

## Getting a bike

If you are considering getting a motorcycle for the first time, you should:

- **Take a rider-training course to learn how to handle it safely.** A good source is the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. This is a national, not-for-profit organization sponsored by many of the major motorcycle manufacturers and distributors in the country. To find a course near you, go to [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org) and select the state. Or you can call (800) 446-9227.
- **Decide what you want the motorcycle for.** A trail bike is not designed for highway use. Nor is a street bike intended for use as an off-road vehicle.
- **Get the amount of engine that you need.** The bigger the motorcycle the heavier and harder it is to handle.
- **Make sure it fits.** Standing still, with your hands on the handlebars, both your legs should be able to touch the ground. You should also be able to reach all controls easily.

## Riding gear

Because of the very nature of a motorcycle, there are certain precautions you should take that the driver of a car would never consider. Part of this is how you dress.

- **Helmet.** The helmet is the most important piece of safety equipment a motorcyclist has. In the event of an accident, it can help protect against serious head injuries. Get a good quality helmet that bears the DOT label. This indicates that it conforms to federal standards.
- **Eye protection.** Whether or not your motorcycle has a windshield, you still need to protect your eyes against wind, dust, insects, dirt, rocks

or other foreign materials. Get good quality goggles or glasses, or a helmet with a face shield. Be sure they're shatter-proof and well ventilated to avoid fogging.

- **Long-sleeved shirt or jacket.** Leather or denim provides the best protection in case of a spill.
- **Trousers.** These should be durable and long-legged. Leather or denim is best. Do not wear shorts or baggy pants. Baggy pants can get caught in the chain. Shorts provide no protection in case of a fall.
- **Full-fingered gloves.** These should be non-slip and durable. Leather works well though some synthetic fabrics are also good.
- **Footwear.** Leather boots with non-skid soles are best, but sturdy shoes that cover the ankles and are non-skid are also good.

## Getting ready to ride

Most people don't check the tires on their car before going to the store. A sudden flat on the way would, for the most part, be an inconvenience. Motorcycles again are different. A sudden flat, even on a short trip, could be lethal.

Before taking a bike out, you should check:

- **The tires.** If one looks low, check the pressure. Remember, the motorcycle will handle poorly with low tire pressure. Even worse, low pressure can lead to tire failure.
- **Under the bike.** If gas or oil is leaking, get it fixed. A gas or oil leak could lead to an engine fire.
- **The oil and fuel levels.**
- **Your headlight and taillight.** Make sure high and low beams are both working.

- **Your turn signals.** Make sure all four lights flash.
- **The brake controls.** Make sure they both turn on the brake light.
- **The sight windows for hydraulic fluids when accessible.** Check at least once a week.
- **The reservoir for coolants when accessible.** Check at least once a week.

There's still more to do before actually starting out. You should also check:

- **The clutch and throttle.** Be sure they're operating properly, with the throttle snapping back when you let go.
- **The mirrors.** Clean and adjust them. Make sure you can see the lane behind you and as much as possible of the lanes on either side.
- **Brakes.** Test the levers one at a time. Make sure they're firm.
- **Horn.** Make sure it works.

## Road safety

Seasoned bikers have a simple rule of thumb when riding: assume you're invisible. Nearly 66 percent of motorcycle-vehicle accidents occur because the driver of the vehicle was unaware of the motorcycle. This is disturbing considering that, in terms of 2001 statistics for vehicle miles traveled, the rider of a motorcycle is 26 times more likely to die in an accident than the driver of a car and five times more likely to be injured. This is up from 14 times as likely to die in a crash in 1997.

There are some simple rules that motorcyclists can follow to help avoid accidents.

- Never ride in another vehicle's blind spots.
- Drive with your headlight on, day or night.
- Be especially cautious at intersections. This is where 70 percent of motorcycle-vehicle crashes occur.
- Check your rear-view mirror when stopping or changing lanes. Always use your turn signals when changing lanes or making a turn.
- Watch the road ahead for possible problems or hazards. Hazards that cars negotiate easily can be a real problem for a motorcycle. These include potholes, oil slicks, puddles, debris, railroad tracks and even manhole covers.
- During a rain shower, it might be best to seek shelter for the first few minutes until the rain washes the oil slick from the roadway. For better traction, follow the tracks of other vehicles.
- Don't tailgate.
- Pass only where permitted and in a passing lane. Don't try to pass on the shoulder or negotiate through traffic by riding between lanes of slow-moving or stopped cars.
- Obey the speed limit and other traffic laws.
- Never drink and ride. It takes much more coordination to handle a motorcycle than a car. Even one drink could impair your ability to react.

Finally, always follow the most important rule of the road — always be courteous to other drivers.

While safety is the primary concern for the driver of any vehicle, for the motorcycle rider, it has even greater importance. The rider's own preparation and care can make the difference between a great ride and serious injury.

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**Getting**



**Ready**

**A safety checklist  
before  
taking  
the road**



**to  
Ride**



Motorcycles can be a tremendous amount of fun. They give the rider a sense of freedom and being at one with the road that ordinary four-wheeled vehicles most often can't. But motorcyclists pay a price for that. They don't have the heavy metal body surrounding them. They lack safety belts. In many cases, they don't even have windshields. In case of a crash, the only thing between the rider and the pavement is the rider's clothing.