

THE OUTSIDE EDGE

times

By: George Tranos



RESOLUTIONS

With 2011 just around the corner, now is the time to start making those New Year's resolutions. How about this year, though, you make one to improve your riding. Here are some things you can do to help.

Get your motorcycle license. Are you serious about motorcycling? If so, having an actual motorcycle endorsement is your first step. It's a fact that unlicensed or improperly licensed riders account for a disproportionate number of motorcycle injuries and fatalities. Taking the time to actually pass a motorcycle road test (or earn your license through a road test waiver by taking a state sponsored motorcycle riding course) will lessen your odds and lower your risk.

Take formal rider training. Motorcycle rider training really does work. Learning to ride properly is like building the foundation to your house with real cement instead of mud. Having that firm underpinning is key to maintaining and improving your hazard avoidance skills. If you've never taken a class, this is the year you should try it. You will be surprised at how much you will learn. More riders crash their own motorcycles because of improper cornering than any other reason. If you don't feel comfortable or enjoy cornering, then you will benefit from formal training. Even if you have taken a previous course, refreshing your skills is important.

Practice your braking, swerving and U-turns. Skills are perishable and must be learned properly and repeated often in order to be "second nature." When a hazard presents itself, riders tend to revert to their training. Practicing the correct response to a hazard will help you avoid that hazard when it appears in the real world. Learning how to brake properly to stop in the shortest distance you can is a skill every rider should have. Knowing how and when to swerve to avoid something is also an invaluable skill. If you don't know how to do this or haven't practiced this in a long time, your risk of crashing when confronted with a bad situation is greatly increased. Practicing and improving these skills can save your life.

Take a defensive driving course. Attitude is important and nothing can help you become a better driver (and rider) than having the right attitude. Knowing and using defensive driving techniques will help you both when in your car or on your bike. Space cushion driving puts space around you to provide more time to react to hazards. Having a strategy to reduce risk will help every time you are out on the road. Successful completion of a six hour defensive driving course will lower both your car and motorcycle insurance, reduce points on your license and most importantly refresh your driving knowledge. Courses are available both in groups and on-line. This is a potential money saver as insurance discounts last as long as three years and will help you further better your survival odds and reduce risk.

Resolve to try something new in motorcycling. Get out of your motorcycling rut and try something new. That may be a different motorcycle, a different riding group or a different place to ride. Test ride a new motorcycle – maybe take a demo ride at your local dealer or at a manufacturer's demo ride tour. Go to a motorcycle rally. Americade is in June in Lake George, New York, and is fairly close to those of us who live in the northeast. There are demo rides, guided and unguided tours, poker runs, bike show competition, great mountain road riding and group camaraderie of being with many other like-minded riders. Try riding a dirt bike or supermotard. Take a weekend trip. Try a track day. Ride a cruiser (or standard). Do something different!

Most of all, make a resolution to just ride more! Nothing improves skills like miles in the saddle. Ride whenever you can. Leave the car home if possible. Get out and enjoy the scenery. After all, riding is why we love this sport so just do it!

Happy Holidays to all from my family to yours!
Hope to see you on the road in 2011.



George Tranos is a freelance writer and photographer. His reviews and stories have appeared in many national publications. You can write him at George@BigAppleMoto.com