

READY ...OR NOT?



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Ask Motorcycle Safety ... about short rides

Directorate of Communication and Public Affairs
U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center

Each week during Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center will release a question-and-answer feature article with experts from the USACRC Driving Directorate. The directorate collects and analyzes Army accident data, formulates policy and develops tools to aid in preventing and reducing off-duty driving accidents in private motor vehicles.

This week's discussion on the importance of short rides at the beginning of riding season is with Steve Kurtiak, the Driving Directorate's motorcycle and recreational vehicle safety program coordinator. Kurtiak is a retired Army NCO and certified Motorcycle Safety Foundation RiderCoach with more than 40 years of riding and racing experience with many types of street motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and dirt bikes. He has also attended advanced training including Lee Parks Total and California Superbike School.

Riding season — what is it and when is it?

For much of the United States and many overseas locations, the typical riding season lasts from late March to late October. This past winter was especially long and delayed riding season for many Soldiers, especially CONUS. May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month and the unofficial start of riding season.

Are riding skills are perishable, especially after the off season or deployment?

Riding a motorcycle involves a lot of mental processing and coordination. As with any other sport, it takes practice to be a good rider and remain proficient when operating a motorcycle. When you go without riding for even a few weeks, those skills perish to a degree and need refreshing. For example, turning and braking, both normal and quick, need to be practiced before you head out into traffic.

How important are serviceability and roadworthiness, for both your bike and gear?

Your motorcycle has been in "hibernation" for months. If you're the type of motorcyclist who meticulously preps your bike for storage, returning it to the road will take minimal time. However, many riders just park their motorcycles without prepping as the owner's manual specifies. Tires will lose air pressure, batteries will lose their charge and parts will begin to rust. If you don't take time to go over the motorcycle before riding, you may be setting yourself up for disaster.

Is your riding gear still in good shape? Does it still fit properly? Is it time for a new helmet? These are questions you need to ask before you begin the next riding season.

Must riders re-familiarize themselves with the road and bike's handling characteristics?

At the start of every riding season, it's a good idea to practice until you become familiar again with the motorcycle, even before you take short trips. Are your starts from a stop jerky or stalling? Can you operate all the controls without looking? Are you in the best position in traffic to be seen? These are a few questions you should ask when you begin riding again, and only when you've answered "yes" to all of them are you ready for a longer trip.

Why a short ride versus a long trip?

You wouldn't run a marathon without training first, would you? Long trips on a motorcycle take a toll on your body, and like any other sport that requires mental and physical exertion, it takes time to condition to perform comfortably. Buffeting from the wind can fatigue neck, arm and leg muscles, and trying to get in an "iron butt" ride for the first ride of the season is not a smart choice. Increase the length of your rides like you would train to increase your PT score — incrementally over time.

Ride safe!