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You in the Rider's Seat

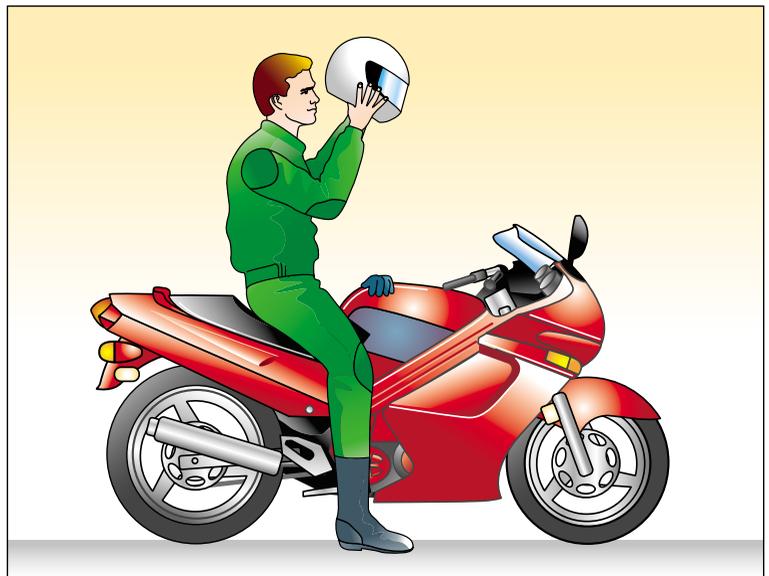
Topics Covered

- The Challenges
- The Cost
- The Solutions
 - Be fit to ride
 - Make good decisions
 - Take responsibility
- Preparing to Ride

Being on the road can be challenging for riders and drivers. Riders, however, sometimes face additional challenges, such as poor road conditions. This chapter introduces you to motorcycling and provides three solutions to these challenges – keeping focussed on the task of riding, making good decisions and looking out for the safety of others. You can use these solutions when making choices about how you as a rider can keep yourself and others safe.

The Challenges

Riding a motorcycle is fun and exciting, but it can also be challenging. You can reduce the risk of a crash by becoming a competent rider and making good choices.



1 - 1

Vulnerability to injury

More than half of all motorcycle crashes result in injury or death. Unlike in a car, on a motorcycle you're not surrounded by steel and you don't have bumpers to protect you. You also don't have seatbelts or airbags to help prevent injury in a crash – you have to depend on good riding skills and good judgement to keep you safe.

Exposure

Being a rider means being outdoors. While this may be your main reason for riding, it can also be uncomfortable. Riding in rain, wind and extreme temperatures can reduce your alertness and reaction time. **Chapter 2, You and Your Motorcycle,** suggests ways you can protect yourself from the elements when you ride.



CrashFact

Every day in B.C., a traffic crash causes a fatality. On average, every 17 days, one of these fatalities is a motorcycle rider.

Traffic Collision Statistics: British Columbia (1997–1998)



Think About...

Think about what a crash could mean to you. How much would it cost to fix your bike? What if you were injured? How would that affect your family? Your job? What if your passenger was injured or even killed? What about the other people involved in the crash?

Visibility

The compact size and shape of motorcycles can make them invisible to other road users. Even a small car can hide a motorcycle from view. Road glare can make a bike seem to disappear. Rain, mist and fog make motorcycles hard to see. Dusk and nighttime are especially dangerous for riders because visibility is already limited. Throughout this guide you will learn many techniques for making you and your bike more visible.

Vulnerability to road conditions

Some road surfaces, such as gravel, sand and mud, can make a motorcycle unstable. Unexpected ruts and grooves can also be hazards. Rain and cold temperatures make road surfaces slippery. Crossing railway tracks requires a special technique. Read **Chapter 9, Challenging Riding Conditions**, to learn techniques for handling poor road conditions.

Balance and coordination

A motorcycle rider has to balance the bike while operating a set of controls, watching for hazards and dealing with traffic. As if this isn't enough, the rider also has to cope with many different road conditions. **Chapter 6, See-Think-Do**, talks about a riding strategy that will help you handle all these factors.

Personal factors

Riding safely takes self-confidence. Confidence comes from having excellent skills that you can depend on. Safe riding also depends on being alert and focussed on the task of riding. It means never being impaired while riding. Read **Chapter 8, Personal Strategies**, for ways to handle personal pressures.

The Cost

Riders are more at risk of being injured in a crash than are drivers of passenger vehicles. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, motorcycle riders are 16 times more likely than motorists are to die in traffic crashes.

The Solutions

Riding a motorcycle is not for everyone, and staying safe on your bike depends on the choices you make. Will you choose the thrill of speed even when it is dangerous? Will you always choose to ride with a proper helmet and riding gear? Will you choose a motorcycle that is suitable for you? Will you ever put your passengers at risk?

A thinking rider always puts safety first. Road sense is about making choices that help keep you and others safe. The choices you make determine the kind of rider you will be. A thinking rider who uses road sense chooses to:

- be fit to ride
- make good decisions
- take responsibility

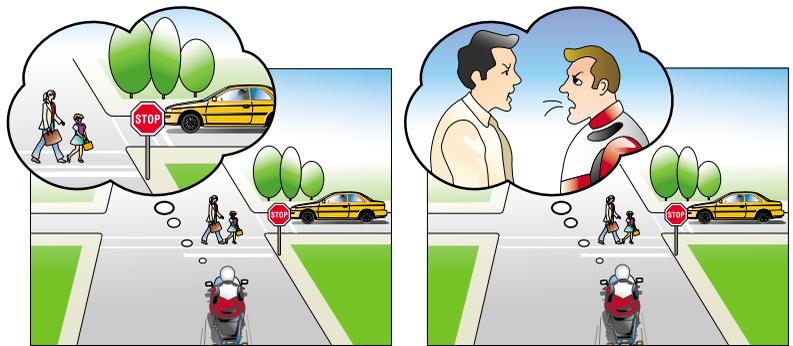
Be fit to ride

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 1

You’ve got a busy morning, beginning with a 9:00 a.m. dental appointment, then coffee with a friend. Just as you are heading out to your motorcycle, your roommate starts an argument. According to him, you’re not doing your share of the chores.

While riding to your appointment, you think of all the things you should have said to your roommate. You’re having trouble paying attention to the road.

What choice would you make?



1 - 2

Focus on your riding?



Focus on the argument?



CrashFact

Based on police reports, the top five causes of motorcycle crashes in B.C. are:

- careless riding
- riding too fast
- rider inexperience
- alcohol
- following too closely

If you make the right choices, you can help keep yourself safe.

Traffic Collision Statistics: British Columbia (1998)

Alertness and concentration

Riding requires that you be alert and give your full concentration to the task. Fatigue or illness can make you less alert. Being cold and wet can be distracting. Drugs, alcohol and even prescription medications can affect your focus and balance. Strong emotions like anger or distress can make you lose concentration. All it takes to cause a crash is a few seconds when you’re not paying attention. **Chapter 8, Personal Strategies**, outlines ways you can stay alert.

Physical condition

Riding is physically demanding. Here are some things to consider before you learn to ride:

- **Coordination** – You will need good coordination to keep a bike upright and balanced while operating several controls at the same time. This is easier for some people than for others. How is your coordination?
- **Strength and endurance** – Riding a motorcycle is demanding. It takes strength to push a bike. You need endurance to take the strain that riding puts on the arms and upper body. You may ride in difficult weather conditions. Are you ready to learn the techniques that will help you meet the physical demands of riding?

- **Eyesight** – Your eyes will take in about 80 per cent of the information in the riding scene. You will need to have sharp eyesight and good peripheral vision. Should you have your vision checked by a specialist to see if you need to wear glasses or contact lenses?
- **Health** – Some health problems, such as a back injury or heart condition, may prevent you from riding or make riding dangerous for you. Are you healthy enough to ride? Should you check with your doctor?

Make good decisions

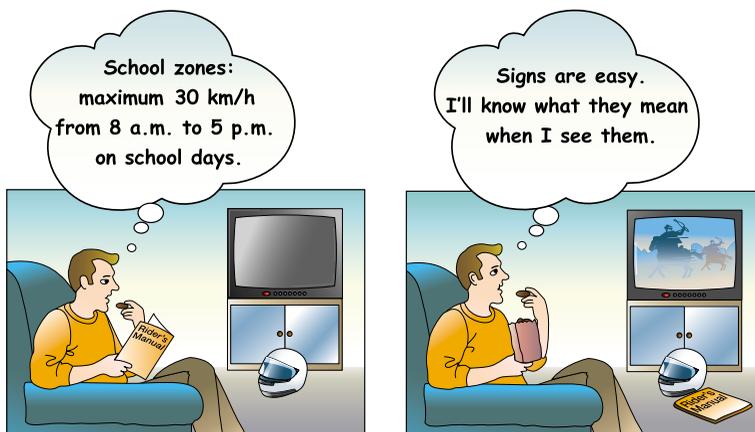
You will have to make quick and accurate decisions when you ride. Will you be tempted to run a yellow light because you are in a hurry? Will you take a chance and ride after you've been drinking? Being a safe rider requires learning, planning, predicting and thinking for yourself.

Keep learning

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 2

As you ride along, you spot a school zone sign. You know you have to slow down, but during what hours? The sign doesn't say. Quickly, you try to remember when school zone speed limits are in effect. Do you have to slow down at 8:45 a.m. or not? You can't remember...

What choice should you have made?



Take the time to learn the rules of the road?



Not worry about it?

The first step in making good riding decisions is to devote time to learning as much as you can about riding. You can do this by having a learning plan:



RoadSense Tip

You must be accompanied by a qualified supervisor before you pass the motorcycle skills test. See **Chapter 11, Your Licence**, for more information on supervisors.



CrashFact

New riders who have taken a professional training program that includes classroom and on-bike training have a 50 per cent lower crash rate than riders who have not.

California Motorcyclist Safety Program (1987–1995)

1. **Study this guide.** The information in this guide will introduce you to the basic information you need to know to become a safe rider. You will be tested on this information when you take a motorcycle knowledge test.
2. **Get a learner’s licence.** After you pass the motorcycle knowledge test you will be given a learner’s licence. (See **Chapter 11, Your Licence**, for details.)
3. **Get help from experts.** Once you have a learner’s licence, learn the basic riding skills. A good way to do this is to take a professional training course and work with a coach. Use *Tuning Up for Riders* to guide you and your coach in your practising. Until you are confident in your basic riding skills, such as braking, turning and changing gears, stay in an off-street practice site.
4. **Keep studying and practising.** Once you have passed the motorcycle skills test, practise riding on quiet streets. Be confident in low-traffic areas before moving into busy urban traffic or high-speed highways.
5. **Get licensed.** Pass the road test(s) to earn a Class 6 licence. (See **Chapter 11, Your Licence**, for more details.)
6. **Assess yourself.** Keep checking your skills and keep learning throughout your career. How can you keep your riding skills sharp?
 - Ask an experienced rider to watch you ride and suggest how you can improve your techniques.
 - Take a refresher course.

Professional training

Seriously consider taking a professional motorcycle training course. These are available for both beginning and experienced riders. **Chapter 11, Your Licence**, includes more information on choosing a motorcycle rider training course.

Plan your riding

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 3

You’re definitely going to be late for your dental appointment now. Maybe if you go just a little over the speed limit you’ll be able to make that next light.

What choice would you make?

Take a chance and speed?



Keep to the speed limit and plan your time better in the future?

Developing Your RoadSense



RoadSense Tip

Smart planning means doing a thorough pre-trip check before you start to ride. See **Chapter 3, Knowing Your Motorcycle**, for more information on the pre-trip check.

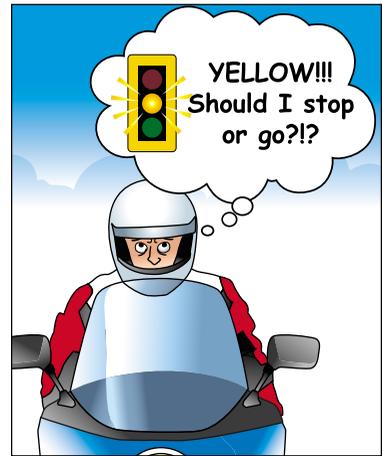
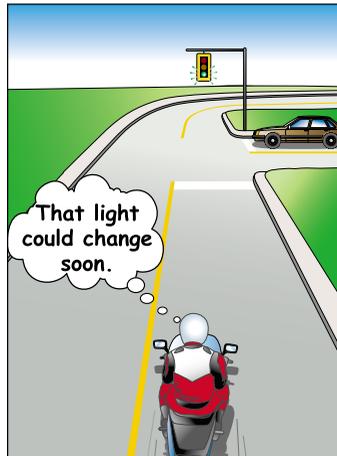
Smart riding means planning ahead. Have you allowed enough time to get to your destination? Have you planned the shortest and safest route? What's the weather going to be like – do you have the right gear? What other riding plans might you need to make?

Predict the scene

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 4

You're going too fast and forget to watch the traffic lights at the next intersection. Suddenly, you find yourself almost at the intersection and the light has turned yellow.

What choice would you make next time?



1 - 4

Predict the scene well ahead?



Respond in a hurry?



Think About...

Can you predict how sharp a curve is? Can you tell if a green light is about to change? How can you tell if a driver is thinking of changing lanes?

Being able to predict the riding environment will help you make the right decisions. You need to be aware of all the clues in the riding environment (e.g., road conditions and signs, signals and road markings). You also need to predict what other road users might do. Being aware of the riding scene will help you make better riding choices.

Think for yourself

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 5

There's one more intersection before the dentist's office. You have to turn left and there isn't a turning lane to help you. You become frustrated as you wait for your turn. Cars are lined up and the driver immediately behind you honks. You see a turning space but hesitate...is that gap wide enough for you to turn safely?

What choice would you make?



1 - 5

Wait until you feel there's a safe gap?



Turn to satisfy the driver behind you?

Another part of making good choices is to know yourself and understand the things that can influence your riding:

- **Pressure from other road users** – At times you will feel pressure from drivers or other riders, and you'll have to decide what to do. How will you react to someone who is tailgating or honking at you?
- **Influences from peers** – Other people can influence your riding. Your friends may pressure you to ride beyond your abilities. You may think that fast starts will impress them. Making tough decisions can sometimes lead to uncomfortable situations. How can you deal with this?
- **Influences from the media** – Riding has a special mystique in our culture. Think about the bike ads and movies you have seen. How are riders portrayed? What type of riding do these images encourage?

Will you base your riding decisions on safety, or will you allow other influences to pressure you? Read **Chapter 8, Personal Strategies**, for ways to handle difficult situations.

Take responsibility

Becoming licensed to ride means that you are taking on new responsibilities for yourself, your passengers and other road users.

You, the rider

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 6

You finally got through the dentist appointment. Now you're worried about being late for your friend. Just as you round a curve, you see a big semi-trailer. It's going pretty slowly. You're nervous about passing – you haven't been riding for long. But if you don't pass you're going to be late.

What choice would you make?

Push your limits and pass? ◀or▶ **Accept your limits and stay behind?**

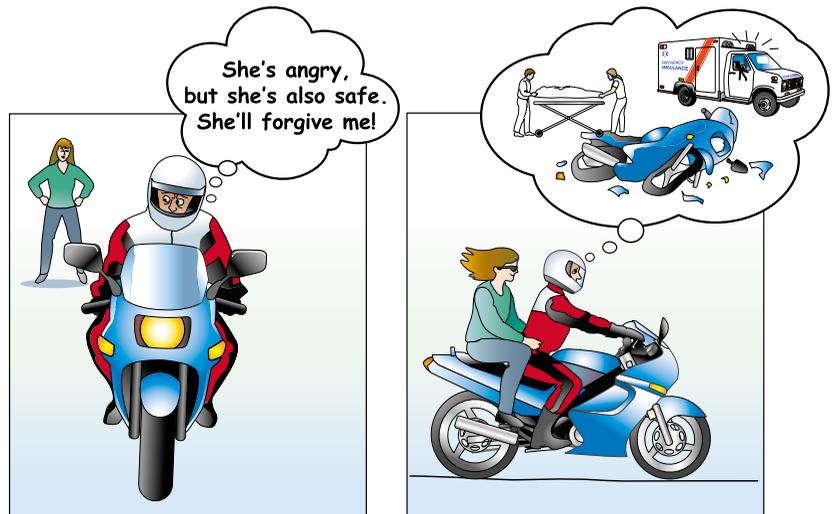
You need to know and accept the limits of your riding skills. You also need to accept the limits of your motorcycle and the road conditions. Will you take responsibility for developing your riding skills so that you can ensure your own safety?

Your passengers

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 7

You meet your friend at a café and have a great time together. Just when it's time to leave, she says, "Can you give me a ride home? I'm dying to ride on your bike." She doesn't have a helmet, but it is only a couple of blocks to her apartment.

What choice would you make?



1 - 6

Risk annoying your friend by not giving her a ride? ◀or▶ **Take your friend and risk her life?**

You are responsible for the safety of your passengers. Make sure they wear a helmet and protective gear and they know how to be a safe passenger. Carrying a passenger changes the way your bike handles, so you need to be an experienced rider before accepting passengers.

For more information on carrying passengers, see **Chapter 8, Personal Strategies**.

Other road users

Thinking Like a Rider, Part 8

You are almost back home. About half a block from the next intersection, you notice a woman standing at the crosswalk, but she is looking the other way and doesn’t appear ready to cross. You could slow down and prepare to brake for her, but if you just speed up a little bit you could make it through the intersection first.

What choice would you make?

Be cautious and slow down?



Get through the intersection first?

You share the road with cars, trucks, trains, other motorcyclists and bicyclists. Pedestrians and people who use wheelchairs may need to cross your path. You may need to move to the side of the road so that an emergency vehicle can pass. You never know when an animal may dart across your path.

You cannot always take action that will protect you, your passengers and other road users. But by making responsible choices, you can help prevent many dangerous situations.

Preparing to Ride

Because riding a motorcycle is complex you’ll always have to make choices. Some of these choices may be tough. You can prepare yourself by studying this guide and *Tuning Up for Riders*, by practising with a qualified supervisor and by taking professional training.