

How I've Survived SoCal Commuter Traffic on a Motorcycle

Commuting on Southern California's
Freeways

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I Introduction

Riding a motorcycle is one of those things I love to do. Just ask my wife! I'm sure she would call it an obsession, but I don't look at it as such, since my wife and I have spent the last thirty five years raising five boys. And although I have been riding motorcycles for almost 40 years, it has been only the last twelve years that I have been able to really enjoy riding.

Over the years I have had many people come up to me and start talking about riding a motorcycle. Often it turns out that they are interested in riding a motorcycle to save commuting time, money or both.

Since riding a motorcycle is not for everyone, I often find myself hesitant to encourage them to ride, because I don't want their spouses, parents, kids, etc. coming to me later and telling me it was my fault for them riding a motorcycle and getting themselves hurt or killed.

No, that has not happened, yet, but I do think about it. I even worry about my boys picking up riding (as my oldest two have done) for fear of them getting hurt. Although my oldest has done a great job of hurting himself with his off road toys.

So I started thinking, what could I tell a novice rider that would get them to think about

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the pluses and minuses of commuting on a motorcycle?

This book contains my thoughts, ideas, experiences and habits (some good, some not so good) that I have collected over my 40 years of riding. I will talk about my motorcycle riding and a little about my different commutes, and give my thoughts on motorcycle safety and commuting. I just can't talk about riding a motorcycle without talking about safety.

I dedicate this book to my sons that ride or will ride and those folks that want to think about commuting on a motorcycle. And I especially dedicate it to all of those that currently ride a motorcycle in the Southern California commuter traffic.

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II Me, an Expert? Hardly!

In My Humble Opinion (IMHO), professionals, I don't care who they are, generally will not recognize those in their field that have not completed the same type of education or training that they had to endure. So to become an "expert" in any field, you must spend many hours of professional training under the direction of a "professional" in that field you are trying to become an expert in.

I really don't see much difference in the motorcycle training industry. To become a professional motorcycle instructor, you would need to become a MSF instructor by taking their instructor courses. Many have come from the ranks of being a Motorcycle Officer and have had years of training on a force. And then there are the "Track Day" Instructors that many of come from racing backgrounds.

Then there are those that are old timers, riding long before organized training came along. These came through the ranks with mostly "seat of the pants" training. Whether street or track, they endured and learned the lessons the hard way.

I feel I'm in that last category, but not an expert. My training consisted of the salesman that sold me my first motorcycle, telling me to go find a parking lot and learn how to use the brakes and learn how to control the motorcycle in general.

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While in the Air Force I also attended a couple of early (pre '80) on base two day motorcycle training classes. Since then, the only formal training I have had was a day at the Willow Springs "Streets of Willow" track that my oldest son talked me into taking with him. So, I consider myself more of a seat of the pants, self taught motorcyclist than an instructor/classroom taught one. Or in other words, I got my riding degree from the Institution of Road Rash and Hard Knocks.

It's not that I haven't wanted to take advance riding courses; I just never seem to find the time or money to do so.

So other then the two Air Force trained classes and the one track day, I have not had any other formal motorcycle training or riding skill courses in my 40 years of riding. Although I do have almost 400,000 miles on motorcycles and most of those miles have been commuting on some of the busiest Southern California freeways.

The first few years were not ticket free, but I have not had a ticket (knock on wood) since November of '75, and I have had two accidents; one in '87 and the other in '08, but more on those later.

Ever since I started riding back in July of '71, I decided that 95% of the folks on motorcycles didn't belong on them for one reason or another. I really think it boils down to the fact that many take their motorcycles and the roads they ride for granted

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instead of being taught to respect their motorcycles and the roads.

It doesn't mean that I don't fall into the 95% every now and then. As you read through this book, you'll see areas where the thought will come to you, "what was he thinking". After all I am only human.

So what makes me qualified to write a book like this? I know I haven't had the "Formal" training like many that could write this book, but I believe I do have some good ideas, thoughts and pointers that I have obtained over my years on the road that have kept me alive and even to be able to still enjoy most of my time riding a motorcycle, even while commuting.

What I am not going to be talking about are the proper riding techniques to enter a curve or how to maneuver your motorcycle through an obstacle course (although if you bust traffic, guess what you are doing?); I'll leave that to the experts. And I do strongly encourage you to seek the experts on riding techniques and improving your own riding skills and habits!

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III Forty Years of Riding

My motorcycle riding started in my dreams, long before I ever rode one. As youths my brother, Dave and I would ride our bicycles all over the countryside every chance we got.

We loved riding around and exploring on them and especially finding big hills that we could peddle up (sometimes the hills were just too steep to ride up, so we would walk our bikes up them) and then ride down as fast as we could.

The areas in California we lived in back, in the early to mid 60's, were City of Orange, near El Modena off Chapman Avenue, and Goleta, north of Santa Barbara. These areas were just being developed, so we had plenty of room to roam and explore. (But, as our mother tells us, she always knew where we were!...right lol).

I remember back then of Dave and me watching motorcycles go by and we would talk about owning one someday. Once while walking home from the store, two motorcycles with two riders each, were distracted and crashed (ran into each other) right in front of us. None of the riders were hurt too badly; they all picked themselves up and rode away. While scary, that little incident did not discourage us from thinking about riding.

I joined the US Air Force just two months after graduating from High School. After boot

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camp and tech school, I was stationed at Los Angeles Air Force Station (Now Air Force Base) just a few miles south of LAX.

I had inherited a '63 Chevy Impala 4 door from my older sister, that I had to have the engine (inline 6) replaced and then drove it down to the LA area. After getting the bug to put a V8 in it and after getting it somewhat drivable, I found that I just didn't really know enough about what I was doing and so while it still needed some major engine work done to it, the knowledge and money just wasn't there for me to do it right.

So between that and car insurance, the car was too expensive for my \$300 a month pay check, especially when I was paying \$125 a month for my apt. So no longer able to afford the car, I sold it to a junk yard and put the money toward buying my first motorcycle. (I did see a couple of women and a bunch of kids riding in that car some time after that. The junkyard obviously put a new engine in it.)

My First Two Bikes

Just a few days after my 19th birthday I bought my first motorcycle; a Suzuki Gaucho, which was a street legal 50cc oversized minibike. This was my real first experience with two wheels and a motor.

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I only had a mile or so to ride to work after buying the little 50, but I was never one for sitting still, when I wasn't working I would often ride down along the beach communities. That's one reason I put on 3,000 miles on it in the three months I owned it. And during those three months, I was on leave for a month so I parked the bike in my apartment (it was a good thing the manager didn't find out).

Although it was only 50ccs, I once rode it up to Santa Barbara to visit my sister. Since it was not freeway legal, I had to stay to the highways, so I planned my route appropriately. It took me over three hours to travel the 100 miles to her home. What an adventure.

I decided I needed something bigger, so I talked my dad into co-signing on a loan for me to buy a '72 Yamaha DS7 250cc twin. With that bike I was able to ride it on the freeways.

No too long after buying the 250, I moved out to Hawthorne and then out to Inglewood and had about 5 miles to ride to work. Just riding back and forth to work wasn't cutting it, so again, every chance I had, I would take off riding down by the beaches or riding up to Santa Barbara to visit my sister and her husband.

In eleven months, I put on over 14,000 miles. That allowed me the time I needed to be able to afford a car again, so I bought a '72 Vega GT

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Wagon and several months later I sold the Yamaha and got just enough to pay it off.

It was great having a car, but it didn't take long to start missing not having a motorcycle. I was convinced though, my riding days were not over.

A year and a half later I had gotten married and re-enlisted in the Air Force and was stationed at Mather AFB just east of Sacramento.

Married and Still I Ride

The Marriage Myth: Once you get married, your wife will not let you ride, much less let you own a motorcycle! FALSE...for some of us anyway! Although my wife tried really hard to get me to give up riding several times over the years, it just never happened. I always found commuting on a motorcycle was a good reason to own one.

Chris, my new bride, wanted a car to drive, but I needed transportation back and forth to work. I had once ridden a friend's Honda CB450 and liked it. So it didn't take long to find one, a '71 with just over 9K miles for about \$900. After rebuilding the top end, this bike started my long career of commuting on motorcycles.

During that time, my commute consisted of about 50 miles a day, north on I5 for about 5 miles, then east on SR50 for about 20 miles, to

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Mather AFB (Rancho Cordova area). Since the traffic was moving most of the time, I only had to Lane Share when there was an accident.

I was even able to get Chris to ride with me for a short while, riding all over the Sacramento area. I just loved riding up and down those old river roads with her on the back.

A few months later though, Chris got pregnant with our first son and she quit riding with me. She insisted someone had to be alive to take care of our baby. Although she went on a couple of short rides over the years, that pretty much ended our two up riding for 29 years.

After putting on a little over 4,000 miles on the 450 and since Chris wasn't riding with me, I decided to sell the Honda and get a bike that handled a little better. (The 450 was pretty top heavy)

During a trip to Southern California to visit the in-laws, I found and bought another '72 Yamaha 250 twin that only had about 400 miles on it. I owned it for only about 6 months, but I managed to put on over 5,500 miles. Needless to say, it wasn't all commuting miles.

Just a couple of months after buying the 250, two things happened, we got orders for Germany and our first son was born. Just before leaving for Germany, I sold the Yamaha and I was without a motorcycle again.

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For the entire three years we were in Germany, I wanted a motorcycle, but of course I couldn't afford one. Instead, I bought every motorcycle magazine I could and would read them from cover to cover, dreaming that I would have another bike some day. Those European roads were so inviting and not having a motorcycle for those three years was almost more than I could bear!

You Did What?

When we returned to the states, our orders were for England AFB in Alexandria, Louisiana. I left Chris and the boys (we had two now), in El Segundo, (near Los Angeles) with her parents and I went ahead to the base to find a place for us to live.

Being there alone, I had plenty of spare time on my hands and some of that time I spent down at the local motorcycle dealer. They had a really nice looking '75 Yamaha RD250 twin and I kept trying to tell Chris that I wanted another bike. And every time she would just hit the ceiling along with saying, "we couldn't afford one!" Which of course, she was right.

A few days before her and the two boys joined me, an Airman I knew on base was getting shipped out and had a '76 Honda CB550F that needed a little work and sold it to me for my Pentax camera (with all accessories, it was worth

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about \$300) and a small amount of cash (I think about \$135).

Oh yeah, I forgot to tell Chris about it until after I had picked her up at the airport in Houston. You did what? She was not a happy camper! This was the beginning of Chris's frustration with me and motorcycles. Her thinking (and hoping) was that since I went those three years without a motorcycle, I would be done with them. I think she found out that she was wrong, I wasn't done with them!

Although I didn't have that bike very long, it reassured me that I still enjoyed riding a motorcycle; as they say, "it's in my blood".

About the time our third son was born, I had gotten out of the Air Force and we moved back to Los Angeles.

My brother-in-law's friend had a '68 Ford Mustang that needed a lot of work and Chris talked me into buying it as our second vehicle. So after a year of fixing it up and taking care of a bunch of its issues (like it wasn't running), I had it running pretty good and all it needed was a headliner and paint.

One day a co-worker and I were talking about the older Mustangs and how he was looking for one. I told him I would sell him my Mustang for \$1,000, which he jumped at.

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Back to Commuting on a Bike

I then started a search for a motorcycle and bought a '78 Yamaha XS400 that only had 900 miles on it. Chris later told me that she again hoped I would be done with wanting a motorcycle. That obviously didn't happen. She just couldn't figure out what was wrong with me.

This is when my motorcycle commuting experience really took off. Although we only lived about 11 miles from my job, we lived on the south side of LAX and I had to commute to the north side of the Santa Monica airport.

A short time after buying the bike, I started college, working on my computer science degree. This required me to commute on the motorcycle to downtown Los Angeles and Orange County for classes, adding another 22 miles each time for classes, riding on I10 east bound into LA during the night-time rush hour traffic.

In two short years I put over 14,000 miles on the little 400 and it started showing its age. So I told Chris that I needed something bigger and started looking for my next bike.

I sold the Yamaha and Honda came back into my life in the form of a brand new '83 650 Nighthawk. I picked it up in Pasadena and had Chris follow me home. Later that night, I had to go some place and when I returned, my new bike was wrapped in toilet paper. It was my wife's

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way of telling me she noticed it I guess! I wasn't sure if I should have laughed or cried.

Two reasons I really liked the Nighthawk was the shaft drive and self adjusting valves. I felt like I would be able to spend more time on the road and less time working on it and I was right.

We moved to Palmdale and I had to start commuting down SR14 connect with I5 and then I405, through the San Fernando Valley to Santa Monica and down the west bound I10 for one or two exits. And since I was still going to school, my commute grew to 130+ miles a day. I found that lane sharing on both I405 and I10 (to school) freeways very challenging. You had to develop a sixth sense; quick reflexes, watching the cages around you very closely and being ready to stop on a dime or move to the left or right to avoid hitting one of them around you.

So in four years I had over 74,000 miles on the Nighthawk and then one night coming home from school just outside of Palmdale on Pearblossom Hwy, I was riding next to another motorcyclist and we were both doing about 85mph (speed limit was 55mph), when the Nighthawk's front-end started wobbling.

I tried my best to get it back under control and had slowed down to 65 mph when the bike's handlebars went lock to lock and I was thrown off. I got scraped up pretty good with second

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degree burns on elbows and knees and other minor scrapes and bruises.

The cop that wrote up the accident asked me what speed I was doing, I told him 65mph when I hit the ground. So he just wrote me up for the accident and not speeding. I was honest, I was doing 65 when I hit the ground, I just didn't tell him how fast I was going before that.

The wobble was due to a universal handlebar mounted fairing (called a Vetter Rooster) I had mounted on the Nighthawk a few months after buying the bike. Previous to installing the fairing, I had had the bike up to 105 mph without issues, so I knew it was the fairing. Because right after mounting it, I was racing a Vette behind LAX and when I hit 100 mph, (I warned you there would be times you would think: what was he thinking?) I got into a terrible front-end wobble. I was able to get it back under control after slowing the bike to 55 mph. I found out right after that not to exceed 85mph with it.

The only thing I could ever think of causing the wind speed to exceed 85 mph that night was probably due to a couple of tractor trailer rigs going the opposite direction. Unfortunately this time the handlebars went lock to lock at 65 and I didn't have a chance to recover.

After the crash, Chris decided that motorcycles were not going out of our lives

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anytime soon, so she finally quit bugging me about owning and riding them.

A month after the crash and after settling with the insurance company, I bought a '85 Honda VF700 Sabre (700cc) that had 6,000 miles on it. I added a frame mounted Hondaline fairing that was designed for that bike (it was not a universal fairing) and some Krauser saddlebags.

A year later, I changed jobs and finished school a couple of months after the job change. My new commute was only to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena. This commute allowed me to pick one of two routes during good weather. I could travel south on SR14 then to I5 then east on I210, or I could take off on the Angeles Forest and Crest highways.

Needless to say, I would avoid the freeways anytime I had a chance, and the commuting miles continued to grow. For the four and a half years I was at JPL, two and a half of those years I rode the motorcycle, one of those years I rode in a vanpool and the last year I drove the vanpool.

When I started driving the vanpool, the bike became a luxury and not a necessity. I made the mistake of selling the Sabre. I had put on over 74,000 (mostly commuting) miles in the five years I owned it.

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Six months after selling the bike, I was laid off from JPL and a few months later, I moved my family to San Diego.

I kept getting the bug for another bike, but we couldn't afford one at the time. Since I didn't need one for commuting, I went bikeless again.

The Bike Bug Bites Again

Not quite two years had gone by since moving south, I started another new job. My route was east on SR56 and south on I15 to SR163 and into downtown, near the San Diego airport.

Since I could ride a motorcycle in the carpool lanes I was able to avoid most of the heaviest traffic, convincing Chris I needed to buy another motorcycle. I found a '83 V45 Sabre (750cc), similar to the '85 VF700 Sabre I had sold a few years before.

This commute was only 43 miles a day, but again, it required my lane sharing skills. Rancho Penasquitos (where we lived) was at the north end of an eight mile carpool lane heading south down I15. The carpool lanes used to start just south of SR56, they have since extended it up towards Escondido.

Like most of my jobs since JPL, this one lasted just under two years. Since I was doing shorter commutes and not really needing the

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bike any longer and I got tired of getting wet when it rained, I bought a second car and sold the '83 Sabre to Dave, who had worn out three '82 V45 Sabres with his 160 mile a day commute between Sacramento and Richmond, near San Francisco and went bikeless again. I had added another 24,000 miles under my commuting belt.

Riding, but not Commuting

This bikeless period lasted less than a year, the motorcycle bug bit again. Thanks to the internet, I found a '85 V45 (a 750cc not a 700cc) Sabre with matching fairing and saddlebags. A Sabre set up the way I had been searching for, for years and that many years before, I had only seen in the brochures. The only problem was it was sitting in Canada. And although I bought it in February, I had to wait for the spring thaws in June to go pick it up.

When I bought this bike I decided that I wanted to start riding on group rides, which opened a whole new world of motorcycling to me.

A couple more job changes later (Computer companies, they either died or I came across a better offer) we moved to Murrieta California, which is north of San Diego. Since I was carpooling with Chris and a co-worker, this Sabre was still only used for pleasure riding. Although I did ride it into work a few times, but most of the miles I pilled on it were with the group rides. The only thing this bike ever really needed was a

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better saddle (oh the pain!) and the carburetors rebuilt (it would stall out every now and then). Neither ever happened.

After working on Chris for several years, I was able to convince her to ride with me on one of the group rides. But I found, as Dave did when he rode two up, 750ccs were too small for two people our sizes. (Chris and both had grown a bit since the old CB450 days ☹)

Bigger is Better

Dave bought a '84 V65 Sabre (1100cc), that he really liked, so I bought one a few months later. The bike I bought was located on the East Coast and instead of flying back to pick it up; I had it shipped out here to SoCal.

Not only was the engine more powerful, the bike was bigger as a whole. I was able to ride further distances on it and when Chris was on the back, we had more room and it wouldn't lug down like the V45 Sabre did. Although I kept the V45 Sabre, but it was just sitting in the garage, collecting dust.

It never fails, as soon as a job starts going good... I was laid off (again!) and it took me over a year to find another job. This new job required me to drive north to Redlands/San Bernardino area and gave me a chance to start commuting on the motorcycles again. My commute was about 55 miles one-way and with both bikes

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available, if I was working on one, I had the other to ride. This was working out pretty good.

This commute would allow me to take three different routes; the route I enjoyed the most, before our company moved from Redlands to San Bernardino, was to catch SR79 north, go through the Westside of Hemet, jump off SR79 to Gilman Springs Road to west SR60 and then Redlands Blvd to San Timoteo Canyon Road into Redlands. Or just continue on SR79 and pass through Lamb Canyon to I10 where I would head west to Redlands or San Bernardino.

The last and busiest route of the three was riding over to I215, take it north through Riverside and to I10 east for the first off ramp. The section of I215 between the SR60 merge and the SR 60 I215 split was under construction most of those three years and the lanes were a bit narrow. Until we moved our office to San Bernardino, I avoided the last route as much as possible. After the move it made the first two routes much longer.

Where was this Bike 20 Years Ago?

A few months later, my motorcycling world was changed forever. It all started one day in October, when Dave called to tell me all about his brand spanking new Red '05 Honda ST1300 and said I really needed to look at getting one. At first I couldn't justify it, but after thinking about it, I was able to convince myself that I needed to

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buy one. So a month later I too had a Red '05 Honda ST1300 sitting in my garage.

I didn't ride the ST1300 very much for the first month I owned it. I rode it to the Long Beach motorcycle show a few weeks later, but other than that, I was almost afraid to ride it. I didn't want to get it dirty too soon; besides, I wanted to savor its newness. But after the first of the year, I got my nerve up and started riding it more.

I soon found myself riding it and leaving the V65 Sabre in the garage. Eventually both Sabres were sitting, collect dust in the garage. The more I rode the ST1300, the more I liked it. I found the handling and power were perfect for my riding style!

Switching between the big Sabre and the ST1300 was a real pain for the commutes because the difference in the handling and in the position of the saddles and mirrors, so I quit riding the big Sabre altogether.

Of course everyone is built differently and therefore one bike does not fit all and of course, everyone has their own preferences in what they like for a motorcycle. For me, the ST1300 offered me a number of features the other bikes I have owned didn't have.

Some of these features are a seven gallon plus gas tank that can run almost 300 miles,

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allowing me to commute two days between having to fill up , a full, frame mounted fairing, electric windshield which rises up and down with the touch of a button, so I have plenty of protection from the wind and elements. Along with plenty of storage for all the gear I like to carry. And although it weights in at over 700 pounds, it is still very nimble in traffic. Commuting on it has been a real pleasure.

With riding the ST1300 all the time then, the other two bikes were just collecting dust. I had decided to sale them when I first bought the ST, but I was dragging my feet.

Since I wanted to see my oldest son riding, I sacrificed the V45 Sabre for him by stripping off the fairing and saddlebags (I hated myself for doing that and still do to this day, some 5 years later) and sold it to him. I sold the rack, fairing and bags on ebay, helping offset the price I wanted for the bike. A little over a year or so later, I did the same to the V65 Sabre. I stripped it down, selling everything on ebay and sold the V65 Sabre as a bare bike. Between the two bikes I rode close to 60,000 miles and most of those were not commuting miles!

The Second Accident

One morning while enjoying (enjoying as much as possible that is) the ride into work on north bound I215, traffic was its normal mess and I had been busting traffic off and on. As I

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was approaching Riverside where I215 merges with SR60, the traffic started moving faster and the lanes were too narrow to safely bust them, so I slipped into the number one lane.

I had not been there but a few seconds when the vehicle on my right, without even checking his mirrors, decided that he wanted my lane. He did not even give me time to react, he just abruptly moved into my lane, knocking me for a loop.

The ST and I crashed to the ground and into the k-rail. Thank goodness we were only moving at about 20 to 25 mph, but the accident did cause \$8,400 worth of damage to the bike and \$1,000 worth of damage to my gear.

I did not want them to total my bike, and did everything I could to make sure they didn't. But, in the end, what saved it from a salvage title was the fact the adjuster and the dealer missed a few parts, making the initial estimate lower. If they would have added the forks and the front cowls to that estimate, they would have totaled my bike for sure.

While I did not suffer road rash, like I did with my first accident, I was sore with some good bruises and issues that years later still provide me with some pain while riding.

Yet another job change and my commute went south on me. I'm now commuting down by

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the I5 and I805 split near La Jolla. This commute adds about 130 miles a day. The pits of this commute, requires me to ride within a block of our old house in Rancho Penasquitos. But then, Chris would have a really long commute if we would have stayed there.

After leaving the house, I will usually not see too many cars for the first mile until I get to Winchester Road (SR79). For the next five miles, which are three lanes each direction I come across anything from little traffic, to a lot of traffic. I then get on the south bound I15 freeway which has often been a parking lot from Winchester to the Border Check Point, some six miles to the south. So needless to say, Lane Sharing is a must!

The freeway opens up with a few minor slow downs here and there before hitting north Escondido, where it will slow to a crawl, usually before it merges with SR78. Again it is a parking lot for the next 5 miles or more. In south Escondido, the carpool lanes start and it opens up until I have to exit for SR56 West. There, the freeway is usually moving but sometimes it is not. You pay your money and take your chances.

SR56 west bound can be a parking lot from the time I get on it until I get off at I5 heading south, some 7 or 8 miles away. It is never clear; there are usually at least a couple of miles to split no matter what. That was until I started leaving about 15 minutes earlier, now it's not too bad.

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All in all, it can take me over two hours to drive my truck into work or driving it home. If I hit the same traffic on the bike, it will only take me just over an hour. But if it is raining, forget it, I just take the truck and get in when I get in.

CalTrans is also working on building carpool lanes through Escondido. Once those are completed, I hope to be able to fly through that area. I am so looking forward to it, and hopefully the job will last!

A 100K miles on a Motorcycle?

It has been over 5 years since I bought the ST1300 and have over 100,000 miles on it now. I really wasn't sure I would ever see that many miles on one of my bikes. But the ST seems to be handling the mileage pretty good. I am going to be tearing it apart for some major maintenance soon, but any vehicle with 100K on it deserves some extra care!

This latest commute is one of the major contributions to its mileage. When I started this job just over two years ago, I passed the 50K mark a couple of weeks into the job. And two years later, I passed the 100K mark. So I figure in a couple more years, I'll see the 150K mark. That is, if the job holds out.

With gas prices going up like they are right now, I doubt if I'll be driving instead of riding anytime soon. The only problem with that is

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when you commute as many miles as I do by motorcycle, it tends to take some of the fun out of riding, although, I do plan to take plenty of opportunities to go riding other than commuting.

Like I said, the ST1300 changed my riding forever. I now own a motorcycle that I can jump on and head anywhere I desire to go (as long as I can afford it). Miles are not a problem. I still won't do more than 500 to 600 miles in a day, but at least they are "comfortable" miles!

This bike has also made my commutes more enjoyable (where was this bike 20 years ago?). Now if I could just get more of those cage drivers to either stay home or take public transportation so the freeways will clear up a bit!

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IV Why Do I Commute on a Motorcycle?

How many times have I heard "Isn't riding a motorcycle dangerous?" Folks that do not ride just don't get it! One old saying is to ask a dog why it likes to stick its head out the window of a moving car. There is just something about the freedom one feels when riding!

There are several reasons why I commute on a motorcycle:

- Distance – Office vs. home
- Costs – Operating expenses.
- Faster Commutes – Split lanes or sit in traffic, guess which I prefer.

Distance

You just can't always count on your home and job being close together. My last two jobs have been farther away from my home than I would prefer, but sometimes you just can't be too picky. When we moved to Murrieta on September 11, 2002, (Yeah, what a great day to move) both Chris and I were working a mile from each other in Rancho Bernardo. We were able to commute together and gas was only at \$1.35 a gallon. That lasted less than two years, when I was laid off again. For a year after I was laid off, Chris was still commuting, by herself. But then her

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boss, a Dentist, decided to relocate his office to Temecula, so Chris's commute is only ten miles, although it can take her 30 minutes to make it.

So my first issue with living closer to my work is the fact that Chris's job is close to our home. Second, in Southern California, because of our great weather (little or no ice or snow to deal with, depending where you live.) it is a general practice of many to live an hour or more from where you live and work. The main reasons for this is often homes close to your office (like in my case) are either way too expensive or not in an area that you would want to live or raise your kids. (I'm still wondering why we ever moved to Palmdale). So right there, I have two very good reasons to commute.

Costs

When I started riding a motorcycle 40 years ago, it was for financial reasons; I just couldn't afford a car. After Chris and I were married, I continued commuting on a motorcycle for years for the reason that we couldn't afford a second car.

Even when we moved to Palmdale, the cost of another car was a bit more than I wanted to put out. But when I was caught riding home in snow that first winter, I decided I had to find away to drive once in a while! There are some locations in Southern California that get snow and ice. And that's why I bought a '76 Pontiac Astre Station

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wagon, (similar to the Vegas) to use as a commuter when the weather was not good enough to ride in. This car ran a lot better after pulling that Vega 4 cylinder out and put a V6 in its place, but this time I did the engine conversion right!

Faster Commutes

One thing about riding in California is you get to learn about "Lane Sharing". This practice is known as riding a motorcycle through the gap between the lanes (between the *sides* of the cages) in traffic when the vehicles are either stopped or moving at a snails pace. Please note: the definition of Snails Pace, or speed; is relative to the person Lane Sharing. I'll talk in depth about Lane Sharing later in the book.

Of course Chris would prefer I didn't ride at all, but she understands that I prefer riding a motorcycle for my daily commutes instead of sitting in traffic getting frustrated behind the wheel of a cage. Years ago, when we lived in Palmdale, if I took the bike or the cage, she could tell the difference in my attitude when I got home.

The easy answer to the question, "Why do I commute on a motorcycle?" is because I enjoy riding a motorcycle. The not so easy answer is that I would rather be moving in between the cars then sitting behind them. But understand something; I do not like splitting lanes (Lane

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Sharing), but I really can not stand sitting in the traffic day after day either.

One thing for sure is, if Lane Sharing was not allowed here in California and I had to sit in the traffic like the other 49 states require, why ride? I might as well be comfortable and just take the cage. That way I could be warm and dry during the winter and cool and comfortable in the summer. Of course, I would be spending twice as much on gas, and let's not forget my sanity!

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V Motorcycle Safety

For most, riding a motorcycle is basically easy. The problem lies with the roads, the road conditions and the others that are on the roads that make it a challenge. I feel avoiding injury while riding a motorcycle is your main objective.

Okay, so you go on one or two rides and you came back all intact, and besides a couple of bugs in your teeth, you did not fall or get hurt. Congratulations, in fact, you could probably put many miles on your motorcycle and never get hurt. Many have done exactly that.

Heck, I rode for 16 years before I had my first accident. But when I got to 17 years of riding, I had found out what happens to your skin when rolling around and scraping the ground at 65 mph. As the old saying goes; "There are only two kinds of bikers, those that have been down and those that will go down." Will a little pain stop you from having fun on your bike? Are you ready and willing to take that chance?

Remember the objective; avoid injury. But if you are going to worry about that, can you enjoy riding? If you are not or not sure, then you need to consider what safety aspects of motorcycling you need to think about before you can get comfortable enough to enjoy the ride.

Can you be comfortable riding without riding gear, or can you be comfortable in riding gear? I

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guess you could call this the catch 22 of motorcycling.

For me, riding a motorcycle has always been fun and exciting. Over the years, there have been a number of times when I have had pucker moments! Those moments have made me think "what if..." more then I would like to think about.

I have been blessed though; crashing (except those two times) as I tell everyone, "It is one habit I try to avoid." Another old saying goes; "Don't ride faster then your Guardian Angel can fly!" So maybe someone upstairs has been riding with me.

When I first started riding, safety was a concern to me to some extent since I did wear a helmet, gloves and boots most of the time. The Hurt Report was just getting compiled and not everyone knew that motorcycles were hard to see and the person riding would get hurt or killed when they collided with an object, like a cage or tree.

Well actually we (the riders) did, we just took it for granted, get hit or hit something and you're hurt or dead. But like all young adults that think they will live forever and it will never happen to me.

I know that many may disagree with me when it comes to riding gear, and that is their choice, I have no problem with that. I've been

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down twice, once without a good riding jacket and pants, and once wearing both. Either way it hurts, but road rash hurts a lot and that pain can be avoided! Although, I'll admit that when I am riding around town I might not have my riding pants on, I will have a riding jacket, gloves, a helmet and boots on though. It's called CHOICE, and that is up to the individual.

Riding Gear

I always (almost always) wore a helmet, gloves and boots, but a good riding jacket was seldom something I was able to afford. (Back then pretty much all good riding jackets were made out of leather)

I did buy a leather jacket at one point. But I didn't really buy it so much for protection from the road, but from the weather and elements. And besides, I looked real cool in it! But most of the time, even as late as 2001, I was using any ole jacket I could find to ride in. As long as it kept me warm and/or dry.

Riding pants were something the racers wore on the track. You might see some street guys wearing chaps, but that was it until riding suits became popular in textile form.

I remember one time, back in '73, while riding with some buddies, we took our helmets and our shirts off because it was so hot out. Talk about young and dumb! I got a really good

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sunburn out of it, but I was so lucky that time. If I would have survived a crash, I would have been one heck of a mess!

Early on, all I rode with was an open faced helmets. And on my helmet, I always wore a full face shield (I think they were called a bubble shield) and later on after installing a windshield on the bike, I went to a snap on visor with a ¼ shield. I was just trying to protect my eyes from getting bugs in them. Protecting the lower part of my face was just never really a concern. But not long after buying the 650 Nighthawk, I bought my first fullfaced helmet, a Bell Star II. It was orange and I felt that would help people see me.

I was always a big believer in wearing good gloves (what were considered good gloves anyway) and I felt boots were a must. In fact I started wearing harness boots about the time I started riding. Chris hates my harness boots.

Just before my first accident I had bought my first Shoei Full faced helmet, replacing my old Bell Star II and had bought a new pair of boots. When I hit the ground at 65 mph, my left glove shot off my hand (so much for wearing "good" gloves), but I was only thinking about my head bouncing off the asphalt and getting whiplash, so I grabbed the chin part of the helmet and hung on for dear life.

Not only did this save my neck from whiplash, it saved my hands as well. My left hand

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had a slight scuff mark on the lower right part of my palm and it didn't even break the skin; my right hand didn't have any marks on it at all.

My helmet, boots, ski jacket and polyester pants didn't fair as well. My helmet had three big scrapes front to back (that could have been my head). My new boots were all scraped up and even had a hole in my left big toe area, along with my sock having a hole in it, but my toe was fine, not even a scratch or mark. My ski jacket and pants ripped to shreds and left me with second degree burns on my elbows and knees along with a few other areas of road rash. Needless to say, it hurt getting all the rocks and debris out of my elbows and knees.

What did I learn from that accident? A good helmet, gloves and boots were a must, but a motorcycle jacket and pants were still not top on my list. I did learn that universal, large handlebar mounted fairings were not something I would have again!

Sometime around '01, my youngest son fell on his bicycle and got a good case of road rash. About a week later, a patient of my wife's office walked in with a new textile motorcycle jacket on. My wife talked to him about it and that night told me that I needed to buy one. I took her advice and bought one within a week. So now I had a good motorcycle jacket for the second time in my life.

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But riding pants were still not a consideration. Dave called me one day and told me that he had bought a pair of chaps. My first thought was, "that's nice". But then I decided for warmth, a pair would not be a bad idea. Just before a ride up to Santa Maria in late January, I tried to find a pair of chaps. I was really sorry I didn't look harder to find some because my legs froze something terrible on that ride! Within a month or so I did buy a pair and started using them for my rides.

Even when I started commuting on a bike to Redlands, I was using the chaps for cold weather, but not protection from the road. I rode out for a forum's Ride To Eat (07-07-2007 RTE) in Arizona. The temperature leaving work in San Bernardino was 102F degrees and I hit 110F degree plus, much of the way for the first 500 miles and an hour and a half of 115F heat. I had a cooling liner and mesh riding jacket, but also wore my chaps, finding that the chaps were a great heat barrier. They really did help in keeping the heat from my legs.

By August of '07, I bought a Cortech Riding jacket and the following November I bought a pair of TourMaster's Venture riding pants.

The following April ('08) is when I had my second crash. Even though I was only going 25 to 30 mph, the jacket and pants did their part, I didn't have any road rash what so ever! I did have some bruising and sore spots, but no road rash (the jacket and riding pants took it all)! It

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cost the insurance company around \$1000 just for my gear replacement. The helmet alone, a Shoei Multitech, was \$500.

A new term to introduce you to is ATGATT, which means: **ALL THE GEAR ALL THE TIME**.

I will ride ATGATT anytime I'm commuting or going for a longer (not local) ride. If I'm just riding around town, I won't bother with the riding pants, but I have everything else on. Anytime I'm riding in temperatures above 80, I wear my mesh jacket and remove the panels to my Tour Master Flex riding pants to expose the mesh below. As Tony the Tiger says: "It's great!"

Those pants come in real handy for my commute since it could be in the 50s in the morning for the ride to work and 80s in the afternoon for the ride home.

I just can't say enough about riding in the proper gear. Even though you might be a little toasty, or feel like the Michelin man, when you need the gear, you'll be glad you had it on.

The crotch rocket crowd always says, "Prepare for the crash". They expect to wash out once in awhile on those mountain curves they are racing on, so having the proper gear on is part of their ride.

On the other hand you have the cruiser crowd, they like to have the air blowing through

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their hair. While it might look cool and that, lack of having the proper gear on will mean the doctors will be spending a lot more time on your skin graphs! Now, if you need some old tattoos removed that you no longer want; road rash will do the trick!

Being Comfortable in Your Gear

I'm sure this is one topic most riders don't think about when it comes to gear, of course looking cool is at the top of the list! But being comfortable when riding is just as important as any other part of riding. But getting comfortable on a bike is not always easy to do. Getting too hot or too cold affects your concentration. And anything that can do that is not good.

So you need to pick your gear for your riding. I have a commute of 62.5 miles and in that distance I can see anything from the upper 20's degrees to the 80's, the same day. So I have different gear for different times of the day and year. That is also one major reason I ride a bike that has storage. Saddlebags or and a trunk allows you to carry extra gear with you so you can adjust to the different weather conditions.

I usually carry my rain gear, which consist of a liner for my riding pants and for my mesh jacket, if I'm not using my solid jacket. Some mornings when I leave for work, and if the temperature is below 55F, I have an electric jacket liner and gloves to handle that. Some have

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heated handlebar grips. Which would be nice, but I feel my gloves are enough. I found out just how much I rely on the electric gloves when one of the wires broke in the liner for my right glove while riding into work one morning.

You should find gear that you can use all the time when you ride and remember, you might need to change out during a long ride, so have a way to carry that extra gear you may need to have with you.

Being Seen

Everyone likes to be seen! You go to a party and if nobody said anything to you, you would leave, right?

Well on the streets riding a motorcycle, you are like that invisible person at the party! Nobody will see you! Just ask the little old lady that just made that left turn in front of you! And you say, "But I had my headlight on, how could she not see that?"

What does it take to be seen? Brighter clothes? Brighter headlight? Headlight Modulator? With the way folks drive these days you need every advantage you can get.

As for your gear, a number of my riding buddies, including Dave, have bought the HiVis Yellow riding jackets. And many have bought matching helmets! I have not gone that direction

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yet. Just washing my Red jacket recently and the white areas on it did not come out very clean; I can imagine that the Yellow will not be any better when cleaning it! But, you can see that Yellow coming from a long distance.

Now, let's talk about the bike. When was the last time you really looked at your headlight or another motorcycle's headlight? Most motorcycle headlights I see on the road are pathetic! Unless they are really looking for them, nobody will see them, period! My bike came with 45/45 headlights (two of them) and were totally worthless as far as shining down the road or having someone see me! I replaced mine with Bright White 55/60 and added a headlight modulator and driving lights. With that, the cage drivers seem to see me a lot better, **BUT I'M STILL INVISIBLE TO MANY!**

For those that are not familiar with Headlight Modulators, they are a device that connect to your headlight to make it flash between low beam and high beam. There is also a daylight sensor connected to it so the headlights will only flash during daylight hours. If properly made, they are approved by the Feds in all 50 States. (Although from what I hear, in some States the cops will still give you grief over them)

Now there are a number of forum members that will not use a headlight modulator. They feel that it sends the wrong message to that driver sitting on the side of the road, to go ahead and pull out in front of them. I have had that

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experience a couple of times, where someone thought I was giving them my right-of-way, when I wasn't. But that has never caused any real issues. Besides, you should be watching everyone and always expect them to do the dumbest unexpected maneuver in front of you.

Anytime I'm riding on a surface street and it is daylight out, I will use the modulator. I can not tell you how many drivers I have seen, getting ready to run a stop sign (the old California Stop), slam on their brakes instead of pulling out in front of me.

I also use the modulator when I'm Lane Sharing. I remind myself I'm still invisible, but I'm giving myself a better chance of being seen by cage drivers, and most of those that see me coming will move to the side to let me pass.

Like myself, many have attached extra lights to the front, and some have added lights and modulators to the rear of their bikes, so when they hit the brakes, the brake lights flash before staying on. I added a rear light/brake light LED bar, but not a rear modulator. I think it helps more during the day then at night because I feel my factory rear light is kind of dull.

Being Comfortable on Your Bike

Yet another topic most riders don't think about when it comes to their bikes. It is very important not to just be able to ride your

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motorcycle, but if you are going to spend 30 minutes or more on it at a time, you should think about what can you do to improve your comfort?

Probably one of the first things to think about is the saddle. Some riders are just fine with the way the stock saddle comes from the factory and probably some bikes are fine. So you have to ask yourself, is it comfortable to ride an hour without discomfort? For most, the stock saddles are a joke. If you spend more the 30 minutes to an hour on it, you will be sore.

I made the mistake of using the stock saddle for a weekend ride of 1,200 miles. It was 500 wet miles to Sacramento, then I went on a 200 mile ride with the Pashnit group, then did the trip home of another 500 miles. The trip home was so painful I had to stop almost every hour, sometimes more. Talk about being distracted! By the time I got home I could not sit right for a couple of hours.

The following week, I sponsored a group ride with the Sabmag group. It was just a local ride of about 180 miles or so. My wife even rode with me. We were both a little sore by the time that ride was over.

I had ordered a custom saddle a couple of months before those rides, but it was not finished until a few weeks later, but just in time for our next ride. After putting that custom saddle on for

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that ride, both Chris and I enjoyed the entire ride without TB (Tired Butt) or VSB! (Very Sore Butt!)

Okay the saddle is great now, what's next? If you are like me, I like to sit up a little more while riding like the old standard bikes provided. A cruiser is more like an easy chair when you are riding, where as a Sport and Sport Touring bikes, like my Sport Touring bike, has you leaning forward.

I don't really care for either. So I added what are known as a handlebar riser. Of course each bike is different how the bars are mounted, and I had to buy one of several available for mine. I even bought an updated model, because it pushed me back a little more.

Saddle, Handlebars, we are done, right? Well you might be, I wasn't.

Next on my list was a windshield. The stock shield was a little narrow for me. So I bought an after market shield which I like. Dave on the other hand bought one like mine and didn't like it and went back to stock one. So everyone has to find their own likes and dislikes.

When I was riding my V45 Sabre, I picked up a used Tankbag. What I liked about it, was that I could carry things, like my camera, a bottle of water, etc., in it and not worry about taking up valuable space in the saddlebags. So finding a

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tankbag that would work well with my ST1300 was another task.

The way my bars sit, the tankbag had to be smaller, so I picked up a magnetic mini tankbag. Not long after buying the bag I was on a long trip with Dave and as we were going through a small canyon, a strong gust of wind hit me so hard from the side, it blew off the left side magnet and the bag went against my right arm. After lowering the windshield I was able to regain control of the bike and then push the bag back down to the tank. Distracted? You bet!

After that little adventure, I added a strap to the front of the bag so if anything like that happens again, I know it won't blow off the bike and get away from me!

A bad habit Dave got me into was to listen to music while riding. "Huh? Are you nuts?" That's what I told him when he first told me that he was. Okay, so I went out and bought a CD player that I could mount in the tankbag. I have since bought a GPS that plays MP3s and plugs into my Autocom.

What's an Autocom? It is a device that allows you to communicate between rider and passenger, between two bikes (with a CB or GRS type radio plugged in), it allows you to hook up your cellphone so if there is an emergency, someone can contact you when you are riding.

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The Autocom has extra plug-ins that allows you to connect a radio, CD player or a MP3 player, etc. It is not cheap. But it is handy and makes the commute that much better; because the music helps take some of the stress of the commute off my mind, but I find that it is not distracting where I would endanger myself.

There are other things that you could add to your bike that I won't list, but if you check out the Web Sites for the type of riding you plan on doing, you'll get more ideas then you can shake a stick at.

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VI Commuting and the Weather

You just can't talk about commuting on a motorcycle unless you include the weather. And if you have never ridden a motorcycle in the middle of a heavy rain in Southern California rush hour traffic, you have never lived! But be very careful, or you won't live to tell anyone about it!

Long distance commuting on a motorcycle is a lot different than a ten minute commute or even commuting in a cage. Not only do you have the traffic to battle, you have the weather to deal with as well. Even if you are only going to be a fair weather rider, there are going to be times that you get caught by the weather unexpectedly. That's one reason; I'm always prepared for the weather.

Back in my early years of riding, I got caught in a number of rain showers. The first rain I was in, I was riding the little 50 through the base parking lot and the bike went out from under me. It broke one of the mirrors and my gloves kept my hands from getting cut up as they slid through the glass. (No, I don't count that as an accident, it was more of a tipover.)

Since the Suzuki 50 and Yamaha 250 were my only sources of transportation back then, I got wet many times. I carried my rain gear with me as much as possible anytime it looked like it

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may rain. My rain gear consisted of my Air Force Rain Coat. At least it kept most of my shirt dry.

For years, because I had no choice, I rode no matter what the weather was. I remember many times splitting down I405 with cages on each side and the rain so hard you could hardly see 200 feet in front of you! To stay warm, I found that ski mobile suits were great. For boots in the cold and/or wet weather, I had some big heavy duty rubber boots. For added insulation, my wife made me some thick over socks (I think I still have those floating around someplace). I would use the best gloves I could afford and often, I would still be a Popsicle by the time I got to work, but I was warmer then I would have been with my normal gear on. Besides, I was young and dumb back then and I could handle the cold better then I can now.

When working in San Bernardino a couple of years back, we had one unexpected storm that dumped so much water on the roads; you needed a canoe to navigate them. I tried to ride in it, but I didn't even get a block away before turning around and heading back to the office. I stayed there until the big storm had past. On my route home going south on I215 through Perris and right next to the freeway, a tornado had overturned some train cars. I'm just glad I was delayed for a little bit or I might have been in the middle of that.

Commuting from Murrieta to San Diego, you can never tell what the weather will be 60 miles

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away. I have had to ride home in the rain several times. And believe me, riding in that traffic when it is raining makes me very nervous, not so much from the rain, but from those crazy cage drivers. I do try to avoid riding during the rush hour if it is raining. In short expect the unexpected from the weather and be careful in the rain and traffic.

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VII The Roadways

When my wife rides with me, she hates the freeways, but she is just fine on surface streets, back country and mountain roads. What she doesn't realize (or refuses to believe) is that the surface streets and the back country and mountain roads are far more dangerous than freeways. And the reason for that is obvious; you have more directions for cars or critters to come at you on those types of roads than on a freeway or divided highway.

Surface Streets

While most of my current commute is on the freeways, I still have to cover several miles of surface streets from home to the freeway and a couple of miles from work to the freeway.

Riding in residential areas is often the worse. You never know when a kid or adult will jump out in front of you because they did not see you. I have had many balls come flying out in the street, I have had kids run out in front of me, and people fling open their car doors or just step out in front of me.

And then there are the water hazards, (like on a golf course) at the gutters or intersections. Those always make for a fun slide. I will usually stay upright and go through those carefully.

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Besides the cages and people, you have dogs and cats and other critters to worry about because they will run out in front of you. Some times I feel I'm running an obstacle course trying to get safely to my home in the evening.

Surface streets in commercial areas can be just as bad or worse. I like going out at lunchtime to eat. Most of the folks at the business around here do the same thing. And their minds are on "where should we go eat?" and not on the road in front of them. Pulling u-turns in front of you, hanging a left turn, pulling out from the right, you just never know when one of these things will happen.

During the daylight hours, if I'm on surface streets and the Sun is out bright, I will run my headlight modulator. I find that the modulator actually helps the blind drivers see you. You know the type? Those cages either turning left in front of you or those turning from the stop sign on the right, but they don't stop and just jump right in front of you, making you slam on your brakes so you don't run into the back of them. I know some drivers get irritated at the flashing lights and all, so, depending on the situation, if I'm sitting at a light behind someone, I will turn it off, until we start moving again.

Back Country and Mountain Roads

Very similar to surface streets, back country and mountain roads can be very hazardous,

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although they are probably the most popular to ride on for commuting or just enjoyment!

Again, there are many directions for objects to come out at you. And I'm not just talking about the cages, kids, dogs and cats. Now you have anything from small critters (squirrels) to very large critters (horses, cows and deer) to avoid.

Even critters as small as squirrels can cause you to crash, just ask the folks on the forums, they will tell you all about it. And it seems every year we hear about more and more deer hits. Especially when riding through the mountains.

When I lived in Palmdale and commuted into Pasadena for five years, I commuted over the Angeles Forest and Angeles Crest Highways which are mostly back country and mountain roads. While lots of fun twisties, there were lots of road hazards to watch for.

Late one night coming home, I had a deer run right in front of me and scared me to death. It missed me by only a few feet.

Another time I was heading into work in the morning and noticed a bumper on the side of the road and thought, that wasn't there yesterday, they must have had an accident last night. No sooner I thought that, the front end of the bike found oil on the road and almost slid out from under me. I fought like crazy to recover control

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and found myself in the oncoming lane with a dump truck coming at me (Thank goodness he was coming up hill). I only had time to ride to the shoulder of the oncoming traffic. The look of the dump truck's driver was one of "what are you doing?" He had no idea that I just saved myself from becoming a big delay for him and the cages behind him!

And one of my favorite hazards to watch for is idiot cage drivers that either pass you on blind corners or pass other vehicles on blind corners and are coming at you. A number of riders were killed recently in San Diego from some idiot passing the motorcycles with traffic from the other direction coming at them and caused a car to go off the road, loose control and cross back over into the pack of motorcyclists.

So just a few of examples, and again, as with surface streets, on back country and mountain roads, be very careful or you will become a statistic.

Freeways and Divided Highways

Ah yes, freeways and divided highways. What more could one ask for then to crank it up to about 80mph and feel the wind through your hair?

On freeways and divided highways, unlike the surface streets, back country and mountain roads, you have multiple lanes all traveling the

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same direction and the access to the roadways are restricted so you don't necessarily have the same worry of cages and critters coming at you unexpectedly, well for the most part anyway.

You pick a lane and go! During non rush hour traffic, the freeways can get you from point A to point B in decent time. But during rush hour traffic when you add 500,000 cars on at the same time, you have a problem. Like any roadway, a freeway can only hold so many vehicles before things come to a grinding halt. And this is where the problem with the freeways lies; they are nothing more than big parking lots at those times. Lots of people trying to get somewhere (like to work or home), only to be stuck in traffic.

At least, in California if you are on a motorcycle, you can Lane Share and ride in the carpool lanes without having to pay the fees.

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VIII Lane Sharing or is it Busting Traffic

And talking about slug infested freeways is a great place to explain "Lane Sharing" in more detail. As stated before, "This practice is known as riding a motorcycle through the gap between the lanes (the sides of the cages) in traffic when the vehicles are either stopped or moving at a snails pace."

Lane Sharing is a Commuting Tool and should not be abused; otherwise you'll find yourself lying in the middle of the freeway wondering how you got there.

Is Lane Sharing for You?

You will have to ask yourself, is Lane Sharing for you? It is probably one of the most controversial topics in the forums, right next to using/not using helmets. Most of the forum members that live in California love the idea that they can move through the traffic and not get harassed by every Law Enforcement Agency around. Those that live outside of California see Lane Sharing as a terrible thing and don't understand how we do it! In many in other countries, Lane Sharing is just part of life on the roads.

First off, in the State of California it is **NOT LEGAL, nor is it ILLEGAL**, to Lane Share! So

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while you **do not** have the **RIGHT** to share someone's lane with them, there is no law that forbids it and most law enforcement agencies will not pull you over if you take some caution and Lane Share "nicely".

What do I mean by that? Very simply, if an Officer of the Law does not like the way you are Lane Sharing, they have all sorts of laws that they can slap on you to make your life miserable!

Safe Lane Sharing, What's That?

There are all sorts of myths about Lane Sharing in the Motorcycle World in the Golden State. Where the blame is, is probably on the laws or lack of them. Because like I said, it is not legal, nor illegal. It all boils down to the officer watching you to decide whether to write you up or not, and the judge to agree with the officer or throw the ticket out. It is that simple!

You can be the safest rider out there going between the cages at a speed less than 10 to 15 mph over what the cages are doing and because an officer doesn't like you sharing lanes with the cages, he can write you up for all sorts of things, like (I'm not a cop, I don't have all the technical terms down, so please forgive me) "Unsafe Lane Change", "not enough clearance between your motorcycle and the cage you just passed", "reckless driving", "unsafe speed", etc., and a host of others.

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If you do get a performance award for it, I do suggest going to see the judge; he might be a little more lenient than the officer's interpretation of Lane Sharing.

So, what is **safe** Lane Sharing? Good question, because nobody really seems to know, especially in the State of California. The reason why I say that is because of all the different interpretations I hear from everyone, cops, other riders on what they have heard and otherwise. It seems that every law enforcement agency has its own interpretation also! This makes it even harder to figure out.

And just because you happened to ride behind a motor officer and watched him split traffic, doesn't mean if you were to mimic him perfectly, there is no guaranteed that you will not get a ticket (even by the same officer).

Lane Sharing Myths

So, just how do you know if you are going to be able to Lane Share and not get written up? Let's try going through some of the Myths of Lane Sharing, for starters.

Myth #1 Do not go more than 15 mph above the speed of the vehicles you are Lane Sharing with. This number comes from a number of cops and riders I have talked to or heard say over the years, (and I have heard this since I started

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riding back in '71). I've also heard people say 10mph. This is why I call it a myth!

The main thing here is; you've got to keep your speed down where you will allow yourself enough time to react if a cage makes an abrupt move and/or an observing officer feels is a safe speed for conditions. So a little mind reading is necessary, on your part, reading all the minds of all the cage operators on both sides of that white line you are following and the cop! Keep in mind too, if you are just inches away from the cars you are traveling through, even 10 mph faster might be too fast!

For example, a few years ago, my wife was on the back of my bike and we were heading up Pacific Coast Highway just north of Santa Monica during rush hour. The traffic was so bad and the lanes so narrow, I was doing all of about 5 mph over what the cages were doing, sometimes walking the bike up between them! And some of those cages were determined; I was not getting by them. (All the time my wife was having panic attacks). Well, we made it through and I did not come in contact with any of the cages!

Myth #2 Do not go faster than 35 mph (Traffic at 20mph) when Lane Sharing. I was once told by a San Diego PD Motor Officer not to go over 30mph. About six months later, that same officer told me that if I Lane Shared at all, I would be written up. I contacted the SDPD to find out what gives and basically, they decided their policy is to write you up for Lane Sharing. This

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was about a year ago, I haven't been written up yet. But if I see a SDPD on a bike, I am a lot more careful what he sees me doing.

My suggestion, is don't go faster then you feel comfortable. For me, when an officer is not visible and when traffic is doing 45mph, I'll generally merge back into a lane. If the cages will not allow you to do so (they like to tailgate the vehicle in front of them to keep you from getting in front of them), I will just shoot forward a cage or two until I can find some room in a lane to merge into.

I've heard other maximum speeds from several unreliable sources, so to say if you are doing 30 and the cages are doing 20 to 25, doesn't mean you can't get written up. In general, if there is a cop present, don't do anything dumb.

Something dumb like I saw a while ago. A cop was leading about 4 or 5 of us bikes Lane Sharing through heavy traffic. Once the traffic started moving around 40 to 45, the cop moved over to the right a couple of lanes, as did I since the lane was wide open. The cop was still a good distance ahead of me, but pretty soon, he was out of sight. A few miles down, I could see his blue lights flashing on the shoulder. He had pulled over a motorcycle and it turned out to be the first bike behind the cop while we were Lane Sharing earlier.

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The best I could figure out was once the cop got out of the way, said bike took off going between the cars at a speed greater than the 50 mph the cars were moving at. The cop did not have his happy face on!

One thing that really does bug me is when someone tells me that I should not be going over a certain speed. First, if you are watching the traffic in front of you, are you going to take your eyes off them and look at your speedometer? If you do, you're nuts. When you take your eyes off those in front of you, is when one of them will do something dumb and take you out.

When you are Lane Sharing you need to learn to judge your speed, the speed of the cars vs. your speed etc., **DO NOT GET IN THE HABIT OF LOOKING AT YOUR SPEEDOMETER.** Keep watching those vehicles in front of you! And if you need to look back to see what's behind you (like another motorcycle), just do a very quick glance.

Myth #3 You can not go back and forth across the white line while lane sharing, you must stay on one side or the other. While this is pretty much impossible to do, it is another one of those gotchas for a Law Enforcement Officer. Try following any motorcop through traffic, does he stay on one side of the line. No, he is too busy dodging the inattentive cage operators that are in various parts of the lanes. This is one of the cases that if they did pass a law saying it was legal, that they would have to take into account.

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It is **IMPOSSIBLE** to stay on one side or the other of the white line when busting traffic. Plain and simple! Their excuse is "It's the law!" To me, it one of those laws created for cages, but never considered for a motorcycle Lane Sharing.

Myth #4 If you get in to an accident, it is your fault. Not true! But having witnesses is real handy to have. And you think someone is going to stop for you after you just got through whizzing by them? Maybe they will. When I had my second accident, I had just finished splitting some traffic and moved into an "open lane". I hadn't been there long when the delivery van next to me came abruptly over into me without signal or even looking. Many motorcycle accidents that I know of (unscientific statement) caused while Lane Sharing are often because the cage saw a "open lane" and wanted to get over to it before the cage operator behind, had a chance to close up the gap.

Thus the abrupt lane change. These are usually accompanied with no signal, and not even a look back in the mirrors by the offending cage operator. Of course, the speed you are going and vs. what the cages are doing will be considered by the officer. I was very lucky; I had several people stop for my accident. One fellow (who I wasn't able to thank) stopped the driver of the van that hit me about a 1/8 of a mile down the road. I could never prove it, but I think if nobody would have stopped him, it would have been a hit and run.

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When I first looked down the road after getting up from my tumble, there was a truck parked as it was blocking the van. When I took the picture, that truck was already moved, but I did get a good picture just how far the van had traveled before stopping.

But like any accident, never admit anything other than you were involved in an accident.

Myth #5, It is illegal to Lane Share in a construction zone. When you are in a construction zone, often the lanes are six to seven feet wide, which makes it even harder to slip through. I really don't know the "legal" answer, but again I would have to say it is up to the officer writing you up.

Myth #6 I'm still waiting for this one...

Lane Sharing Suggestions and Pointers

I'm sure there are plenty of other myths, but here are a few thoughts, suggestions and pointers that you should take into account when Lane Sharing:

- How wide are the lanes? I already said something about a construction zone, but how about areas not under construction. I have seen some pretty narrow lanes out there that make it very difficult to Lane Share.

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- How fast the traffic is moving? 25 mph? Lane Share. 70 mph? Just stay put, you don't need to be going through the cages at that speed.
- Keep an eye out for the other drivers as you are approaching their vehicles.
 - Without spending a lot of time observing (remember to keep your eyes on those vehicles in front of you), can you see what the drivers are doing? Drinking coffee, eating, reading the newspaper, shaving, putting on make up, talking on their cell phone and the new favorite, texting!
 - These cage drivers are the ones that will take you out. They are not watching the road, much less you.
 - These are the drivers, IMHO, that actually make Lane Sharing safer for a motorcyclist, then staying in the lane in front of them. Most accidents on the freeways are rear-enders by inattentive drivers. Think about it; are you safer next to them or in front of them? I prefer next to them.
- Watch the gaps the slower drivers are creating. Instead of jumping into those gaps or "open lane", slowly merge into it and then if possible, move away from the lane that has cages in it, to help make yourself seen in the mirrors of the other vehicles that could mistake your lane as OPEN!

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- Try to watch the vehicles out in front as far as you can see, while still watching those close to you. This allows you to make better judgment as you approach two vehicles that are too close for you to pass through or one that is sitting on the line making it too difficult to pass. By looking forward like that, you won't have to lock up your brakes to avoid hitting a cage.
- Because both lanes can be going at different speeds, watch when one lane starts slowing and the other is now going much faster. Merge to the faster lane and stay with those cars until they start slowing or traffic in general starts picking up or slowing down.
- Be seen. Just before my last accident, I had installed a headlight modulator. Although ironic, the guy never looked before he pulled into me.
 - A headlight modulator is great when Lane Sharing. Those that are paying attention will often move away from the white line where I'm heading.
 - But like I said, I wasn't seen when I was hit. You are still invisible, but you do make your chances better when they see you before you get to them instead of startling them as you pass them.
- Don't hit mirrors or kick doors on the idiots that cut you off or refuse to move over to let you by. This is where you need patience!

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- Several years ago, I got frustrated with some jerk that passed me on my left (he was probably doing 100+mph) when I was in the left lane of a freeway doing about 75 (we were in a 65 mph zone). A half of a mile down the road, traffic slowed to a crawl and as I went by him, I lightly tapped his mirror. Watching him in my mirror, I could see him trying to getting around vehicles (we are talking about 3 lanes of stopped traffic). I jumped off the freeway (at my normal offramp) and he continued to chase me for miles trying to run me over. Just when I thought I was rid of him, because of all the traffic I had passed, he would show up again because he kept driving on shoulders and every where else he could until he caught up with me. Finally he tried to block me, but I rode up next to his door and was able to block his door and keep him from getting out. (Blocking a cage door while straddling a 700 pound motorcycle is quite an accomplishment) After some verbal exchanges, he left and I haven't touched a mirror since! (Another one of those moments where you are thinking, "what was he thinking?")
- People do open doors or throw things out, but not necessarily at you. In the 40 years

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I've been splitting traffic, I've only had this happen a couple of times.

- Once when traffic came to a halt, a guy opened his door and threw out his coffee. He did not see me coming up between the cars until I slammed on my brakes and I came to a screeching halt not more than two feet from his face. He turned as white as a sheet and I'm sure he needed to go home and change his underwear.
- Once there was an unusual motion in a car that caught my eye. I could see the driver watching me and the passenger reaching back, getting what looked like a towel and then got ready to snap it at me. I just waited for the opportune time to slip by. The driver was so intently watching me; he almost didn't see the traffic stopping in front of him. As he hit the brakes, he and his passenger were both caught by surprise and I just slipped by.
- People will block you off so you can't get by.
 - Yes, this does happen. I've had a few times where the driver will sit on the white line to keep me from going by him. When it has been the cage to my left, I have been known to cut over and go down their left side and then cut back over to continue to on my way. (I'm very sure if a cop saw me do that, I would get written up for it.)

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- The best thing to do is just be patient, sooner or later traffic will open up so you can get around them.
- Watch for other motorcycles entering and exiting between the #1 and #2 lanes. If you are just getting ready to start Lane Sharing, look in your mirrors for other bikes (while watching the vehicles in front of you for sudden stopping!). If you are exiting, again watch out for other bikes, they could be passing you between the #2 & #3 lanes!
- What happens when you come across a slower moving motorcycle also lane sharing?
 - One thing I do not like is to be following another motorcycle through traffic while Lane Sharing. It's not because I'm a better rider than them either; it is because it cuts down on my visibility of the traffic and road ahead.
 - Sometimes the motorcycle rider in front of you will move over for you, but often I find that either they know you are back there, but they figure that you can just wait for them, or they just never look back to see what's behind them.
 - When the slower rider will not move over for you, whenever you can, try to get in their mirrors. They just might not see you back there. But don't push them too hard if they do see you and

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won't move over. If you are too close to them and they crash, they could take you with them!

- If you know they see you and still will not move over, you have two choices:

First: just sit behind him and see how many other motorcycles stack in behind you.

Second: *NOT recommended! *

Move over between the next set of lanes (#2 & #3 if it is more than 2 lanes in your direction) and start busting the traffic until you have overtaken the other rider and can move safely back between the #1 & #2 lanes. This last suggestion is NOT Recommended and should only be done when really desperate. It is not an action that will get you any pats on the back, might even get you a performance award. Use it as a last resort to keep from doing something dumber!

- What do you do when someone comes up behind you, that would like to pass you?
 - Another thing I don't like is for a faster motorcycle pushing me to go faster. I need to go a speed I'm comfortable

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with. So I will move over and let them by.

- If you are the slower rider, move over for them! The worse that can happen will be for them to go part the cages for you and you'll have a better/wider path.

Lane Sharing done smartly can be a benefit for you and the cages around you, although they might not recognize it as such. But there is one less large vehicle on the road and you are not in their way to get where they are going. There might be lots of cages there, but you are not one of them!

So if Lane Sharing is for you, be smart and enjoy the fact you are not sitting in a cage or on your motorcycle wondering why the traffic isn't moving!

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IX The End, and Your Beginning

I hope you found the information in this book informative, useful and/or helpful.

Motorcycles are a blast when you can enjoy them. The more you can relax and be comfortable (but not too comfortable) while riding, the more you'll find you are in control. Just remember to stay alert and be watching everyone around you that you can and be calm!

If you choose to participate in the battle of the highways during rush hour traffic on a motorcycle, I wish you luck and please be careful out there and remember, ***YOU ARE INVISIBLE AND THEY ARE OUT TO GET YOU!***

And one last piece of advice: go take advance courses any time you can!