



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

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# READY ...OR NOT?

## Ask Motorcycle Safety ... about speed

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 speed and how it affects different types of motorcycles is with Robert Myrick Jr., the Driving Directorate's private motor vehicle and recreational vehicle safety program coordinator. Myrick is a retired Army NCO and certified Motorcycle Safety Foundation RiderCoach with more than 20 years of experience in vehicle safety in Germany. He has over 30 years of riding experience on all types of motorcycles and has worked with and attended advanced PMV-2 and PMV-4 training at the Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club.*

## What are the different types of motorcycles?

There are three basic types of motorcycles: street, dual-purpose, and off-highway, broken further down into the following categories:

- **Touring** — The Honda Gold Wing, Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic and BMW K1200LT are a few of the most popular types of touring bikes. They are heavy and can be expensive. They may also come with features like CD players, CBs and GPS. These motorcycles are designed with long trips in mind.
- **Cruiser** — Most cruisers are heavy, around 500-900 pounds, and have a low seat height that makes it easier for shorter riders to place both feet on the ground.
- **Sport** — Sport bikes, direct descendants from the track, are fast, light, sleek motorcycles designed to give maximum performance. Their engines produce high torque and horsepower; a stock sport bike can produce almost 200 horsepower from the factory. Most models have a seat height of 32 inches or greater, making it difficult for a shorter rider to reach the ground with both feet. Some riders lower their motorcycles by modifying or shortening the suspension.
- **Standard** — Standard motorcycles are a good choice for a first bike and popular for commuting. Their upright riding position offers greater visibility in traffic.
- **Scooter** — Scooter engines are usually located under the seat, directly attached to the rear axle. Their engine displacement varies from 50cc to 650cc on some models.

- Mo-ped — These are motor-driven cycles equipped with operable pedals and engine displacement of 50cc or less. States vary on registration requirements.
- Off-road — Off-road motorcycles are typically used for recreational or competitive purposes, but are not street legal. These bikes are available in a variety of styles and sizes.
- Dual-purpose — These types of motorcycles are equipped for use both on the street and off-road trails.

### **Do they differ from one another in how they handle on the road?**

Yes. Basic control techniques are the same, but a cruiser is heavier and built with long rides in mind, while a sport bike is lightweight and turns aggressively. The riding position between a cruiser, standard motorcycle and sport bike are also different, as mentioned above.

### **How does speed affect a motorcycle?**

Speed stabilizes a motorcycle. If you think back to the U-turn box when you took the Basic RiderCourse, you may remember it was difficult to control the motorcycle at slow speed, but if you maintained speed in the box, it was easier to negotiate. The opposite was also true; too much speed would not allow you to complete the same U-turn box. Correct speed will differ throughout your ride and must be adjusted constantly.

### **Why is speed so dangerous on a motorcycle?**

As speed increases on a motorcycle, a greater amount of force and lean angle is required to turn. A novice rider does not possess the skills to turn a motorcycle like professional sport bike riders.

Excessive speed on a motorcycle also reduces the amount of time a rider has to react to traffic and hazards, and in some cases the posted speed limit might be too high for road conditions. If you're riding on an unfamiliar road and encounter a decreasing radius curve, you could be in for an off-road excursion where hopefully only your pride will be hurt. Remember, you can go through a turn a thousand times too slow, but only once too fast!

### **What can Soldiers do to keep themselves in check on their bikes?**

A rider can have a long riding life simply by riding within his or her limits and never under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you have a burning desire to go fast, find a track that offers courses on motorcycle riding techniques. Public roads are not raceways.

Ride safe!