseSM. There, experienced riders with your best interests in mind will help you select the bike that's best for you.

9. Thrill-seeking and high-risk behavior is killing Soldiers. — False. Indiscipline is the No. 1 killer of Soldiers. On duty, we lost 54 Soldiers to accidents last year, including those serving in two combat theaters. I think you would all agree that requires high-risk behavior. Off duty, we lost 154 Soldiers to accidents, 130 of which were privately owned vehicle (POV) fatalities. A large percentage of these POV accidents were the result of indiscipline or lack of experience. Speeding, loss of control and not wearing protective gear (i.e., seat belts and helmets) were the major causal factors in these fatalities.

10. Those getting killed on motorcycles are 18 years old and have just returned from Iraq. — False. For the last two years, Leaders have led the way in motorcycle fatalities. To be more specific, specialists and staff sergeants age 22 to 33 led the way in Army motorcycle fatalities. More than 80 percent of these fatalities involved indiscipline (speeding) and loss of control while riding a sportbike. When it comes to sedans, younger Soldiers age 17 to 24 accounted for 74 percent of the fatalities. Of that group, nearly half were either speeding or not wearing their seat belt.

Know the facts and use them to make positive risk decisions. Being an educated and experienced rider is one of the best things you can do to protect yourself. Also, a word of advice: slow down. Don't be in a big hurry to get into an accident.



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