

Risk Management- Steve Warmath



When I first took the motorcycle safety course for my endorsement, we covered “Risk Management” in the classroom session. I thought to myself...well duh.....riding a motorcycle is risky; we know that, let’s move on. As the class progressed the subject was presented and compared to climbing a ladder. The premise was, the higher you climb the ladder, the more risk you are taking. OK....maybe there is more to this than I thought. Let’s make up a random ladder scale to illustrate the extremes of say a 1 to 10 on the risk management scale. **(1)- Sitting on the couch watching TV. (10)- You are Evel Knievel about to jump the Grand Canyon in your rocket powered motorcycle.** Now let’s look at how the choices we make and the conditions we ride in affect our management of risk.

Generally, risk management involves understanding risks and doing something to circumvent or reduce the same. Thus, an expert rider knows all of his physical, environmental and vehicular limits. Risk management comes in the form of having the appropriate safety gear, motorcycle apparel, parts and proper training. This may also result in a lesser risk of liability in an accident. The rider who appreciates the worth of risk management is the rider who experiences fewer collisions and is enjoying it the most. There are few steps to consider in risk management. These steps are:



- 1. Acknowledging the existence of risk.** The first step is to admit that there is a risk in riding. For this reason, the rider should ride accordingly because risk to people and property may be at stake.
- 2. Risk Assessment.** This is a learned skill. Those who are new riders are somewhat groping when it comes to assessment skills. Thus, they must exert more effort and take advantage of time to increase their skill. The lack of protective gear while riding is a clear indication that the rider has poor risk assessment skills i.e. flip-flops and shorts.
- 3. Risk Recognition.** One cannot manage risks if he/ she does not recognize them. There are two forms of risk – the subjective and the objective. The subjective risk is that which is inherent in a rider's attitude. Objective risk, on the other hand, is created by environmental, vehicular and road riding conditions.

Risk management should be a natural effect of riding. It includes lots of factors like weather, motorcycle condition, road conditions, rider's health and more. Sometimes riders are unaware that they are already implementing it. This is a subconscious application. It is something innate that even if you do not think about it, it just comes out as a constructive defense against a probable road dilemma. External factors like rider's philosophies and attitude may affect his risk management skill. Thus, it will be better if he/ she have this positive outlook and the urge to desist trouble and injuries. For example: One day I was on my way home from work in Thomasville on 319 in the usual kind of busy traffic and noticed a sport bike coming up from the rear at a pretty fast pace. Right after he lane split the two cars ahead of me, he gunned it and popped a wheelie and sped down the road on one wheel for about 200 yards. Let’s give him an **8** for “idiot”.....oh, sorry, on the risk management scale. As riders, we have limits too and these, unlike legal limits such as speed and right-of-way, can only be stretched so far before the consequences become very dire indeed. These limits are our personal limits, the limits of our machines, and the limits of our environment. To ride safely, we must know these limits and ride within them. This would be a fairly easy task if the limits were fixed and separate. However, they are each highly variable and intertwined so that one can affect the others.



Personal limits change constantly. There are the slow, but perceptible signs of aging when we finally don glasses that eventually give way to bifocals and when hearing dims. As we reach the age of 40, night vision begins to lessen. With any luck, skill and experience provide compensation.

Not even the young among us are immune to personal limits. We are all susceptible. These limits can be imposed by physical conditions such as fatigue or emotion or by medications, both over-the counter and prescription. New prescriptions can have unexpected side effects, and drug interactions can produce terrifying reactions. Medications should be carefully discussed with doctor and pharmacist before we ride. Getting all prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy lessens the chance of a conflict or overdose not being spotted. Recreational drugs create dangers that should be obvious.

Over-the-counter drugs frequently pose problems. Almost every label on allergy medications carries the warning, “May cause drowsiness. Do not operate heavy machinery while taking this medication.” By heavy machinery they don’t mean bulldozers or tanks. They mean cars and trucks and motorcycles and riding lawnmowers and anything else where a drowsy, dizzy or uncoordinated operator could have an accident. Almost every skill needed to safely operate a motorcycle is affected by such medicines.

Even when we’re at our physical best, our motorcycles pose limits. Obvious ones are type and power. A fully loaded touring bike is not made to ride over sand dunes at the beach, nor is a two-up 125-cc bike safe on the interstate. Even the best-maintained bike is subject to routine wear and tear. New tires are slick until the mold release wears off. Cheap tires can offer poor traction under even optimum conditions. Brake pads wear. A poorly cared for bike is a disaster.

Even when our bikes and we are in tip-top condition, the environment can sharply define our limits. A twisty back road is a joy on a warm sunny day. The same road on a cold, wet night is a rider’s nightmare. Cold can dull our reflexes and slow our reaction times. Numbed hands operate controls more slowly and with less feedback, making full-braking stops less effective. Nature can brush a road with sand or mist it with rain or fog. Our only choice is to slow down and to avoid any sudden changes in speed or direction. Sometimes you just have to realize that it is time to get off the road.

The Motorcycle safety Foundation has a strategy for handling “subjective” risk using “**SEE**”- a simple and powerful strategy to **S**earch, **E**valuate and **E**xecute. It is a way to understand what is going on around you and to be constantly planning and implementing a course of action. To **SEE** is to **S**earch for factors that might lead to risky situations, to **E**valuate how the factors may interact to create risk, and to **E**xecute an action to maintain a margin of safety.

Our limits, the limits of our machines, and natural limits, all combined in endless permutations, are part of the challenge of motorcycling. Knowing these limits and riding within them are part of the responsibility of motorcycling. And that is part of the joy of motorcycling.

Be careful out there....it’s a jungle. *Steve*