

Lawnmowers and motorcycles roaring to life a sure sign of spring

Motorists should give riders space and respect, but motorcyclists can avoid problems by driving as if they won't

I know that last week I said I would tell you more about vehicle kilometrage or exposure data in this week's column. Plans changed when I noticed that spring had arrived (I think it was about 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday), judging by the packs of roving kids suddenly clogging the streets in my neighbourhood.

Nothing announces spring's arrival more than the sound of children laughing as they dash around outside. Except maybe the sound of their parents sparking up a thousand lawn implements.

Oh. And of course, the oh-so distinctive sound of a motorcycle roaring to life after lying dormant through a long, cold winter.

So, May being motorcycle safety month and all, I thought it might be prudent to spend some time on motorcycle (and motorist) safety tips.

Attention motorcyclists: now that you're "on the road again," please take a moment to read through the following



**Road
Wise**

Paul
Allen

common safety hazards and strategies. Maybe even read through the scenarios first, figure out what you think is the correct response (no peeking), then read ahead to see if you're on track.

Hazards and strategies

First scenario: A car tailgates you for several blocks while you're riding down a multi-lane street. You decide to move out of the way. But as you move into the other lane, the tailgater changes lanes too. What can you do to avoid an accident?

Response: Make the first move, and I don't mean offering the offender a friendly hand gesture. I do mean that you should signal, and slowly move into the left or right lane to let the miscreant

pass. The longer he tailgates you, the more likely he'll rear end you. This battle of wills isn't worth fighting.

Second scenario: You're approaching a four-way intersection, with oncoming cars waiting to turn left. Just as you arrive at the intersection, the car in the opposing left-turn lane jumps the light and turns in front of you.

Response: This is the most frequent location for motorcycle/vehicle collisions, so you must think defensively. It sounds sad, but your safest bet is to always assume the other guy is going to cut you off. Shift down, reduce your speed and leave your hand covering the front brake lever, just in case.

Third scenario: You're braking to avoid a hazard when you lock up a wheel and your motorcycle starts to skid.

Response: The front wheel skid is the most difficult to control. It helps to release the front brake immediately. Fortunately, front wheel skids are less frequent.

Rear wheel skids are more common

and easier to handle. On pavement, keep the rear wheel locked and skidding to avoid being thrown. Keep looking well ahead, steer straight, and keep your motorcycle straight up. On loose surfaces, ease off the rear brake to stop skidding. Continue to look straight ahead and don't lean.

Make safety a family affair

To get a complete refresher on accident avoidance and riding skills, I recommend taking the Motorcycle Skills Refresher course offered through the Manitoba Safety Council. Even if you've been riding for years, there might be a thing or two you've forgotten (or never knew). You'll get a chance to go over more accident-avoidance techniques, as well as equipment, basic balance, braking and so on. Is riding part of your family? Then why not make the course an exercise in family bonding!

The course runs on June 9, 2001 in Winnipeg only. To register, give the Manitoba Safety Council a call at

(204) 949-1085 or 1-800-661-3321. The Council may offer future dates outside Winnipeg if there's enough demand, so if you're interested, make sure you call and let them know.

There are a couple of other points I'd like to reinforce before I go. First, drive defensively! Don't assume you've been seen, slow down and wear protective gear. And please don't drink and ride.

Here's a quick note to motorists: Make a concerted effort to look for motorcyclists. Double-check your blind spots where bikes can "hide" without you seeing them. Please don't tailgate, and remember to give bikes the same space—and respect—you'd give a vehicle.

Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.

Visit MPI's Web site at www.mpi.mb.ca