

On two wheels or four, respecting other guy's rights key to safer travel

“Average” motorcycle rider and “average” driver see through different windows, share interest in safety

What is a motorcyclist, anyway? Are you envisioning a mid-30's business guy riding for the fun and socializing aspects, or are you picturing a young kid in bright leather revving up a screaming machine that coordinates with his outfit? Or are you thinking about someone more in the middle of these two extremes?

Well, no matter what you're thinking, you're right. There is no one definition of a motorcyclist, any more than we can define the types and attitudes of “vehicle driver” in one or two short sentences, either. However, we do know that there is an “us vs. them” mentality out there, with motorcyclists on one side and drivers on the other, and there are lots of misconceptions on both sides of the windshield.

We've talked a lot about the average driver in earlier columns, but for this one we'll need to create the average motorcyclist, too. Let's call him Don, a composite created out of a



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recent MPI focus group of motorcyclists. Keep in mind we're going to work with averages and generalize here.

Who is this “average” rider?

Now, since most motorcyclists ride twice a week, on average, let's assign that amount of riding time to Don. However, his reasons for hitting the highway will vary greatly depending on how old we decide he is.

Younger drivers tend to want to get noticed (hence the bright green leather outfit that matches the bike), whereas many older drivers ride to be part of what they perceive to be an inner “circle” of motorcycle owners and riders. I'll leave it to you to

decide Don's age, and his potential motivation for riding.

Don would more than likely wear a helmet, and if we placed him in the “older driver” category he would probably wear gloves and protective clothing, too.

Now let's examine some opinions that came out of the same focus group, which incidentally also involved vehicle drivers. We'll call the average vehicle driver Zach, just to make things easier.

In Don's opinion, if someone was going to cause an accident, it was going to be the vehicle driver. Zach (speaking on behalf of the average driver) felt the motorcycle rider was most likely to cause the crash

Zach said Don regularly exceeded speed limits and wove in and out of traffic. Don agreed that some older bikers feel the younger bikers do drive in this manner, calling them “overconfident.” While Don admitted to speeding occasionally himself, he

claimed that on many occasions he did it to avoid an accident.

More likely to get hurt

Both Don and Zach agreed that motorcycle riders were more likely to get hurt or killed. Zach believed bikers take more risks, thereby increasing their likelihood of being involved in a bad accident. Don, on the other hand, believes he is a defensive driver. He believes he is more skilled than other road users, and thinks vehicle drivers pose the greatest risk to his safety.

Here's the reality. Between 1992 and 1996, 22 people died in motorcycle crashes and 747 people were injured. About half of the accidents involving a motorcycle were the fault of the motorcycle rider. And when the seasonal nature of motorcycles and type of use are taken into account, motorcycles are twice as likely than other vehicles to be involved in fatal crashes.

It's time for both parties to set aside misconceptions and start concentrating

on sharing the road. After all, neither Zach nor Don wants to be in a collision.

Motorcyclists: Drive defensively! Don't assume you've been seen, slow down and wear protective gear. One more thing: impaired riding was a factor in 42 per cent of the total number of motorcycle-related fatal crashes between 1992 and 1996. Obviously, don't drink.

Drivers: Make a concerted effort to look for motorcyclists. Double check your blind spots where bikes can “hide” without you seeing them. Don't tailgate: give bikes the same space you'd leave a vehicle.

A little effort, common sense and respect from both sides, please!

Take care, and until next week, stay **RoadWise**.

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