

Riding down the street, I couldn't shake the feeling something was wrong. That morning, I'd decided to take my young son riding with me, but we'd only gone a couple of miles when I had a foreboding of disaster too intense to ignore. I took my son to the mall where my wife worked, planning to leave him with her while I rode the bike home. I didn't want him with me if something happened.

Unfortunately, the store where my wife worked wouldn't allow her to watch him while I rode home and then drove back. So I put him back on my bike and carefully rode home, wondering all the while what I was sensing as we cruised through the streets and intersections. I was relieved when we safely turned into the driveway. Still, I couldn't shake this ominous feeling.

We pulled off our riding gear and went into the house. Because this was my son's first ride, I'd bought him a complete set of personal protective equipment (PPE). After all, wasn't that what my older brother, Hector, had taught me? He'd been a Motorcycle Safety

Foundation (MSF) instructor where we'd grown up in Puerto Rico. He'd also taught sport bike riding techniques and participated in National Hot Rod Association drag races. He was an avid rider and was very good at what he did. He'd drilled safety into me from the moment I purchased my first motorcycle, making sure I bought a machine I could handle.

We'd been home about 15 minutes when the phone rang. Picking up the receiver, I heard my wife's trembling voice. Before I could speak, she told me Hector had been killed in a riding accident. My fears hardened into reality as she told me the facts.

Riding with friends on their sport bikes, he'd been racing on a narrow, winding road. It was 97 F with 100 percent humidity that day in Puerto Rico. Anyone who has ever ridden in such conditions knows that heat and precise riding are fatiguing. Even though my brother was noticeably tired and dehydrated, his friends encouraged him to push his limits. And there was no way Hector would be the last rider in the group or head home before finishing the ride.

Hector had led the pack as they reached a fork in the road. Suddenly, a horse and rider trotted out in front of him. Locking his Yamaha R1's brakes, he flew off and struck a metal support wire, breaking his neck. His friends stopped, but they couldn't help him. For 17 minutes, he lay on the side of the road gasping for his breath before he died. He'd made a common mistake made by many of us who ride in groups. He'd succumbed to peer pressure and died while trying to impress his friends. That was three years ago, but I still miss him every day.

So what does this have to do with you? If you're a rider, maybe a lot.

Riding motorcycles is becoming increasingly popular among Soldiers. We buy motorcycles for practical reasons, such as their lower cost compared to cars and greater fuel economy. Riding also gives us something in common with other Soldiers who ride and bonds us with them. Unfortunately, even after taking the required MSF rider training, some Soldiers still choose to ride irresponsibly (indisciplined). Wanting to look cool, tough or be part of a group, they ignore traffic laws and ride their bikes too fast for conditions or their skills. Giving in to peer pressure and trying to fit into a group, they ride

Dying to Impress

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UNFORTUNATELY, even after **TAKING** the required MSF rider **TRAINING**, some Soldiers **STILL CHOOSE** to ride **IRRESPONSIBLY (INDISCIPLINED).**

to the edge of their abilities and beyond.

This doesn't have to happen to Soldiers. Just like we did during deployment, we need to stick together and make sure we and our buddies make smart choices while riding. To do that, we can:

- Identify the risks and control them by using composite risk management.
- Perform preventive maintenance checks and services on our motorcycles so they're ready for the road.
- Start off riding smaller, less-powerful and less-expensive motorcycles. Only after mastering them should a rider consider something bigger, more powerful and more expensive.
- Learn from others' experiences. During group rides, pair new riders with experienced riders to transfer riding skills. This is a key element of the Army's Motorcycle Mentorship Program (MMP). If your organization or installation has an MMP, joining is a great

way to build skills and camaraderie with other riders.

- Plan a route within the skills of the group's least experienced riders.
- Do a riders' brief before group rides. Brief the route and plan stopping points along the way.
- Use effective PPE when riding. A simple, long-sleeve cloth shirt will disintegrate almost immediately when it touches the pavement. Skin grafts are painful and costly.
- Avoid giving in to peer pressure. If the group is engaging in risky riding or breaking the law, choose to ride safely and obey the law. If the group leaves you behind, ride at a safe pace and catch up with them at the next stopping point.
- Ride to arrive! <<

Editor's note: The author manages the MMP for the U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory.

RIDE FOR YOUR LIFE

The Motorcycle Mentorship Program establishes voluntary unit- or installation-level motorcycle associations where less experienced riders and seasoned riders can create a supportive environment of responsible motorcycle riding and enjoyment. This can create positive conduct and behavior and serve as a force multiplier that supports a commander's motorcycle accident prevention program.



MMP
MOTORCYCLE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Check out the USACR/Safety Center MMP website for some examples of active mentoring programs.

<https://safety.army.mil/mmp/>

Have you heard about the new feature on TRIPS?

TRIPS now provides users with a more detailed motorcycle assessment, allowing them to better capture their riding experience.

TRAVEL RISK
TRIPS
PLANNING SYSTEM
<https://safety.army.mil>



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