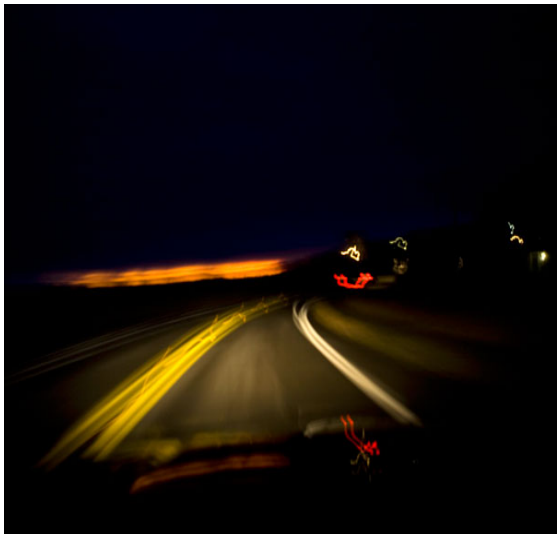
Night Riding- Steve Warmath, Safety Officer



Riding at night can be fun but also offers up another set of safety issues. The ability to see and be seen is limited compared to riding during the daylight hours. Many riders love to see the bright lights of the city and revel in the glow of the moonlight, not to mention it's much cooler in the summer months when the Florida daytime heat is almost unbearable. We should be aware, however, that there are risks inherent with night riding.

When transitioning from a brightly lit environment to a dim or dark one, it takes the human eyes approximately 30 minutes to completely adjust to the low light conditions. A couple of things happen as a result of this transition. Visual acuity is diminished and depth perception is affected. The natural blind spots in the eye also become more prominent. A constant, moving scan ahead is important in order to see the whole picture.

Have you ever noticed someone at a roadside restaurant having a bite to eat at night and they are wearing sunglasses? The reason for this is so they can minimize the time it takes for the eyes to readjust from a light environment (restaurant) back to a dark environment (driving at night). What about pilots flying at night and their need to look at maps or other things that need illumination? They use red lensed lights. The eyes are minimally affected by red light in a dark environment.

You may have heard the term "Overdriving your headlights". What this means is that essentially, you are driving at a speed that will require **more** distance to react or stop than the distance it will take for you to perceive the threat, react and stop or avoid. You don't want that to happen to you with a big buck standing in the road staring at you.

An often used defense, "I didn't see him (the rider)" when a vehicle strikes a motorcyclist, may be used more frequently, as it is more difficult to see at night. There are some things you can do to increase your visibility to other motorists and to increase your ability to see.

All those bright lights are pretty, but they also can cause a glare that will momentarily blind you. Blindness, even for a second, can cause an error that results in an accident. To help alleviate this, be sure to have clean, scratch free, clear vision glasses or helmet visor. Plan ahead and always keep a set of clear glasses on the motorcycle. You never know when you might be riding and day turns into night before you arrive home.

Riding can be dangerous during the day, but the danger is exponentially increased at night. If you have a moon lit night, it can help, but you can't always count on that. To increase your ability to see and be seen on dark roads at night, make sure you do everything you can to increase your night vision acuity and visibility.
In most of the country, bugs come out at night and a clean, scratch free windshield can help you avoid the bug attack, as can a full faced helmet.

Lightly colored clothing and reflective gear can also be a life saver at night. Some states require a piece of reflective tape on helmets. Reflective gear in the form of vests, jackets and other clothing are available in motorcycle dealer stores and online. It can be fashionable too. Some jackets have reflective designs on the back that are not only fashionable, but provide additional visibility when riding at night.
Another danger of riding at night is the prevalence of animals such as deer, possum, armadillos and other creatures. Some of these animals are more likely to be on the roads at dawn or dusk, but can be there any time. It's difficult to see them in the day time, but at night, your ability to react to a deer or other animal darting out in the roadway is decreased, and you'll have less time to respond. The only thing you can do is slow down, be aware of your surroundings, anticipate animals moving into your path, and practice quick braking techniques in advance of

night riding. Swerving or trying to outrun the animal is usually not the best choice. Quick stopping is normally your best chance of avoiding a collision with an animal.

The lights and reflectors on your bike can help you to be seen by other motorists. After market lighting options such as fog lights or LED headlights can increase your span of vision and visibility by other motorists.
It should go without saying, "Don't drink and drive," and "Don't ride when you're extremely tired." Both conditions put you, the rider, at unnecessary risk.

Riding at night is not for everyone, and some people avoid it at all costs. If on a trip, and night falls, they simply get a hotel. That's one option, but riding at night can be safe and enjoyable if you follow some of the tips above.
Ride safe and have fun!

Be careful out there….it's a jungle. *Steve*