

The Navy and Marine Corps Magazine for Afloat and Shore Safety

SEA &

SPRING 2009

SHORE

**Ninth
Annual
Traffic-Safety
Magazine**



SPEED

Injures...

**(See table of contents for details of this crash.
Turn to back cover for details of another crash.)**

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Mishaps cost time and resources. They take our Sailors, Marines and civilian employees away from their units and workplaces and put them in hospitals, wheelchairs and coffins. Mishaps ruin equipment and weapons. They diminish our readiness. This magazine's goal is to help make sure that personnel can devote their time and energy to the mission. We believe there is only one way to do any task: the way that follows the rules and takes precautions against hazards. Combat is hazardous; the time to learn to do a job right is before combat starts.

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FEAT

- 2 **2007 Traffic Fatalities Lowest in 13 Years**
A look at the national statistics for traffic fatalities and injuries.
- 3 **Making Roads Safer**
The Federal Highway Administration urges state Departments of Transportation nationwide to adopt more coordinated systemwide approaches to reduce crashes.
- 4 **Right Place at the Wrong Time**
By Danny Dray
A two-day visit with family in Chicago gets off on the wrong foot when the author meets up on the road with a young driver about to go into diabetic shock.
- 7 **Price of Distraction: A Speeding Ticket**
By Lt. Ben "Teen Wolf" Libby
Deleting a voicemail from his cellphone while driving to work nets the author a speeding ticket.
- 8 **"It Won't Happen to Me"**
By CWO3 Scott S. Hadley
The author's habit of making long drives in a single day finally catches up with him.
- 10 **"Wake Up, You've Just Crashed the Pickup!"**
By SKSA Daniel Sosa
A young Sailor on the way back home with two of his shipmates falls asleep at the wheel and rear-ends another car with his pickup.
- 11 **Booze + Black Ice = DOA**
A Sailor survives a five-month deployment, only to come home and die in a car crash while visiting his mom.
- 12 **Flawed Plan Proves Fatal**
By Ken Testorff
A flawed plan leads to a PO3 dying in a car crash after helping two squadronmates drink six pitchers of beer.
- 14 **Bring Your "A" Game**
By LCdr. D. A. Nowicki
Freshly returned from deployment, the author finds he's out of practice in handling traffic.
- 15 **What in the World Is That Guy Doing?**
By Lt. Jeff Callaway
A motorist cautions against letting distractions interfere with the attention you pay to your driving.
- 16 **A Little Effort Can Go a Long Way**
By Lt. Patrick Cole
The author explains the process he goes through when returning from deployment to get ready to ride his motorcycle again.
- 18 **Taking Traffic Safety to Sea**
State troopers board ships returning from deployment to warn Sailors and Marines about the responsibilities and hazards of being home again.
- 19 **Forget the Excuses—Just Buckle Up**
A look at nationwide seat-belt use.

URES

- 20 Go-Fast Bikes Making Statistics Jump**
Sport bikes are becoming increasingly popular with young Sailors and Marines. Unfortunately, they're also becoming increasingly deadly.
- 21 Strap on ORM for Safe Motorcycling**
By Kevin McDonald
A veteran motorcyclist talks about the need to make risk management a part of every ride.
- 22 A Valentine's Day Tragedy**
By LCdr. Charles Loiselle
On his way home from a reenlistment ceremony, the author comes across a motorcycle crash involving a young Marine corporal who'll never see his 24th birthday.
- 25 Training, PPE Save Bike and Rider**
By CWO4 Charles Vandiver
A motorcyclist's training and PPE combine to save him from injury when the back tire on his bike blows out during a group ride.
- 26 The Deadeye Doe That Wouldn't Let Me Go**
By Wade K. Mears
A Midwest motorcyclist encounters a deer at night that charges him as he passes her.
- 28 Coast to Coast in 18 Days**
By CMDCM(AW/SW) David Peters
The author tells how he made a successful cross-country motorcycle trip.
- 31 My Hit-and-Run Crash**
By YNSN Christopher Slaton
A motorcyclist gets suckered by a driver who hits him, then speeds off after checking to make sure he's alive.

DEPARTMENTS

- 1 Admiral's Corner** **32 Best Practices**

FRONT COVER



A 16-year-old driver and 17-year-old passenger of this speeding car were injured when the driver lost control. The car hit an embankment, a tree, the embankment again, then flipped and slid across the road into a guardrail. Because she wasn't wearing a seat belt, the passenger was ejected, leading to more serious injuries than the driver incurred.

Admiral's Corner

FROM COMMANDER, NAVAL SAFETY CENTER



Motorcycle ABS Showing Promise

I'm all about finding more ways to save the lives of our Sailors and Marines. One piece of technology I'm especially interested in is the antilock braking system, or ABS, as it's more commonly known.

While ABS hasn't significantly reduced the risk of passenger-car crashes, some believe it will be more helpful to motorcycles because of their instability in a wheel-lock situation. Studies done on closed test tracks have shown that ABS can reduce motorcycle-stopping distances. These results suggest that ABS has the potential to reduce crashes in real-world scenarios.

One study analyzed 200 serious motorcycle crashes identified from insurance claims. Reconstruction was used to determine how these crashes would have been affected by ABS. About half the cases were deemed to be relevant to ABS, and most of those involved another vehicle violating a motorcyclist's right-of-way. The reconstruction demonstrated that between 8 and 17 percent of these crashes could have been avoided had the motorcycles been equipped with ABS.

Another study compared fatal-crash rates per registrations of motorcycles with and without ABS. Motorcycles used in this study included those for which ABS was optional equipment and could be identified as present by the model name. Fatal motorcycle crashes per 10,000 registered-vehicle years were 38 percent lower for ABS models than for their non-ABS versions.

Annual motorcyclist deaths in the United States more than doubled from 2,077 in 1997 to 5,154 in 2007. Meanwhile, motorcycle registrations increased by about 75 percent in the last 10 years, to 6.6 million in 2007.

Improper braking continues to be a major factor in motorcycle crashes, and although proper braking practices can be taught, rider-training courses only are part of the solution. With ABS, the system monitors wheel speed and reduces brake pressure when impending wheel lock is detected. Brake pressure is increased when traction is restored, and the system evaluates and adjusts brake pressure many times per second.

In view of this emerging area of study and the fact that ABS only adds about \$1,000 to the cost of a motorcycle, why wouldn't you seriously consider this option to enhance your chances of keeping the rubber side down? Think about it.

A. J. Johnson
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy

2007 Traffic Fatalities Lowest in 13 Years

The overall number of traffic fatalities in 2007 reached its lowest level since 1994, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The number of reported deaths among motorists in the United States in 2007 was 41,059, compared to 42,708 a year earlier, which translates into a 3.9-percent decline.

Passenger-car-occupant fatalities declined for the fifth straight year, while light-truck-occupant fatalities dropped for the second consecutive year. Motorcyclist fatalities, however, continued a 10-year increase, reaching 5,154 in 2007—the highest number since NHTSA started collecting fatality-crash data in 1975. Motorcyclists now account for 13 percent of the total fatalities.

Meanwhile, the number of people injured in motor-vehicle traffic crashes continued an eighth consecutive year reduction. An estimated 2.49 million people were injured in 2007,

compared to 2.58 million in 2006. This new low marks the first time that injury totals have dropped below 2.5 million since NHTSA started collecting injury data in 1988. The number of people injured declined in all categories, except motorcyclists and pedestrians.

The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fell to a historic low of 1.37 in 2007. The overall injury rate also declined. The 2007 rates are based on the latest (May 2008) traffic-volume trend estimates from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Overall VMT decreased by 0.6 percent over 2006, from 3,014,116 to 2,996,232. *[Note: VMT data will be updated when FHWA officially releases the 2007 Annual Highway Statistics.]*

Alcohol-impaired driving fatalities (those involving a driver or motorcycle rider with a BAC of 0.08 percent or greater) declined by 3.7 percent in 2007. ■

Motorists and Nonmotorists Killed and Injured in Traffic Crashes

Description	Killed				Injured			
	2006	2007	Change	% Change	2006	2007	Change	% Change
Total*	42,708	41,059	-1,649	-3.9%	2,575,000	2,491,000	-84,000	-3.3%
Motorists								
Passenger Vehicles	30,686	28,933	-1,753	-5.7%	2,331,000	2,221,000	-110,000	-4.7%
Passenger Cars	17,925	16,520	-1,405	-7.8%	1,475,000	1,379,000	-96,000	-6.5%
Light Trucks	12,761	12,413	-348	-2.7%	857,000	841,000	-16,000	-1.9%
Large Trucks	805	802	-3	-0.4%	23,000	23,000	0	0.0%
Motorcycles	4,837	5,154	+317	+6.6%	88,000	103,000	+15,000	+17%
Nonmotorists								
Pedestrians	4,795	4,654	-141	-2.9%	61,000	70,000	+9,000	+15%
Pedalcyclists	772	698	-74	-9.6%	44,000	43,000	-1,000	-2.3%
Other/Unknown	185	152	-33	---	7,000	10,000	+3,000	---

Source: Fatalities—FARS 2006 [Final], 2007 Annual Report File [ARF], Injured—NASS GES 2006, 2007 Annual Files
*Total includes occupants of buses and other/unknown occupants not shown in table. Changes in numbers shown in bold are statistically significant.

Making Roads Safer

“Safety is our top priority, and while the fatality rate on our nation’s roads is the lowest in history, we are always seeking new ways to prevent tragedies where lives are lost. We owe it to the traveling public to work even more creatively.”

That was the “call to arms” issued by acting Federal Highway Administrator Jim Ray to state Departments of Transportation, urging them to adopt more coordinated, systemwide approaches to reduce crashes.

Each year, nearly 43,000 people—motorists, passengers and pedestrians—die on America’s roads. Though the fatality rate—1.37 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled—is the lowest in the nation’s history, the number of fatalities has hovered at about the same point for nearly five years [see how the Navy and Marine Corps has fared in the accompanying charts].

To improve roadway safety nationally, the FHWA recommends better use of nine tools:

Roadway Safety Audits. State DoTs should formalize the use of these audits, which are comprehensive evaluations of existing or planned roads or intersections to identify potential safety improvements.

Rumble Strips and Rumble Stripes. Used in centerlines and shoulders, these cost-effective devices have shown improvement in warning drivers of lane departure. They have reduced head-on collisions and opposite-direction sideswipe crashes by 14 percent. Shoulder rumble strips and stripes have shown a 38-percent reduction in run-off-road crashes on freeways, and a 13-to-18-percent reduction in run-off-road crashes on rural roads.

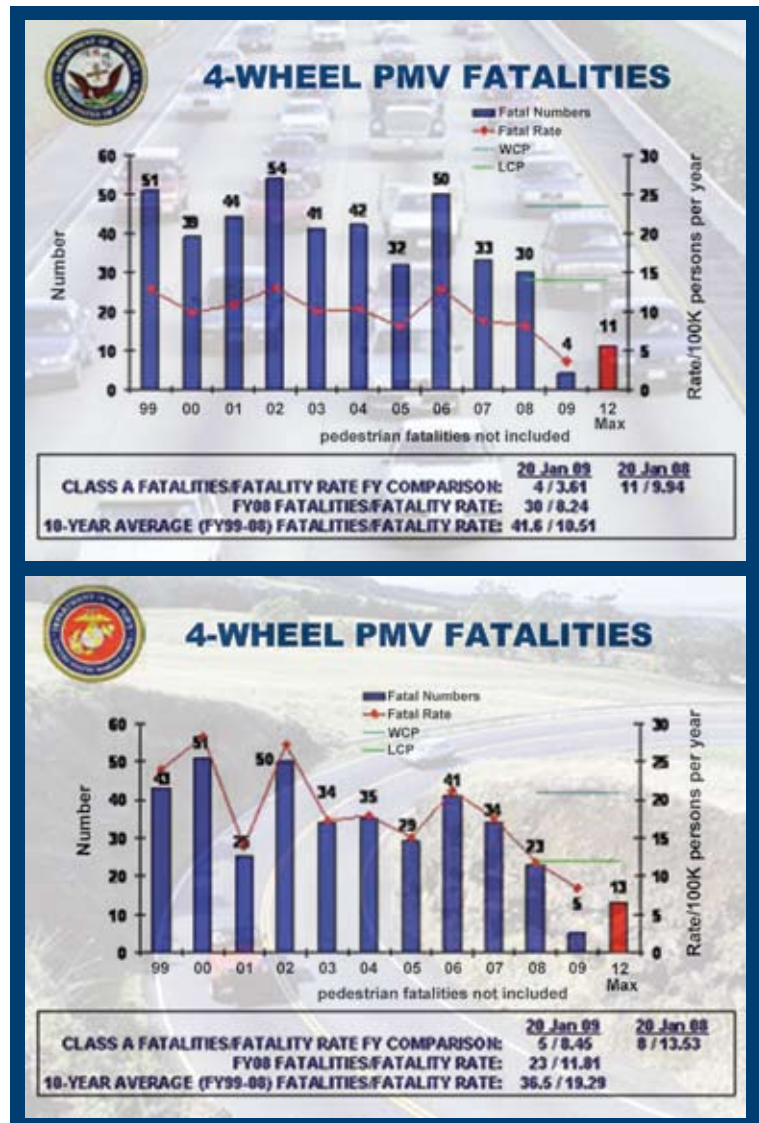
Median Barriers. Used to separate opposing traffic on divided highways, these barriers have a long track record of reducing cross-median collisions. States are encouraged to consider using cable median barriers where appropriate to further heighten roadway safety.

Safety Edge. This paving technique, giving a 30-to-35-degree slope to the road’s edge, reduces the risk to drivers if their tire inadvertently falls over an otherwise near-vertical road edge, leading to loss of vehicle control and rollover crashes. Safety edge makes such notoriously severe crashes far less likely.

Roundabouts. Roundabouts have demonstrated a 60-to-87-percent reduction in crashes.

Turning Lanes at Stop-Controlled Intersections. At intersections with significant turning volume, turning lanes for right and left turns on major road approaches can reduce crashes dramatically—in some cases, by as much as 55 percent.

Yellow Change Intervals. Red-light-running crashes at intersections, which too frequently result in



fatalities, can be reduced by properly setting yellow-light signals. Studies show a one-second increase in the yellow-signal interval can reduce red-light violations by as much as 50 percent.

Medians and Pedestrian-Refuge Areas in Urban and Suburban Areas. Raised medians or pedestrian-refuge areas at pedestrian crossings at marked crosswalks have shown a 46-percent reduction in pedestrian crashes. FHWA recommends that medians be between 4 and 8 feet wide to improve pedestrian safety.

Walkways. Ensuring a sidewalk or pathway exists near a roadway can reduce pedestrian crashes by as much as 88 percent. FHWA recommends a pathway at least 4 feet wide (of stabilized or paved surface) in areas routinely used by pedestrians. ■

A photograph of the Chicago skyline at dusk, with several skyscrapers illuminated against a darkening sky. The city lights are reflected on the water in the foreground.

Right Place at the Wrong Time

Knowing My A-B-C-Ds Saved My Life

By Danny Dray,
Naval Safety Center

That's all I could say to my wife one rainy Saturday morning from Chicago, when I had to call home and tell her I just had been involved in a car crash.

After landing at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, I had stood at the rental-car counter and insisted on declining the additional insurance on the 2008 Dodge Magnum. My insurance company covers me, even if I'm in a car other than my own. Besides, I'm a good driver who, before this date, never had been in a crash. Why pay the extra few bucks when I didn't need to?

I used deliberate time-critical risk management (TCRM) to ensure my trip alleviated

risk. I also used TRiPS, the online, automated, risk-assessment tool designed to help Sailors and Marines arrive at their destination safely. As I left my house, I realized I was in the execution phase of my travel plan. I was quite comfortable using this new tool (consisting of "A" – Assess situation, "B" – Balance resources, "C" – Communicate, and "D" – Do and debrief). Although perhaps sounding like a new type of risk management, this new tool is easier to remember, with its A-B-C-D, compared to ORM's five-step process.

So, off I went to visit family for two days. I threw my duffle bag on the floor behind the driver's seat and left the parking lot, once I had



checked the car for scratches and dents. I buckled up and checked the gas gauge to ensure it was full, as the friendly rental agent had told me to do.

By 0900, I was headed south on I-294, en route to the western suburbs of Chicago. Traffic was light, which meant I should arrive at my destination about the time I had told my family I'd be there, even though it had started raining. I was glad I didn't feel rushed.

After exiting onto I-88 headed west, the rain got worse. I encountered a never-ending construction zone where the interstate split and had to decide if I should take the single lane or double lane of traffic. I chose the single lane to minimize the amount of traffic I'd see. Later, I would regret that decision.

I was following a Chicago cab by about four or five seconds (with my ORM facilitator's words echoing in my head: Assess situation and vehicle's surroundings). I had enough space behind me, the hardest driving area to control, and I was traveling about 40 in the 45-mph construction zone.

Being a traffic-safety specialist and a conscientious driver, I often play the "what if" game while driving:

- What if the guy in front of me has a flat or

slams on his brakes? Can I stop in time to avoid hitting him?

- What if the car next to me veers into my lane? Do I have an escape route to avoid being hit?
- What if a car merges at the next onramp? Do I have room behind or ahead of me to speed up or slow down and allow the merge?

This thought process keeps me alert and vigilant while driving, and I'm ahead of the game if I find myself in a tight spot. (TCRM step B:

It felt as if my rental car's rear end lifted up for a split second, as it started to fishtail slightly.

Balance resources and judgment by using tools I learned from an AAA DIP course taught by my friend, Mike Borkowski).

With both hands comfortably on the wheel at the eight- and four-o'clock positions, the next thing I knew I was looking into the rearview mirror just in time to see a red Toyota pickup truck slam into my rear. It felt as if my rental car's rear end lifted up for a split second, as it started



to fishtail slightly. My head hit the headrest, jarring me sharply. I let my foot off the accelerator, instead of applying brakes on the wet surface, and regained control of my car. In another two or three seconds, though, the same truck hit me again, this time putting his vehicle into the cement barrier wall and disabling it.

Several questions were running through my mind. Was this guy drunk at 0950 or impaired by some other drug? Did he think I was someone else whom he was mad at and had vowed vengeance toward? Had someone crashed into him from behind and caused him to hit me? Will he come after me again? Am I still in danger?

I slowed my vehicle and pulled into the emergency breakdown lane, all while keeping my eyes on the truck and driver's strange actions. I put my vehicle in park about 40 yards ahead of his seriously disabled vehicle but kept the rental car running, with emergency hazard lights flashing. Then, I reached for my cellphone and dialed 911. My heart still was racing, as I tried to process what just had occurred and explain it all to the Illinois State Police (ISP) desk sergeant who had taken my call. (TCRM step "C": Communicate.)

For the next 15 minutes or so, while I waited impatiently for the ISP to arrive at the scene, I watched the pickup driver try to pull his vehicle off the barrier wall—to resume driving and possibly flee the scene, I assumed. When the ISP trooper finally arrived, he asked for my driver's license and vehicle-rental papers. Simultaneously, I explained what had happened.

About three minutes later, a tow truck pulled up behind my vehicle and blocked my view of the scene. I figured I wouldn't be able to watch this young driver perform a field-sobriety test for the trooper, but I felt certain he was going to jail. I was starting to feel somewhat vindicated for the vehicle assault that had occurred.

Roughly 30 minutes later, though, I watched the tow truck pull away, with the mangled Toyota pickup on the flat bed and its driver in the passenger seat of the tow truck. "What's going on here?" I thought. "Why is this guy who's so obviously impaired being allowed to leave the scene any other way but handcuffed in the back seat of the trooper's car?"

Then the trooper walked back to my car, with paperwork in hand. Before I could ask any questions, he explained that the driver was diabetic. He had had him test his blood-sugar level, and it

was only 30, compared to a normal reading of 100 to 110. The young Toyota driver had been about to go into diabetic shock and may have blacked out before hitting my rental vehicle.

I listened to this explanation and directions regarding the report before the trooper asked me if I could continue driving. That was the first time I even had thought about my personal health. I assured the trooper I was OK but sat there for a minute, trying to digest the events of the past hour, before I pulled away. (TCRM step D: Do and debrief.)

Among the thoughts racing through my mind as I sat there was how grateful I felt to be able to drive away from such a violent crash. Some luck may have been involved, but I also was prepared. A few months earlier, I had attended the AAA-DIP course, where I learned that just taking your foot off the accelerator and not hitting the brakes after being hit from behind is a smart thing to do. It usually will prevent your vehicle from fishtailing and spinning out of control.

By having both hands firmly on the wheel and keeping a safe distance from the vehicle in front of me, I had been able to avoid involving others in the crash. And, by driving below the posted speed limit during inclement weather, I had minimized fishtailing and avoided sliding sideways into the concrete barrier wall.

I couldn't have known the chain of events that soon would occur after completing the AAA-DIP course, but that in no way diminishes my thanks to instructor Mike Borkowski for beating the training into my head (or knuckles if my hands crossed the steering wheel). Because of that class, I've become a "success story"—I walked away from what could have been a fatal crash. ■

Resources:

- Tips and Techniques for Driving in Rain, <http://www.edmunds.com/ownership/safety/articles/45401/article.html>
- Tips for Driving in Rain, <http://www.smartmotorist.com/driving-guideline/tips-for-driving-in-rain.html>
- Weatherize Your Passenger Car for Rain, <http://www.weather.com/activities/driving/drivingsafety/drivingsafetytips/wxRain.html>
- AAA Driver Improvement Program (DIP), <https://www.cni.navy.mil/cnrma/Programs/Safety/trafficsafety/aaadip/index.htm>

Price of Distraction: *A Speeding Ticket* The Cellphone Strikes Again

By Lt. Ben "Teen Wolf" Libby,
VAW-121

I was following the car ahead of me in my housing development, en route to my duty station aboard Naval Station Norfolk, when I went head down to delete a voicemail message from my cellphone. Just ahead, I saw flashing blue lights on a gun-metal blue Dodge Charger.

The speed limit was 35 mph, so I instinctively let off the gas pedal and glanced down to notice my speed slowing through 42 mph. At this point, I watched the car ahead of me pull away. A check of my rearview mirror revealed the now easily recognizable unmarked police car pulling out of the turn lane it had been in when I passed.

I expected the police car to pass me and settle in behind the car I was following. I was maintaining 38 mph in the left lane when the police car, instead, pulled behind me, with lights ablaze. I turned left off the road into a parking lot.


Once the police car had pulled behind me and stopped, the officer approached my car and said he had clocked me doing 45 in a 35-mph zone. He asked for my license, and as I was handing it to him, I thought, "What a stupid way to get a ticket! Why am I the one getting pulled over? I only was going as fast as the car in front of me."

That fleeting thought was followed by the realization I had been doing what I always tell myself and my wife not to do. I was distracted and not paying attention to my driving. And I was guilty, so why was I upset?

When the officer returned with my license and a large, yellow copy of my ticket, he told me people had complained about drivers going too fast in the development. I didn't argue. I apologized to the officer and confessed I hadn't been paying attention to my speedometer. After nodding politely, he said, "I understand. With the snow, people are running late today. Have a nice day, and drive carefully, sir."

What is the takeaway from this incident? First, don't speed. The posted limits are there for a reason.

Just because someone else is speeding doesn't give you the right. Second, pay attention to the task at hand. If you're driving, drive. I had no reason to be deleting that voicemail while driving to work.

In the Navy, we preach "attention to detail." This should include all that we do. The ORM tools we use at work easily apply to daily life, too, so use them. 

For more reasons why you shouldn't use a cellphone while behind the wheel of a car, check out "Bases Ban Hand-Held Cellphones," spring 2005 Sea&Shore, pgs. 36-37. Also take a look at the back cover of the spring 2008 issue.

Texting behind the wheel is more dangerous than driving while under the influence of alcohol or cannabis (hemp, or marijuana). That's the finding of research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) for the United Kingdom's RAC Foundation.

The TRL study of young drivers 17 to 24 years old showed that reaction time slowed by 35 percent when they were writing or reading text messages while driving (in a simulator). In comparison, reaction time deteriorated by 21 percent for those under the influence of cannabis, and by 12 percent at the legal alcohol limit.

The TRL study also showed that steering control worsened by 91 percent for those distracted by texts, compared to 35 percent when cannabis was involved. Other findings: Texters were less able to maintain safe distances from other vehicles, and they tended to drift out of their lane more often.

Resources:

- Distracted Driving, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/media/seashore/issues/summer04/distracted.htm>
- Cellphones and Driving, <http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/cellphones/>
- Distracted Driving, <http://www.aaapublicaffairs.com/Main/Default.asp?CategoryID=3&Sub-CategoryID=35>

Air Force photo illustration by Airman 1st Class Jonathan Olds

“It Won’t Happen To Me”

A Seat Belt Saved My Life

By CWO3 Scott S. Hadley,
VFA-37

While we never may have said this out loud, I think many of us believe it—and that’s after having seen crashes in the news or with our own two eyes as we travel local roadways. Some slow down to look, and even a few get rattled by what they see, but I wonder if any ever really take a second to consider they might be next.

I was a newly commissioned chief warrant officer, heading to my first assignment in Virginia Beach, Va. I just had finished CWO indoctrination and aviation maintenance officer training at NAS Pensacola. Having left Virginia Beach two months earlier, I was eager to get back home and get ready to check into my new command. I planned to leave at 0200 and drive all day, so I’d reach Virginia Beach the same day—just like I’d done, going to Pensacola.

Driving such long distances in one day was nothing new to me; I had done it many times before and saw no reason to deviate from the norm now. I just had prepped my ‘88 Jeep Grand Wagoneer the day before with a full tuneup, oil change, and a thorough check for the trip. I also went to bed at 2000 the night

before leaving, so I’d feel good and be ready to go.

The first 12.5 hours on the road were uneventful. The weather was perfect, and my old Jeep was running great. Once I got off the interstate, I stopped for gas a last time on route 58 before starting the last leg of my journey. I was getting excited. With minimal traffic on this rural section of highway, in the middle of a weekday, I knew I’d be home in barely more than an hour. I called my fiancée once I was on the road again to give her my timetable and to let her know things were going well. Unfortunately, all of that changed about 10 minutes after our conversation ended.

I was cruising about 65 (in a 60-mph zone), passing an occasional car, on a highway with four lanes of traffic—two in each direction, separated by a grass median. As I moved into the left lane and started passing a late ‘90s Honda Accord that was going quite slow, I glanced at the driver and noticed he was slumped over the steering wheel. What happened next took only seconds, but it seemed to last an eternity.

As the other car headed into the ditch, the driver must have woke up and overcorrected, or the front





trying to make the trip in one day, and last but not least, both ending up at the same place, at the same time, at 60 or 65 mph. I have no doubt that fatigue was the main factor in this crash—he, obviously, had fallen asleep at the wheel. It just as easily could have

wheels caught on something and turned to the left. Regardless, the Honda came back out of the ditch and smashed into the right rear of my Jeep, spinning it-NASCAR fashion—90 degrees to the right. Needless to say, a 5,500-pound, high-center-of-gravity vehicle doesn't stay upright very long, going down the road sideways at 65 mph. According to state-police reports, my Jeep rolled six times before coming to rest on the side of the road in three pieces. The body, engine and transmission all had detached from the frame.

As I sat there in what was left of my Jeep, I couldn't believe I still was alive. Glass covered me, and I had superficial cuts all over and seemed to be bleeding everywhere. I looked down to find the one thing that had saved my life: my seat belt. It was fastened securely around my waist, as it always is when I'm driving or riding. I developed this habit at the age of 16, when I first started driving. That same year, my home state of Michigan enacted the mandatory seat-belt law.

After pulling myself out of the passenger-side window—the doors had been crushed in place—I was shocked to see what had happened to my vehicle. I had sunk thousands of dollars into it, and now it was ruined, but I was alive, and that's all that really mattered. An ambulance soon arrived and rushed me to Southern Virginia Regional Medical Center for a checkup.

Paramedics and doctors there were amazed at my lack of injuries. Aside from many small cuts, seat-belt lacerations, and a piece of glass in my hand, I was uninjured. The firefighters on the scene said they hadn't ever seen a crash this bad that hadn't involved a fatality. The other driver's vehicle just had spun across the median and come to rest on the other side of the highway.


I later found out the other driver was an 18-year-old seaman recruit headed to his first duty station at Portsmouth Naval Hospital. He, too, had been driving all day, but from Charleston, S.C.

The similarities here were many: both of us Navy, both heading to the Tidewater area under orders, both

been me asleep at the wheel. Both of us had been up a long time and had been driving all day. Thankfully, we both were wearing our seat belts.

This mishap made the front page of the local county paper the next day. The headline read, "Man walks away from totaled car." I walked away from that vehicle only because I was wearing my seat belt, not because I was lucky or because it wasn't my time to go. Don't you owe it to you and your family to give yourself that second chance?

Here are the lessons I learned the hard way:

- Visit TRiPS, the online, automated risk-assessment tool designed for Sailors and Marines who are getting ready to go on liberty or leave or are driving outside command travel limits. The system helps you recognize—and avoid—the hazards faced on the highway. Navy personnel can reach the site via Navy Knowledge Online (NKO) at <https://www.nko.navy.mil>. Marine Corps personnel can reach the site via the Army Combat Readiness Center website at <https://crcapps2.crc.army.mil/TRiPS/marines>.
- Limit your driving time; 12 hours is far too long to drive.
- Get enough sleep before driving.
- Always wear your seat belt, even if you're just going around the corner to the store. You never know when a crash is coming.
- Always watch out for the other guy.
- It (a crash) can happen to you. 

Resources:

- Fatal Factors: Fatigue, http://safetycenter.navy.mil/seasonal/criticaldays/CDS08/briefs/CDS08_fatigue.ppt#268,1,Slide 1
- TRiPS—The Travel Risk Planning System, <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle/TRiPS/default.htm>
- Innovative Safety Belt Programs, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/articles/motorvehicle/occupantprotection.htm>

“Wake Up, You’ve Just Crashed the Pickup!”

By SKSA Daniel Sosa,
VFA-2

People from 16 to 29 years old often maintain busy schedules with school, jobs, extracurricular activities, late-night socializing, night-shift work, or poor sleeping habits. As a result, they run the highest risk of having a mishap behind the wheel of a car. I learned my lesson the hard way one night in January 2007.

I had two jobs—one a night shift. I also was indulging my passion to PT. With as little as four to six hours of sleep a night, I kept telling myself I could ignore the symptoms of fatigue.

In the 24 hours before my eye-opening experience, I had worked 16 hours between my two jobs, had done five hours of PT, and had gotten a total of three hours’ sleep, split between two naps. I was on my way back from an evening trip to a local shopping mall with two of my friends.

In earlier times, I usually fought drowsiness behind the wheel by rolling down the windows or playing loud music. I always kidded myself this behavior was OK, but I knew better.

While driving home from the shopping mall that night, my vision suddenly became extremely blurry, and I remember thinking I was in my bed sleeping. It was that moment when I fell asleep behind the wheel of my 2005 Chevrolet Colorado and rear-ended a white sedan in front of me. I then careened off the road, onto the shoulder, and down a dirt embankment before hitting an 8-foot-high cinder-block wall. I was going about 65 mph at the time.

I woke up to the voice of a friend telling me that we had crashed. I kicked out the door and, while getting out, wondered sleepily who had wrecked my truck. Then, suddenly, I realized I had caused the mishap. My two passengers had sustained only minor injuries (strained muscles and minor bumps and cuts); the front end of my truck, though, was destroyed.

Thirty seconds was all it had taken for me to feel drowsy, lay my head back, and fall asleep at the wheel. I could have avoided this crash if I just had paid attention to the previous warnings about fatigued driving.



An estimated 100,000 drowsy-driving crashes are reported annually. I’m now one of those statistics. I can’t stop thinking about what might have happened that night. My foolishness could have caused inexplicable pain and suffering for my family, as well as others. There’s no excuse for such wanton disregard for life. My hope is that others will read this story and, unlike me, make the right choice when it comes to getting a good night’s rest. **S**

Resources:

- Sleeping and Driving Don't Mix, <http://www.aaafoundation.org/quizzes/index.cfm?button=drowsyquiz>
- National Sleep Foundation Drowsy Driving Prevention Week, <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0Ix/b.2418857/k.A5A7/Drowsy-Driving.org.htm>
- Introducing Doze-Alert, http://www.sav-a-life.com/Doze_intro.htm?gclid=CPvMvImn1IoCFR07QAodhUfFcw
- Drowsy Driving and Automobile Crashes, http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/drowsy_driving1/drowsy.html

Booze + Black Ice = DOA

That equation could be the epithet for a young Sailor who had been home visiting his mom for 10 days in January. The airman died from head and neck injuries when, with a BAC of 0.22, he hit a patch of black ice. According to the mishap report, the unbelted victim was ejected partway through the driver's-side window.

After hitting the black ice, the vehicle yawed counter-clockwise, first striking a sign and then a snow bank. The car subsequently went airborne for 91 feet, before landing on its roof and sliding another 6 feet into a ditch. The mishap report notes these distances don't indicate speeding, but one can't help wondering if driving at the posted 55 mph was justified, given the road conditions.

The victim's BAC was more than twice the legal limit (0.10) in the upper Midwestern state where this crash occurred. However, alcohol wasn't the only substance found in his blood. The medical examiner also found levels of THC, the principal active component in marijuana. *[In four command urinalysis tests during the previous nine months, the victim's results all had been negative.—Ed.]*

What factors led to this mishap?

The victim failed to apply training, lessons learned, and sound ORM principles. Despite numerous squadron safety stand-downs that emphasized drinking and driving, he didn't recognize the risks that contributed to this mishap. Besides being under the influence of alcohol and drugs, he drove a vehicle that recently had been diagnosed with a power-steering problem. He also was wearing a cast on his right forearm as the result of an earlier injury.

Simply put, the victim exposed himself to unnecessary risk by **choosing** to drink and drive. He significantly reduced his chances of survival by **choosing** not to wear a seat belt.

During the three months before this mishap occurred, squadron workcenters had held individual training on driving safety and the risks involved with driving. Two safety stand-downs also had been held, both of which included lectures on the dangers of drinking and driving.

Following this tragedy, the commanding officer held quarters and talked about the Navy's seat-belt policy and the importance of applying sound ORM

principles to both on- and off-duty activities. He also initiated a leave-letter program *[a letter to next of kin, signed by the CO, asking their help in keeping the Sailor safe while he/she is home on leave]* as recommended by Commander, Naval Safety Center.

The command's safety officer spoke to all workcenter supervisors and division chiefs on the importance of using more intrusive-leadership measures at the shop level. He urged them to direct more efforts to Sailors' off-duty activities.

The command already had a dial-a-ride program established, but the safety department redistributed cards to each workcenter and briefed each shop on the purpose of this program.

Other initiatives included a decision to hold dedicated safety stand-downs before SFARP (strike fighter advanced readiness program) training and to have Sailors complete a leave worksheet that focuses on trip planning and PMV safety. *[Before Sailors and Marines go on liberty or leave, driving outside command travel limits, they are supposed to access the online, automated, risk-assessment tool known as TRiPS (travel risk planning system). This system helps them recognize—and avoid—the hazards they face on the highway. Navy personnel have access via Navy Knowledge Online, or NKO, at <https://www.nko.navy.mil>. Click the link under "What's New," or select "Organizations" under the "Organizations & Communities" drop-down menu, then select "Naval Safety Center." You will need to have registered on NKO to access the site. Meanwhile, Marine Corps personnel have access via the Army Combat Readiness Center website at <https://craapps2.crc.army.mil/TRiPS/marines>.—Ed.]*

As noted by the commanding officer, the victim had survived a five-month deployment while working on the flight deck, the most dangerous environment in the world, only to come home and die because of poor headwork. "Zero tolerance of drug use, don't drink and drive, and wear your seat belt aren't policies intended to place unnecessary restrictions on us," he said. "They are designed to save lives." ■

Resources:

- Traffic Safety Toolbox, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle/toolbox/default.htm>
- Operational Risk Management, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/presentations/ashore/motorvehicle/sourcefile/motorvehicleorm.ppt>

A Night of Beer and Pizza

Flawed Plan Proves Fatal

By Ken Testorff,
Naval Safety Center

A young PO3 and two PO2 squadronmates from a light helicopter antisubmarine squadron (HSL) had spent six hours at a local bar, eating pizza and downing six pitchers of beer. Realizing that none of them should drive, one of the PO2s called a friend to come and be their designated driver. Before the designated driver arrived, though, the PO3 slipped out unbeknownst to the PO2s and got behind the wheel of his car.

The mishap report says he lost control at approximately 0035, while negotiating an onramp curve. The car went airborne and tumbled down an embankment before coming to rest on the opposite side of a divided highway. The PO3 was thrown from the vehicle on initial impact and died at the scene. A passenger, another PO3, was wearing a seat belt and remained in the car. He suffered a fractured vertebra but was discharged from a hospital with a back brace.

It's difficult to understand why these tragedies occur in commands like this HSL, where the leadership maintains a strong safety culture aimed at personal safety and mishap prevention. For example, in the year before this mishap, four all-hands safety stand-downs had been held, with a focus on PMV and motorcycle safety, as well as drunk driving.

The squadron also maintains active DAPA and PMV-inspection programs and participates in a county designated-driver program. Chain-of-command contact-information cards, including the XO's personal phone number, are issued to all hands. The CO,

XO and CMC brief personal safety and alcohol awareness during each indoctrination and every squadron quarters.

There's more, too. The HSL participates in climate-assessment surveys—another one was scheduled the month after this mishap occurred. Culture workshops are held. And, the squadron had been through a Naval Safety Center survey just three months before the mishap. Last, but certainly not least, the command uses the total risk assessment and control system.

After this tragedy, the squadron redoubled their efforts to prevent mishaps. Leading the new initiatives is a detailed debriefing to all hands of mishap reports. The CO also personally briefs any other interested squadrons. Another new initiative is an E-6 and above summit to identify high-risk individuals and to build actionable techniques for deckplate interven-



Navy photo by PHAN Roland Franklin

**A Sailor participates in
a PREVENT course.**



Navy photo by PHAN Michael D. Blackwell

In signing this contract with his CO, the Sailor promises that he will abstain from underage drinking and drink responsibly if over the age of 21. Contract signings like this are part of the Navy's "Right Spirit" campaign.

tion and process supervision. The HSL leadership also agreed to continue their commandwide focus on personal and vehicular safety, as well as drug and alcohol awareness. And, they resolved to ensure more timely participation in the personal responsibility and values education and training (PREVENT) and other Navy-sponsored drug and alcohol programs.

This mishap and tragic loss of life was especially painful because the hazard was recognized, and they had a plan to call a friend to serve as the designated driver. The plan failed because it relied on impaired judgment for its execution. Another problem was that car keys were in the pocket of at least one person who planned to drink alcohol. Finally, three people consuming six pitchers of beer isn't just social drinking; it's alcohol abuse.

"Our safety mantra always has used these words: 'Have a plan.' What is really important is that the plan must make sense and must be controlled coherently," said the squadron CO.

"We also have talked much about khaki leadership," he continued, "but I believe we need to go one step further and involve our first class petty officers. Directed leadership intervention needs to happen closer to the deckplates, where our senior-junior relationship is shoulder-to-shoulder. The ultimate goal of these interventions will be to influence the personal decisions and behaviors that ultimately lead to these tragedies," the CO concluded. **S**

Resources:

- Traffic Safety Toolbox, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle/toolbox/default.htm#drinking>
- One Drink Too Many, http://safetycenter.navy.mil/seasonal/24-7Holiday/Presentations/Traffic_Safety/Outreach_DUI_One_Drink_Too_Many.ppt

Bring Your "A" Game



By LCdr. D. A. Nowicki,
Training Air Wing Five

There I was—driving around sunny San Diego for the first time in nearly five months. In just one week back from deployment, I had encountered two situations in which I felt fortunate to have had my spouse with me.

In the first case, we were en route to a local hardware store when my wife yelled, “Look out!” as I started to turn left at a stop sign. I hadn’t seen a cyclist crossing the street. I immediately cut loose with some words unfit for print or for the ears of my 2-year-old daughter in the backseat.

The second case was similar, except it involved a bus. I was changing the radio station at the time, trying to get all my old presets back in place—not the best thing to be doing while driving.

In the aviation world, you hear pilots talk about “scan,” or how fast your eyes are moving to scan all the gauges in a cockpit, while maintaining situational awareness. The same principle applies to a car. There’s a scan, and mine was slow from a lack of practice and familiarity.

I think I’ve figured out why most crashes happen within a few miles of home. You don’t get time to

“warm up” before hitting the roads for work in the morning—that first couple of miles after leaving your driveway is all you have. On the way home, most of us turn off mentally once we hit the exit and just follow the suburban streets like mice making their way through a maze. In other words, we take driving for granted.

Sports analysts talk about “bringing your ‘A’ game”—you ought to do the same thing when it comes to driving. Crashes can happen in a split second. Everyone on our ship had been through traffic-safety training just before returning to homeport, but that training wasn’t enough to compensate for my lack of hands-on practice. 🚗

The author was assigned to USS Belleau Wood (LHA-3) when he wrote this story.

It’s a fact of life: People in the military often go long periods of time without driving a car. If you need a reminder to avoid complacency behind the wheel, read the article that follows.

What in the World Is That Guy Doing?

By Lt. Jeff Callaway,
VAW-120

We've all been there—some of us even might be part of the problem. You're on your daily commute, trying to be the fastest rodent in the rat race down the interstate, with someone ahead of you driving like Elmer Fudd.

You ask yourself, "Why is that person swerving back and forth in this lane, sometimes even crossing into the next lane for no apparent reason?" You decide to pull out and pass before you succumb to road rage and do something that probably only would have been legal in the early 11th century.

As you pass, it all suddenly becomes clear. You marvel at how the driver can operate a vehicle with a morning newspaper blocking his view. Or, perhaps the person is straining to reach the rearview mirror so she can make sure her hair and makeup are just right. Another favorite of mine is that driver staring straight out in front, with 95 percent of his brainpower being sucked away by that all-important, can't-wait-till-I-get-home cellphone call. Whatever the reason for such dangerous driving, it serves as a reminder that you need to limit distractions when getting behind the wheel of a car.

A common perception exists that aviators have a dangerous job. However, we're probably more likely to have a fatal car crash than to die in an aircraft incident. As traffic increases every year, it becomes more critical that people focus all their attention on driving when they're behind the wheel of a car.

Like a lot of others, I, too, used to drive and talk on a cellphone at the same time until I came within a few inches of destroying my car and the one in front of me. If you find you must talk and drive at the same time, at least try to mitigate the risk to yourself and others. Get a cellphone with a speakerphone function, or plug it into headphones so one hand is free. And, common sense should tell you not to do anything that interferes with seeing in the direction the car is moving.

I don't mean to imply that driving requires such intense concentration you get out of the car at the end of a trip sweating profusely. Instead, it's pretty boring most of the time, unless you're playing the radio or doing something else to make the time go more



Photo courtesy AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

Whether it's a woman talking on a cellphone in traffic...



Photo courtesy AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

... or a man shaving as he drives to work, these distractions should serve as a reminder to stay alert anytime you're behind the wheel of a car.

quickly. Just know your own limits for task saturation and accept the responsibility for your own actions. ■

The author was assigned to VAW-117 when he wrote this story.

Getting ready to ride a motorcycle again after deployment involves preparation. For one Navy pilot, that preparation begins before the ship docks. Read the story that follows to learn how he sheds his "riding rust."



A Little Effort Can Go a Long Way

By Lt. Patrick Cole,
NAS Fallon, Nev.

As that “light at the end of the tunnel” illuminates the fact another cruise nearly is complete, I start itching to get back on a motorcycle and hit the open road.

Already on my stateroom desk is a blue folder filled with information about roads to explore, cities to visit, rallies to attend, and friends to share rides with on Saturday-morning coffee runs. The folder also contains a list of friendships to be made yet—with people who finally have made the decision to buy a motorcycle and join us. These thoughts race through my head as I begin making a checklist of everything that needs to be done before turning the key for the first time.

I’ve been riding motorcycles more than 15 years—on the dirt, on the track, and to all four corners of the United States (twice) on the open road. These journeys have included a few roadside repairs, some near-misses with inattentive drivers, and a few run-ins with inclement weather, but I’ve always reached my destinations safely. To what do I attribute this good fortune? The little bit of effort it takes to get ready to go when I step off the boat and transition back to “civilian living.”

To make my checklist simple to address, I break it into two categories: man and machine. There are many books and opinions on just about any area of

motorcycling, and I always have a selection to read while returning from cruise. As a result, I often find something I had forgotten or was fuzzy about. The websites for the Naval Safety Center and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration are filled with information on motorcycle courses, safety and statistics. Books and conversations with fellow motorcyclists also are excellent resources to recage your mindset and to get ready to ride after a long layoff.

I learned something long ago that I always pass on to others: You don’t need to worry so much about yourself as you do the other guy out there. Experience has proven that statement to be true. A motorcyclist has to be comfortable enough with his skills and his bike to react calmly and correctly in a crisis situation and avoid becoming a statistic. In today’s busy traffic, little or no time often exists to tell oneself step-by-step how to avoid what just happened in front of or behind you. The reaction has to be as automatic as tying your shoes.

Being comfortable with your skills and your bike allows your “bubble” of situational awareness to increase, which can help prevent a situation from becoming a serious problem. You can devote more attention to what is happening around you, rather than spend all your time concentrating on yourself and your bike. Besides reading books and reviewing websites

to refresh information that has been locked away for months, I even spend a little time in a closed-course setting. I go to an empty parking lot and practice various maneuvers that get me mentally prepared to hit the road again.

Once the mental preparations have started, it's time to think ahead and to formulate the machine checklist from what will need to occur at home. Putting the machine together includes personal safety gear, as well. This gear is an extension of the safety features designed into your motorcycle and always should be thought of as such. Riding without proper footwear is like riding without any brakes—you just don't do it. If you can't remember the last time you looked at the condition of your personal safety gear, now is the time to do so.

The first thing I do is to spread every piece of gear I own over a wide space. I pick up the items one-by-one and check them for problems, such as broken snaps or zippers, punctures, scratches, and tears. Then, I try everything on for fit and function. If it looks wrong or doesn't work right, it gets repaired or replaced. If it passes inspection, it goes back into the closet. I make sure there are complete sets of what I will need for hot weather, cold weather, and

wet weather, including boots, gloves, jackets, helmets, visors, camelback...it's all there.

The first thing I do in the garage is to see if anything has fallen off a shelf onto my bike. I also look for any pools of fluids under the bike. Is the cover still in good shape, or does it look like an animal has chewed the edges? Has anyone moved the bike to gain access to something else in the garage? I always check these items because they can indicate larger problems. Then, I remove the cover and pull out the owner's and mechanic's manuals so I can go over the setup-inspection checklists. A dealer goes through these same items when he uncrates a bike from the factory. While going over these checklists, I remove the battery and charge it good.

When I've completed the setup inspection, I step back and just look at the bike. Do the tires look right? Are all the taillights and turn signals in place? Is the fuel cap missing? It's the little things you miss after being away so long. For example, I once tried unsuccessfully to start one of my bikes with a full tank of gas, only to realize I hadn't turned the fuel cutoff back on. Because that bike is one that requires the fuel to be turned off after every ride, it took me a good 20 minutes to correct a problem I wouldn't have missed if I just had stepped back and done a sanity check on my setup process.

Next, I sit on the bike and work all the controls. Do they respond like you remember they should? Do the turn signals and brake lights work from the lever and the pedal? If the answer to both those questions is yes, and if everything else looks good, I fire up the bike and make sure it runs correctly.

Traditional, carbureted motorcycle engines always need a little tweaking after long storage. Newer fuel-injected systems have the technology to make a variety of adjustments on their own. If the bike doesn't seem right, take it to a professional. Nine times out of 10, saying "it just needs to be ridden after sitting so long" doesn't fix the problem and can cause more expensive damage down the road. It's better to spend a little now, rather than have to spend a lot later.

Last, I combine man and machine. I take the bike to an empty area and refamiliarize myself with the play in the clutch, brakes and throttle. I make some easy stops and some quick ones. I make a



few wide and right turns, using both hand and electric signals as appropriate. I (and most experienced riders) lock up the back wheel in braking to practice skidding. I also work up to some quick evasive maneuvers. Throughout all this refresher training, I work to keep a good scan of my instruments and, more importantly, of what is going on around me. I work that situational-awareness bubble as large as comfortably possible.

On deployment, I do a very dangerous job. However, going home and getting on my motorcycle the first couple of times can be just as dangerous. I know people won't see me on my bike unless I make sure they see me. Even then, a few still will be oblivious. The secret to survival is being comfortable enough with your skills and your bike that any reaction you

may have to make is instinctual. Take time to ensure both you and your bike are prepared. Keep the rubber side down out there! 🚘

The author was assigned to VAW-117 when he wrote this story.

A Motorcycle Safety Foundation Experienced-Rider course suite also would be a good refresher. This course promotes the rider-education training system, which is designed for lifelong use. Another good tool to check out a motorcycle is TCLOCS (tires and wheels, controls, lights and electronics, oil and other fluids, chassis, sidestand).—Joe Peretto, former traffic-safety specialist, Naval Safety Center

Taking Traffic Safety to Sea

Sailors and Marines returning from extended deployments get warnings about the responsibilities and hazards of being home again before their ships ever moor. State troopers carry the message to the men and women as part of a program called “Safety at Sea” on the East Coast and “Ship at Sea” on the West Coast.

In both cases, troopers meet the returning battle groups and steam across the ocean with them, hopping from one ship to another. With two weeks of cruising time, they conduct 80 to 100 workshops, discussing the kind of traffic to expect, traffic laws, safe-driving practices, and the dangers and the cost of drinking and driving. The troopers also discuss alternatives to drinking and driving, such as free taxi-ride programs.

Another subject the troopers address is the fact that, in some cases, vehicles won't be ready for the road right away. After sitting around for months, tags or inspections are likely to have expired, and cars may need some mechanical work. The problem here, as one trooper noted, is that “many of the returning men and women simply will try to do too much, too fast, with too little sleep.”

The main mission of the “Safety at Sea” and “Ship at Sea” programs is to make sure Sailors and Marines don't return from deployment, only to be involved in a car crash. Is that goal being met? An officer with the California Highway Patrol said, “We believe the program has been a great success. Commands are constantly sending us letters, saying how dramatically the incidents have decreased.” 🚘



Navy photo by PH3 Jason R. Zalasky

Resources:

- Resources to Prepare for a Safe Return from Deployment, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/seasonal/returnhome.htm>
- Distracted Driving/Road Rage Resources, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/traffic/distractions/default.htm>
- Back on the Iron Horse: Motorcycling After a Six-Month Deployment, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/MEDIA/seashore/issues/spring07/back-ontheiron.htm>
- Motorcycle Operator Checklist, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/checklists/motorvehicle/motorcyclechecklist.htm>
- Virginia State Police Safety at Sea, <http://www.aamva.org/aamva/DocumentDisplay.aspx?id=%7B289224BF-617F-4028-A973-BB7CD7F32C71%7D>

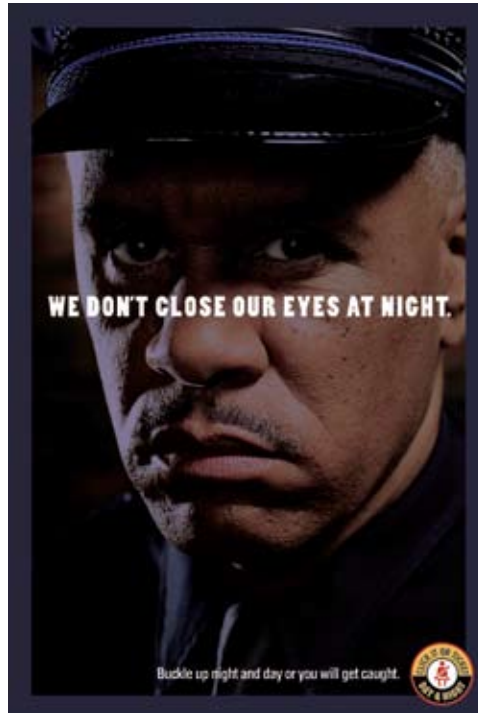
Forget the Excuses— Just Buckle Up

Now is the time to start thinking about the annual, national “Click It or Ticket” campaign, which, in 2009, runs May 18 to 31. The goal, of course, is to increase national seat-belt use from the 83 percent achieved in 2008.

That number is a far cry from the lofty goals established in April 1997, under the Clinton Administration. The aim then was to increase national seat-belt use to 85 percent by the year 2000, and 90 percent by 2005 (from 68 percent in 1996).

While those goals were not met, national seat-belt use has risen steadily since the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) started collecting data in 1994. At the same time, there has been a steady decline in passenger-vehicle-occupant fatalities per mile traveled [see accompanying chart].

Despite these gains, research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) shows that nighttime belt use continues to be much lower than daytime use, particularly among young drivers.

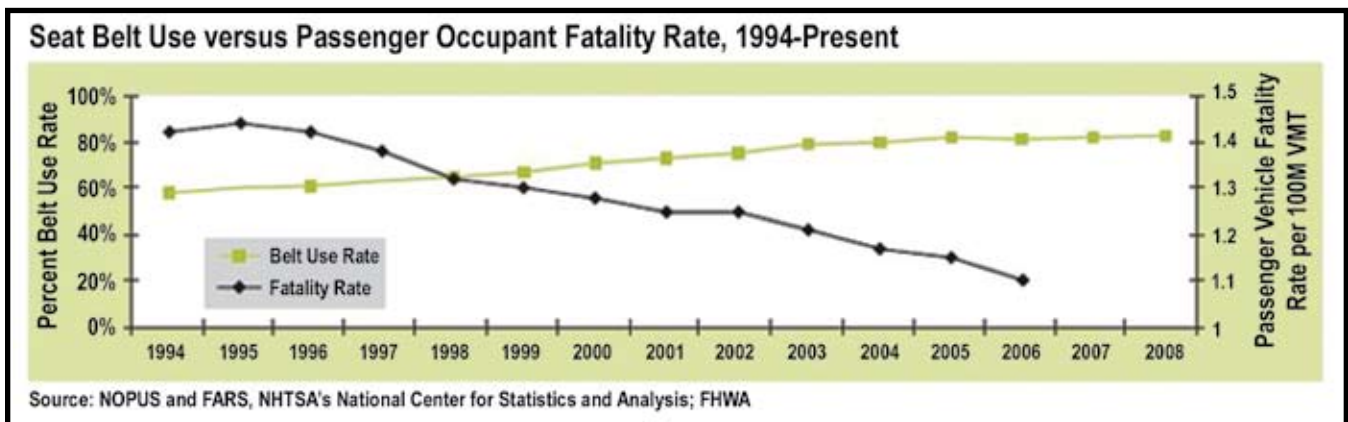


“Seat-belt use among young drivers and occupants is not what it should be, especially at night, when the risk of dying in a crash triples,” said former NHTSA Administrator, Nicole Nason. “Clearly, we need to do more to make people of all ages understand that—whether traveling by car, SUV or truck—a seat belt is the best way to stay alive, day or night.”

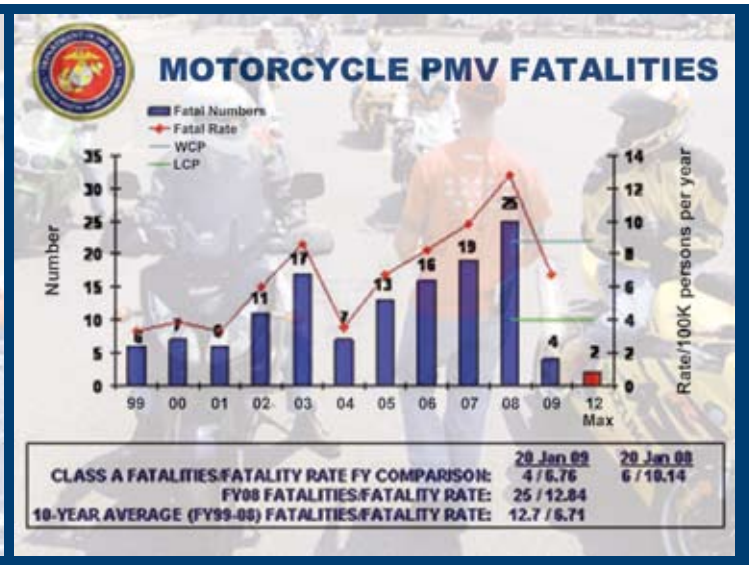
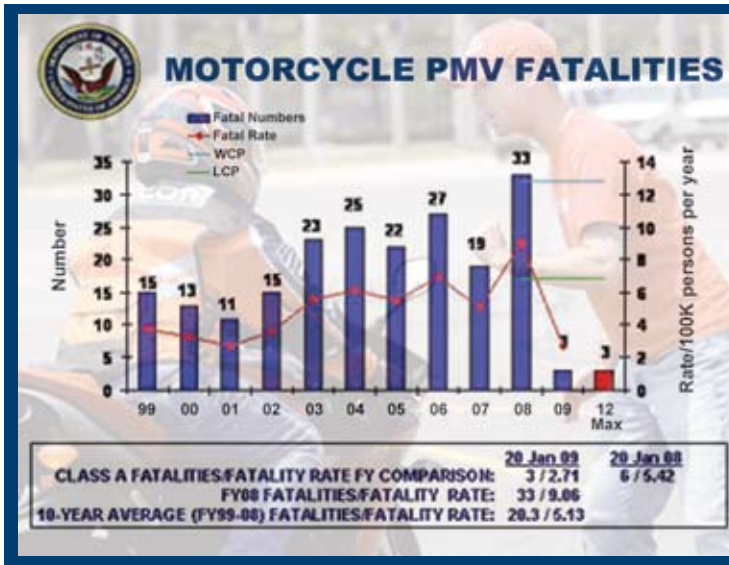
The consequences of not buckling up are even more tragic among young passenger-vehicle occupants. Of the 2,962 nighttime passengers, 16 to 20 years old, who died in 2006, 68 percent were unrestrained. During the daytime, 57 percent of the 16-to-20-year-old occupants killed were unrestrained.

“Wearing your seat belt costs you nothing,” said Nason. “But the cost for not wearing one certainly will. So don’t risk it with a ticket, or worse—your life.”

Commit now to supporting this year’s “Click It or Ticket” campaign. The law-enforcement officers who will be on the streets need our help to make the campaign successful. ■



Go-Fast Bikes Making Statistics Jump



Support bikes, many weighing less than 450 pounds and producing up to 190 horsepower, are built for speed and high maneuverability. It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that these bikes find favor among our young, adrenaline-pumping, adventure-seeking Sailors and Marines. Not everyone, though, shares that enthusiasm.

Navy and Marine Corps leaders see the situation in a different light. They look at the Naval Safety Center (NSC) database and see that approximately half of the 25,000 licensed Navy and Marine Corps motorcyclists ride sport bikes. Then they look at the number of fatalities on these machines, which, in fiscal year 2008, accounted for 87 percent of the total Navy and Marine Corps motorcycle deaths. The picture wasn't much better in fiscal 2007, when 66 percent of Navy motorcycle fatalities and 78 percent of Marine motorcycle deaths involved sport bikes. No less alarming is the fact that an estimated 94 percent of traffic fatalities occur among first-year riders, who average 24 years old.


These statistics are why NSC and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) unveiled a new military sport-bike course (MSBC) in June 2008, designed specifically for high-performance motorcycles. The driving force behind creation of this course was Don Borkoski, a 30-year, retired Navy veteran, who currently is the motorcycle-safety manager at NSC. Soon after arriving

here, he briefed leadership about the need for specific training on these high-performance machines. It took less than a year for his concept to reach the secretary of the Navy's desk and to become reality.

The MSBC started in fleet-concentration areas, including San Diego, Camp Lejeune, and Jacksonville, in June 2008, and is expected to spread rapidly throughout Navy and Marine Corps installations worldwide. The vision for MSBC in 2009 is a full-service contract, where trainer motorcycles are available to all interested riders, so service members can make a more informed decision before buying their own bikes.

"This course increases our capabilities and skills on the road," said LCdr. Thomas Clark, from VA-136, who attended the first-ever class. "As a Navy member, this course tells me the Navy actually cares about their people... to take the time and spend the resources allowing us the opportunity to come out here."

The one-day, eight-hour MSBC focuses on the speed and cornering characteristics of sport bikes, and includes both classroom instruction and range exercises. Students are able to apply the skills they just have learned under strict supervision in a controlled atmosphere. The MSBC is limited to 12 students per class.

For more information on motorcycle safety and this course, visit www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motor-vehicle/motorcycle. 

Strap On ORM for Safe Motorcycling

By Kevin McDonald

Almost every activity you can think of has risk associated with it. For example, participating in certain sports without training and protective gear very easily can get you seriously injured. Motorcycling is no different—in fact, most folks who ride motorcycles consider it a sport, rather than just transportation.

So, it stands to reason that, for the sport of motorcycling, getting good training, wearing protective gear, and improving your riding skills will help decrease the likelihood of a serious motorcycle mishap. Here's an old saying in motorcycling, "There are those who have been down and those who are going down."

I've been riding motorcycles for more than 30 years and have been down several times. Most were unavoidable situations; other times, I was pushing myself while riding dirt bikes, jumping hills, or just being young and carefree. Now, I'm older and, I hope, wiser.

Here's a good example of a situation that was unexpected and unavoidable. I was riding in the left lane of a street with two lanes in each direction. I was changing lanes when, all of a sudden, down I went. I found out another crash had occurred at the same spot earlier in the day, and one of the cars had leaked oil all over the road. The fire department hadn't cleaned up some of the mess. When my tire hit the oil, the motorcycle lost traction.

Once I was riding when my shoe lace got caught on the gear-change lever, which kept me from putting my foot down at a stop sign. My bike and I fell together. Sounds dumb and funny, but it caused me a lot of pain, and it cost a lot of money to fix my bike.

Operational risk management (ORM) can help you identify hazards so you can make good choices while riding. You may not even realize you're already using ORM every time you drive down a road in your car or on your motorcycle. You're constantly making decisions so you can arrive at your destination safely. You're assessing the hazards along the way and deciding the best course of action to avoid a crash. By always applying these ORM principles, you mitigate the possibility of being involved in a mishap.

Motorcycles certainly have greater risks than cars, but operators of both spend a fair amount of time in

the "learning phase." New operators in Japan have to spend many extra hours honing their driving skills at local driving schools and, consequently, are very good drivers before they ever hit the open road.

New and experienced military motorcyclists in Japan must go through two Motorcycle Safety Foundation training courses, and they must drive a certain number of kilometers on base before they receive a license to drive off base. This time driving on base familiarizes the riders with driving in the left lane (as opposed to the right lane in the States) and introduces them to the unique driving style and laws of Japan.

Most single-vehicle motorcycle crashes happen while the motorcycle is in a turn or curve. It takes less driving skill to ride a motorcycle in a straight line. The best approach is to enter the curve slowly, looking through the turn to where you want the bike to go or end up, and then slowly rolling on the gas to achieve the desired speed.

Try to avoid chopping the throttle closed, which makes the bike drive forward, compressing the front suspension. Try to do all or most of your braking before the turn, because applying the brakes in a turn tends to straighten-up the bike, which makes it more difficult to complete the turn in a safe manner.

Enjoy your ride, but never start one without a healthy dose of ORM. **S**

The author was assigned to Fleet Activities Yokosuka when he wrote this story.

Resources:

- Motorcycle Safety Resources, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/traffic/motorcycles/default.htm>
- Risk Management—An Essential But Little Recognized Riding Skill, <http://www.megarider.com/Articles/risk.html>
- Motorcycle Rider Risk Management, <http://www.wood.army.mil/engrmag/PDFs%20for%20Jul-Sept%2003/safety%20jul-sept03.pdf>

Navy photo by PH1 Alan Warner, USN(Ret.)

A Valentine's Day

Tragedy



By LCdr. Charles Loiseau,
Fleet Command Center, Pearl Harbor

As I was tooling along H-3 highway in my '68 VW "bug" one fine, Hawaiian, Tuesday morning, a pair of motorcycles zoomed past me. I was doing a cool 65 mph, and, since they had passed me like I was standing still, I estimated they must have been going 100 mph.

A few miles down the road, the freeway ended at the base gate, and, sure enough, those two bikes were about 20 cars ahead of me, in line to get in the gate. I thought about getting out of line so I could talk to the riders but decided against it.

When I got to the squadron parking lot, I saw what looked like one of the bikes again—let's just say it was a very unusual road bike. I found out who owned the bike but chose not to confront the person. I justified my actions (or, more precisely, a lack of them) with, "Hey, it could have been a bike that looked similar." I even brought up the incident with another officer over lunch, saying, "I may have failed a leadership test, but, being a new guy in the squadron, I didn't want to make waves."

Now, let's fast-forward to the weekend. I was returning from a Saturday morning reenlistment on base—it was a beautiful, sunny, Valentine's Day. A big motorcycle event was going on in town, complete with the Discovery Channel there to film it, so a lot of bikes were on the road. While coming down the freeway a few miles from a major interchange onto an intersecting freeway, I saw a bike in my rearview mirror. It probably was doing 80 or 85 mph when it passed me, and I remember thinking, "That wasn't nearly as fast as the dudes passed me Tuesday, but it still was moving pretty good." Then, I again looked into my rearview mirror to see another bike swerving through the cars. It quickly passed me, too, clearly

trying to catch up with the girl on the first bike. Both bikes were Honda CBRs. The second one was heavily modified and painted yellow and white.

About three miles down the road, I downshifted onto the interchange ramp and came upon a scene I'll never forget. A twisted, yellow-and-black bike was smashed against the outboard side of the offramp, and on the opposite side, about 10 yards farther, lay a limp human form on the grass. A young woman was looking at him, and another car already had stopped.

The car's driver was talking into a cellphone (thank God we have those things) as I pulled over, inventoried what I had in my car to help, and stepped out, still in uniform from the reenlistment. I was the third person on the scene. The accident had occurred less than a minute before my arrival.

My Red Cross first-aid- and CPR-training card still was in effect, but I hadn't done much besides the refresher CPR stuff since having taken the full classes nearly three years earlier. My first thought was "airway, breathing, circulation." The guy was on his back, with his torso twisted slightly.

When I bent down to check for breathing, the victim's mouth was bloody, and the visible teeth were broken. I also heard a horrific rattling sound, followed by silence. I watched his chest for a moment and saw no movement, so I told the lady we needed to start CPR. I gathered up a motorcycle jacket on the ground and used it to support his head, as we turned him slightly to the full prone position. During this process, he gasped and started breathing on his own. I then checked for a pulse on his carotid and found a weak one.

With the victim breathing on his own and displaying a pulse, I began inspecting him for major bleeding. He had a hole in the back of his head, but the bleed-

ing almost had stopped. He was bleeding from somewhere on his lower back, but it wasn't bad enough to risk rolling him over. He also had road rash on his legs—the jeans he was wearing nearly had melted away—but none of those injuries were life-threatening. The lady who was helping me found the victim's wallet in his jacket (he luckily was wearing one of those expensive, leather, racer jackets, with some kind of hard plates in the arms for extra protection). He was a Marine corporal.

It seemed like hours had passed, but an ambulance still wasn't in sight. We called and recalled to ensure one was on its way. The corporal had been unresponsive but suddenly started trying to move. We did our best to keep him stabilized. Finally, we heard the ambulance coming. By this time, a few other cars

had stopped to help. One person was directing traffic on the onramp. A doctor who had stopped had told us not to do anything as long as the victim was breathing and had a pulse.

With the paramedics present, we gave them a 10-second turnover as they put on a neck brace. They unceremoniously cut off his jacket, backpack and gloves, then loaded him onto a gurney. We helped clean up the area and carried the corporal's personal gear to the ambulance. As the ambulance sped off, everyone who had stopped left quickly, too. In what seemed like seconds, I found myself alone with the young lady who had been the first person on the scene.

I told her she had done a good job. She visibly was shaken and said she felt like she was at fault—I understood what she meant. She grabbed her helmet, put on her jacket (which we had used to cushion the corporal's head), and headed for her bike. She was riding the other bike that the corporal had been racing. They never had met before that afternoon on the road, and he evidently was trying to impress her with his skills. She mentioned that he didn't have his helmet on and asked how she could find out his condition. I told her his name and the name of the hospital I thought the ambulance would take him to before she drove away from the scene.

I can't say if the corporal was wearing a helmet when he passed me on the highway. However, he didn't have it on when I got to the crash site. It was on the road, with the chinstrap fastened, which probably meant he had left the base wearing the helmet but had stopped and removed it once outside the gate. Hawaii's helmet law requires only those operators and riders under the age of 18 to wear securely fastened helmets, and you see more riders without them than with them. If, in fact, he was helmetless, I thought he had gotten off easy because he only had suffered a head wound, which accounted for the blood on my hands and uniform.

I called the Marine MPs and reported what had happened, then went back to my car and drove home. All that day, I was thinking about the accident and wanted to go see the guy and find out how he was doing. I also wanted to convince him to come to my command's next safety stand-down and talk about the dangers of street racing and the importance of wearing protective gear. Another part of me wanted to give him a piece of my mind for driving dangerously on the same roads I share with my family and others families, as well as to point out the problems he had caused his unit—he'd surely have some SIQ time.



Here's a crashed Honda CBR, similar to the ones involved in this story.

After mulling over these thoughts all day, I got a call from the base MPs. They wanted some more info about the accident. I told them what I knew and asked about the corporal's condition. I wasn't prepared for the answer I got: "He was dead on arrival, sir."

I was affected deeply by this turn of events. Here was a beautiful, sunny Valentine's Day, and this guy never would get a chance to give his girlfriend roses. He'd never know the joy of earning his sergeant's stripes or of swapping sea stories with the old guys in the NCO Club. He'd never again call his folks from ports he didn't know even existed before he became a Marine. He'd never have a chance to warn friends, shipmates or kids about the stupidity of street racing.

After I calmed down, I came up with a few lessons learned for myself. I'd like to share them with you:

- Check out your car's first-aid kit (mine was a joke). Aspirin and band-aids are useless at a wreck scene. Update your car's stock with some of those big bandages, disposable diapers, maxi-pads, or anything clean and useful for stopping major blood flow.

- Get some fire extinguishers. I have a small one mounted on my door pillar, and I even get flack from the gang at work about that. I was glad I had it that day, though. This guy's bike still was running when I arrived (even though it was totaled), and, if the lady with the other bike hadn't shut it down, a fire could have started.

- As in the tactical world, communications are key. I now have the base MPs on my speed dial—(you also could put 911 on speed dial). Be prepared to describe exactly where you are, especially with a cellphone. Stay on the line as long as possible, preferably until the rescue guys arrive.

- Keep your first-aid and CPR skills current. Most commands offer regularly scheduled courses, and the Red Cross always has them available. A few hours on the weekend or a weeknight, twice a year, is all it takes to stay proficient.



The most important lesson I learned was about leadership. If you see shipmates engaged in any type of risky activity and have an opportunity to talk to them, **do not let that opportunity pass.** I remember when I was the corporal's age (23)—I felt I was bulletproof, and the world revolved around me.

As we get older, we see things differently, especially once kids enter the picture. What if the corporal had lost control of his bike while passing a minivan crammed with soccer kids? Most of us didn't think like that when we were young. Get the word out—talk to your shipmates with fast cars and motorcycles. Make sure they know the life they endanger isn't only their own. **S**

The author was assigned to HSL-37 when he wrote this story.

Resources:

- Motorcycle Safety Resources, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/traffic/motorcycles/default.htm>
- First Aid at a Motorcycle Crash Site, <http://www.2wheeltouring.net/stories/firstaid.htm>
- Motorcycle Riding Emergency Tips—First Aid, http://www.motorcyclistonline.com/features/122_0008_motorcycle_riding_emergency_preparedness_tips/index.html

High-Speed Blowout

Training, PPE Save Bike and Rider



By CWO4 Charles Vandiver

What would I do if I had a blowout at a high rate of speed? What if it happened while I was in a group, riding side-by-side? I had been asking myself those questions for years.

The answers came one Sunday in March, while I was with a group of 15 to 20 riders, cruising Interstate 575 outside Atlanta at 75 to 80 mph. We were riding in a loose, staggered formation when my back tire suddenly and without warning blew out.

At first, the rear of the bike shifted violently from side-to-side, but it remained controllable. As I started slowing down by coming off the throttle and braking with the front brake, however, control became a bigger problem. The flat tire and rim were shifting back and forth on each other, eroding my control. My main concern became the other riders; I didn't want to collide with any of them. Luckily, they were paying attention, saw what was happening, and gave me enough room to ride it out.

I started drifting toward the median and, once there, quickly decided to lay down the bike to avoid

being thrown off. When you lay down a bike, especially a heavy cruising model, you must know what you're doing to keep from pinning yourself under the bike's weight and then being burned by the hot engine and exhaust pipes. Thanks to a motorcycle-safety course and years of riding, I knew what to do and was able to walk away without a scratch. In case you're wondering, the bike ended up in good shape, except for the back tire and wheel.

Less than 20 seconds elapsed from the time the blowout occurred to the time I laid the bike on its side in the grassy median. As I learned, you need to be ready for any unexpected event because it can happen fast.

I had checked my bike before the ride, including the tire pressure, and everything had appeared OK. The blowout occurred in the sidewall, which looked to be in good condition. The sidewall is an unusual place for a tire to fail, and I didn't see it coming. Always have a backup plan, with such items as a cellphone and extra cash; you never know when you'll need one or both.

Has this experience caused me to rethink riding motorcycles? No. I still ride for the enjoyment and thrill of the open road and the wind in my face. The crash just makes me ride safer. The real lesson here is that safety training and proper motorcycle PPE work, so use them and ride defensively. **S**

The author was assigned to USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) when he wrote this story.

Resources:

- How To Handle a Tire Blowout While Riding a Motorcycle, http://www.ehow.com/how_7878_handle-tire-blowout.html
- How To Handle a Tire Blowout While Riding a Motorcycle, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/motorcycle/PSIMotorcycle/pages/howToHandleBlowout.htm>
- Motorcycle Tire Repair: Blowouts, <http://www.soundrider.com/archive/tips/Motorcycle%20Tire%20Repair.htm>

The Deadeye Doe That Wouldn't Let Me Go

By Wade K. Mears,
Marine Corps Mobilization Command

It was a cold November evening when I left my home in Chilhowee, Mo., riding my Harley Sportster *[see the author and his bike in the accompanying photo]* the 65 miles to my second job in Kansas City. The route I take is a long, winding, two-lane country road, with few if any street lights.



I had bought my bike just three months earlier. I'd always wanted a Harley but couldn't afford one—not with a wife, six young children, and a mortgage. But I had found this Sportster at a great price and couldn't pass it up.

It had been 30 years since I'd ridden a motorcycle, and even then, as a responsible teenager (if that's possible), I always had made sure I wore a helmet, jacket and gloves. However, I still hadn't had any formal training. I had sold that bike, for my parents' sake, after my 17-year-old brother was killed on a motorcycle. I wanted to be prepared when I got my new bike.

I'm a civilian supervisor for the Marine Corps Mobilization Command in Kansas City, where all Marines are required and all civilians are requested to attend the basic motorcycle-safety



course before getting on a bike. By the time I had completed this course, I had learned many things about my bike and how to ride. The one thing they didn't have to teach me, though, was to always ride with the required protective gear, which was an important detail the night my story took place.

Let me get back to my story. I had traveled this same road in my car every day for the last six years without ever seeing a deer. I was about 6 miles east of Harrisonville, Mo. It was about 2100, and I just had come out of a 45-degree, left curve when I saw her: a very large doe, standing in the left lane, looking at me. I already had slowed down for the curve—my speed was only about 25 mph. I moved to the far right side of my lane and continued to watch the doe as I approached.

Because of the loud noise coming from my custom exhaust pipes, I expected her to dart off the road, but she just kept looking at me.

Maybe I should have stopped—who knows for sure? When I got about 20 feet from the doe, she charged me. Her head hit my chest dead center! The impact threw me off balance, and because I already was on the far right edge of the road, I veered onto the gravel shoulder, where I laid the bike down on its right side—on top of me. I landed on my right shoulder and rolled out from under the bike as it slid to a stop. As I lay there, all I could think about was my new bike and how badly it must be damaged.

I realized I was hurting but not as bad as it could have been. I ended up on top of the large backpack I had been wearing at the time of the crash and couldn't move. By this time, several people had stopped to render assistance. I told them I was OK and asked if they could help me up. They also lifted up my bike, and a quick inspection revealed it had only minor damage. I got back on it and, against everyone's recommendation, headed on to Harrisonville.

My shoulder hurt a little, but I otherwise felt all right. By the time I had ridden the 6 miles to town, though, the pain in my shoulder was so bad I couldn't move it. I decided to detour to an emergency room. The X-rays showed I had broken my right arm at the shoulder. My guardian angel and my protective gear, however, had spared me all but a small spot of road rash on my thigh.

The moral of this story: Whether a new rider or an experienced one, things can go very wrong very fast. Always use "SEE" (Search, Evaluate, Execute) when you ride. It could save your life. 🚫

Resources:

- Deer, Oh Dear!, <http://www.soundrider.com/archive/safety-skills/deerohdeer.htm>
- Critter Crashes: How to Avoid Deer and Other Animals on a Motorcycle, http://www.motorcyclecruiser.com/streetsurvival/preventing_fatal_deer_accidents/index.html

Plan Your Ride, Ride Your Plan

Coast to Coast

By CMDM(AW/SW) David Peters,
VAQ-137

I recently made a 7,211-mile trip by motorcycle from Whidbey Island, Wash., to Jacksonville, Fla., and back without incident. You don't hear many "good" news stories about motorcycles these days, so I'd like to share how I did it safely.

I rode through Utah and Colorado, following the twisting roads up the Rocky Mountains. I took Trail Ridge Road over the Continental Divide, where the elevation topped out at 12,800 feet. I suffered on the slab (interstate) through Kansas and saw oceans of corn, wheat and all things that grow through Missouri, Illinois, and the blue-grass of Kentucky. I also spent time with family and friends in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

On my return trip, I wound through North Carolina and Tennessee to find the Dragon (Deals Gap Motorcycle Resort), near the Great Smoky Mountains. As the T-shirt says, I carved up all 318 turns in 11 miles, with just one scrape on the kickstand.



in 18 Days



Continuing on, I experienced the great prairie as I left Wisconsin and traveled into South Dakota for the night. I saw the Badlands from a distance and rode through the Black Hills into the Wyoming foothills. In Montana, I had perfect weather and diverted from my route to stop by Red Lodge en route to Beartooth Pass (10,974 feet) and then on to Yellowstone Park. While there, I had to stop to allow a bison to pass just inches away from my left hand. I sat on my ride and contemplated just how small my motorcycle and I were, in comparison to this animal, and how exposed one can feel on a bike.

I completed the trip, shooting through the Idaho mountains, with their canine tops and dark valleys. I was thankful for the August weather and the extra clothes I had brought. Leaving Spokane, I took back roads through the Cascade Mountains and followed the foothills north before winding my way home through farmers' fields to Whidbey Island. I crossed Deception Pass under the typically grey skies of northwestern Washington when I started my trip but had glorious sunshine as I crossed the bridge on the way home.

How do you complete a cross-country road trip like this without becoming a smeared wet spot on the roadway somewhere?

First, you need enough experience to complete the ride safely. Experience means you have to ride your bike a lot—enough to learn your own limits, as well as the bike's limits. Experience has very little to do with speed and everything to do with road and rider conditions. You consider how long you safely can ride your bike under the current weather and road conditions.

Planning is the next critical item. I planned this trip, based on my personal experience level (e.g., how far I safely could ride in one day). If you use the Naval Safety Center's trip planner [<http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle/TRiPS/default.htm>], it will tell you that any motorcycle trip is high risk, regardless of what you do to mitigate risks. So, based on what I knew about myself and my bike, I limited my riding to daylight hours, with a maximum of eight hours in the saddle. That plan still made for a 10-hour-or-more day after adding in stops to rest, eat and get gas.

Plan several rest days into the trip; I can't tell you how important they are. I planned on riding for three days and resting for two on the way to Florida. For the return trip, I planned to ride six slightly shorter days in a row. The three-on, two-off plan worked perfectly, and I was rested fully every day. I really could have



used the rest days on my return trip. I still was riding safely but, after the first three days, found I had to pay more attention to my riding. I was getting a little tired and noticed some complacency setting in (e.g., I would skip small things I normally did).

The Internet is a fantastic tool for planning a cross-country trip. I used it to map my route, measure distances, and make reservations. I researched postings and recommendations on what to see and where to go from others who had been there recently. I downloaded packing lists [<http://www.geocities.com/rollingthunder1il/worddocs/packlist.doc>] and read the lessons learned from lots of people to avoid as many pitfalls as possible. I used my computer to plot my routes and to download them to my GPS. I gave my family a copy of my route, in case I got into trouble. Make a communication plan, and follow it, as well. Touch base with someone daily, so they can keep track of you while you're on the road.

I thought out my gear to the smallest detail. You have little room, and you need to bring along gear that will fill the need and stand up to the use. Rain gear is a must, and it should be very accessible. I have a two-piece set that works well; it has reflective piping and fits in my saddle bag. If you're camping, make sure you keep your sleeping bag dry. There is nothing worse than trying to get some rest in a soaking-wet bag.

I loaded down my bike and made test runs around the local area until I had determined the best way to secure the gear. I made sure the things I needed at every stop were in outside pockets or side bags that easily were accessible. I rigged a hydration bag and tied down the drinking tube, so I could use it anytime I was thirsty—something that really came in handy during those long hauls down a hot interstate.

I brought along all the safety gear I needed for emergency repairs, including a patch kit, in case I had a flat tire. I had a reflective vest, in case I got stuck riding at night. My safety gear was the only equipment I never had to use. I did use sun block, and believe me, SPF-50 isn't too high. I also used lip balm and kept my eyes behind sunglasses at all times. Even with these precautions, I still managed to get a little sunburned. At night, I could feel my eyes had been strained by the sun.

The last thing I did before starting the trip was to make sure my bike was ready. I sent it to the shop for servicing and a thorough safety inspection. I made sure the tire tread would last the entire trip. You don't want to be riding on a bald tire in a thunderstorm in the mountains (watch for tar snakes!), or to be stuck



waiting for your bike to be fixed while you should be out riding.

Finally, once you've planned your trip, you have to ride your plan. Stay within the limitations you set as much as possible. No plan is perfect, and you may have to deviate, or you may want to for some reason (Beartooth Pass). Use your communication plan, and tell the person you contact every day what you plan to do. He/she may be able to assist with maps, weather reports, or reservations.

Last but not least: You're the only one who knows when to call it a day. It doesn't take much to have the most awesome day go terribly wrong. If you don't make the grown-up call to pull over and stop when you need to, then the next grown-up call may be from the highway patrol to your next of kin. Calling it quits when things are beyond your abilities, or you just are too tired to go on safely, means you'll be here to finish the run later—but still alive.

Stay safe, and keep the shiny side up. I hope to see you on the road and read about your motorcycle success, too. ■

Resources:

- Distance & Endurance Riding Links for Motorcycle Riders, <http://www.ridemyourn.com/links/distance.shtml>
- Dave Svoboda's long-distance riding tips, <http://www.concours.org/long.distance.tips.html>
- Cross Country Motorcycle Riding, <http://www.themotorbookstore.com/cross-country-motorcycle-riding.html>

My Hit-and-Run **Crash**

By YNSN Christopher Slaton,
VAW-117

With five years' experience on all types of bikes, I consider myself a knowledgeable motorcycle rider. That experience, however, didn't prepare me for what happened one morning.

At 0600, I put on my gear (helmet, riding jacket, gloves, long pants, and riding boots) and headed out the door for a physical-training session. I stopped for a moment to inspect my motorcycle and make sure there were no problems. Everything looked OK, so off I went.

At a four-way stop, the traffic looked normal for a Tuesday morning: not much congestion. I came to a complete stop, scanned the intersection, and once I saw it was clear, proceeded to turn left. I had completed the turn and was straightening up when, out of nowhere, a van slammed into my right side. I flipped over my motorcycle and hit the street headfirst. As I lay there, the van stopped in front of me.

I ignored the pain I was feeling and struggled to my feet as the van's driver approached. He said he hadn't seen me and was very sorry. I asked if he had a driver's license, and he said he'd get it from the van and come right back. Naively, I said OK and started dragging my motorcycle to the side of the road while he went to his van. I looked up just in time to see

the van speed off before I even could write down his license-tag number.

I was shocked at what had happened and wondered if the driver would have done the same thing if I had been lying there in the street seriously injured. I called the police, and they started a hit-and-run investigation. I then checked into a hospital, where docs treated my knee abrasions, sprained ankle, sprained wrist, and lower-back injury.

You may think it's cool not to wear your protective gear, but it could save your life. Also, if you ever find yourself in a similar situation, remember that not everyone always does the right thing. Take all the necessary steps to protect yourself. ■

Resources:

- Motorcycle Accident Injury and Claim—Protect Yourself, <http://www.lawtigers.com/page/protect-yourself.php>
- Motorcycle Safety Information, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/motorvehicle/motorcycle/>
- Motorcycle Safety Resources, <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/traffic/motorcycles/default.htm>

BEST PRACTICE

WASP Motorcycle Safety Born out of Tragedy

By Lt. Benjamin Armstrong,
USS *Wasp* (LHD-1)

For the past several years, motorcycle crashes have accounted for a significant number of accidental deaths among Navy and Marine Corps personnel. Many other riders suffer injuries that prevent them from returning to the work force. These mishaps, deaths, and injuries are too costly, both in terms of fiscal costs and human resources, to remain unaddressed. Needless loss of life continually degrades the Navy's operational readiness. These facts were brought home aboard USS *Wasp* when we suffered a motorcycle tragedy in March 2008.

The safety investigation determined that a lack of riding experience and training were prime causal factors for the mishap. *Wasp* leadership and the ship's safety program subsequently initiated a review of our motorcycle- and traffic-safety procedures. The result is a dedicated motorcycle/ATV-safety instruction (USS *Wasp* Instruction 5100.19), beyond the ship's traffic-safety instruction.

In July 2008, *Wasp*'s motorcycle-safety program and instruction were identified by Commander, Naval Safety Center as a "best practice" for the fleet. Not only does the instruction govern the program; it also includes a mechanism for tracking completion of the new motorcycle-safety-training requirements announced in July 2008. A copy of the instruction was posted on the Naval Safety Center website for other ships to reference. As a model for the fleet, the *Wasp* safety team was contacted by representatives of the Naval Audit Service in August 2008, when they began research into the future of motorcycle safety for the Naval Safety Center.

The key to safe motorcycle operation is experience. The only way for a novice rider to gain experience is through proper training. It became the goal of

Wasp's leadership, through the motorcycle-safety program, to help the ship's Sailors achieve proper training to become safe motorcycle or ATV riders. The Navy's Basic Rider (BRC) and Experienced Rider (ERC) courses, as well as the new Military Sport Bike Rider (MSRC) course, are important stepping stones to safe operation of a motorcycle; however, they are not the only avenue available.

The Navy BRC course requires riders to bring their own motorcycle, which creates an inherent hazard. Many ride their new bikes for the first time on



Air Force photo by SSgt. Chad Thompson

their way to, or the week before, attending their first safety training. In appropriate cases, the motorcycle-safety program aboard *Wasp* assists Sailors in obtaining rider-safety training through outside civilian sources. The courses identified and approved by the program are certified classes at local educational institutions and motorcycle shops that include the use of loaner bikes. These programs usually include out-of-pocket costs for the Sailors; however, many can be paid for with tuition assistance from the Navy College Office.

These alternate sources of training can provide vital initial experience to our Sailors, who are new to the world of motorcycles before they buy their bikes. The added bonus is that, if the Sailor makes a mistake in the course, he or she doesn't damage their brand-new machine.

The motorcycle-safety program's administrative side has two pillars, both centrally located in a motorcycle-safety binder. The first requirement for anyone wishing to buy or ride a motorcycle is completion of the USS *Wasp* Motorcycle/ATV Notification Form. This form, which includes signatures from the Sailor's LPO, all the way to the commanding officer, is designed to make sure the chain of command knows all motorcycle riders aboard the ship. Signatures from one of the *Wasp* motorcycle mentors and the motorcycle-safety coordinator ensure that the Sailor

has discussed his or her plan with an experienced rider and has selected and scheduled an approved motorcycle-safety course.

Once the Sailor has met the state's licensing and insurance requirements, completed the course, and purchased the bike, he/she returns to the motorcycle-safety coordinator and completes a page-13 entry. This page 13 records the details of the requirements mentioned here and ensures the Sailor understands the DoD requirements for motorcycle-personal-protective equipment. Copies of both the notification form and page 13 are maintained in the motorcycle-

safety binder to ensure an accurate list of all *Wasp* riders.

Through regular training at numerous venues, including divisional safety training and safety stand-downs, *Wasp* continues to enhance the knowledge base of its Sailors. The program also formalizes the position and involvement of the command motorcycle mentors, a voluntary position filled by senior officers and enlisted personnel who ride motorcycles. The continued training and the mentors will help ensure that relevant and timely information continues to flow to motorcycle riders, even after their initial safety training is complete.

For example, *Wasp* motorcycle mentors and the safety department held an informal training session the week before the Virginia Beach Classic, a motorcycle rally that usually draws several hundred bikers. They discussed PPE, both what types to buy and shopping tips to find the best deals, and a brief was conducted on spring PMS to prepare for the coming riding season.

In the last five years, more than 230 Sailors and Marines have perished in motorcycle mishaps. In 2008, 58 died. Understanding the risks of motorcycle operation, using proper PPE, and having up-to-date safety knowledge are all key elements in preventing these mishaps. Ensuring that men and women who ride motorcycles have the proper training and experience needed to do so safely also can prevent many such tragedies. *Wasp's* motorcycle riders, across the spectrum of experience levels, are vital to the ship's success. The motorcycle-safety program ensures that every effort is made to help them stay safe, both on and off-road.

We hope that, as a "best practice," this program will help other commands address the hazards to inexperienced motorcycle riders, so that another tragedy can be avoided. ■

The author is the ship's safety officer.

Resources:

- Motorcycle/ATV Safety Program, <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/bestpractices/traffic/downloads/WASP%20Motorcycle.pdf>
- Motorcycle Safety Resources, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/traffic/motorcycles/default.htm>
- Motorcycle Safety, http://safetycenter.navy.mil/bestpractices/Tools/downloads/SC_motorcycle_safety.pdf





...And Kills

The 24-year-old motorcyclist here, according to witnesses, was traveling at a high rate of speed and weaving through traffic when he hit the rear of a car (see *upper left*) making a U-turn. He was ejected from the bike and died at a hospital from injuries he sustained in the crash.

