

Research shows that alcohol and drugs hinder drivers skills; visual sharpness, reaction time and general awareness.

RIDE STRAIGHT

- The physical coordination and concentration need to ride a motorcycle allow no room for impairment of any kind.
- Even prescription drugs and Over-The-Counter medications can lessen a motorcyclist riding ability.
- Nearly 50% of fatally injured riders are alcohol involved. Drugs, other than alcohol, were found to be involved in a sizable percentage of fatally injured drivers; however, 64% of these cases involved alcohol.
- Good judgment is the most critical skill in motorcycle riding. Judgment is an essential element in the process of preventing accidents. Unfortunately judgment is the first skill affected by alcohol.

Most people ride motorcycles because they enjoy the immediate feedback provided by the machine and the connection with the riding environment. Use of alcohol and other drugs (over-the-counter, prescription, or illegal) before riding a motorcycle compromises the intimate relationship between the motorcyclist, machine, and the road.

There has been a lot of research that shows how alcohol hinders car driver's skills, including:

- **Visual Sharpness**
- **Judgment**
- **Reaction Time**
- **General Awareness**

But what about motorcycle riding skills?

Research also shows that alcohol adversely affects riding skills. Most motorcyclists agree that it takes more coordination and alertness to ride a motorcycle than drive a car. Thus, motorcyclists need the above skills even more than automobile drivers.

Good judgment is the most critical skill in motorcycle riding. Judgment is an essential element in the process of preventing crashes. Unfortunately, judgment is also the first function to be affected by alcohol. This leads to one conclusion: Drinking before riding is a big risk. Using other drugs before riding can also be dangerous and increase risk significantly.

The Effect of Alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant and acts as a sedative to the brain. Although many people feel stimulation when drinking, this is indirect. Even a small amount of alcohol causes depression of those parts of the brain that control judgment, self-control, and inhibition. The release of inhibitions causes the feeling of stimulation. As greater amounts of alcohol enter the system, the parts of the brain controlling coordination and physical reflexes become depressed.

Regardless of the source, when alcohol enters the blood system the effects are the same. One standard size drink whether is a 12 -ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine or a cocktail equals 1 ounce of pure alcohol. Many people think beer contains less alcohol than a standard mixed drink. This is because it usually takes longer to drink a beer than it does a cocktail. And a beer is much more filling. Also, cocktails sometimes are mixed stronger than a standard drink, making them equal to two normal servings of wine or beer.

Different Reactions

Alcohol affects people differently. A heavy drinker may show few physical signs of drunkenness, but the effect on the brain is the same as it is for a light drinker. A motorcyclist showing no outward signs of intoxication may still be unable to ride safely.

A physically large person can have two drinks and only be affected moderately, while a smaller person could become quite intoxicated on the same amount. Smaller people have less blood in

their systems, so after one drink the percentage of alcohol in their blood, or blood alcohol concentration (BAC), will be higher than it would be for a larger person. A BAC of .10 means that the blood system contains about 1/10th of 1% of alcohol. In most states, a person with a BAC of .08 is legally intoxicated; impairment however, starts long before this BAC is reached. Some states have a lower BAC for a motorcyclist to be considered intoxicated.

Once a person's BAC is at any level, it can only be reduced by allowing the liver time to oxidize the alcohol. Showers and coffee don't make you sober. Only time will do that. Showers and coffee may make a person feel more awake, but they don't reduce drunkenness.

Differences between Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol is considered a drug. Although some comparisons can be made between alcohol and other drugs, for the most part alcohol is unique. It is a single substance with a simple chemical structure. Its action inside the body is fairly simple and easy to understand. It's rarely used for medical purposes. And, although it's often abused, it's a legal drug usually approved by society. Other drugs may include many substances. Most are products of modern chemistry. Their action in the body is usually much more complex than that of alcohol. Unlike alcohol, which "burns off" after being in the blood system for a while, other drugs remain in the body for long periods of time. Sometimes a drug's effects may continue after it can no longer be detected in the blood. In other cases, a drug may be detected in the blood after its action has been stopped.

What about Prescription Drugs?

Illegal drugs are not the only ones that can impair your ability to ride a motorcycle. Many prescription drugs have adverse effects on a motorcyclist's riding skills. Even over-the-counter drugs such as cold tablets and allergy remedies can lessen a cyclist's riding ability.

The Effects of Other Drugs

There has been a lot of study done on the effects of drugs on driving behavior, but not much relating drug use to motorcycle accidents. As with alcohol however it can be easily assumed that the adverse effects of some drugs on driving behavior will be magnified when riding a motorcycle. Motorcyclists should be aware of prescription and other over-the-counter drugs that contain warnings to motor vehicle drivers. Even a cold tablet can reduce alertness and perception. Regardless of whether it is an "upper" or "downer" a beer or a shot of whiskey, all drugs have immediate or delayed effects that impair mental or physical processes. They may affect both. These processes are important for all drivers, but even more so for a motorcyclist. The coordination and awareness needed to ride a motorcycle safely leaves no room for impairment of any kind. Who's involved in more fatal accidents involving intoxication – car drivers or motorcyclists?

For Your Information

The proportion of all motor-vehicle drivers involved in fatal accidents who were legally intoxicated (BAC of .08 or greater) dropped to 24% in 1989 – a decline of 20% over the past decade. Unfortunately, the proportion of motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes while legally intoxicated has remained relatively constant at about 40% over the past 10 years. Alcohol accounted for 41% of all traffic fatalities over the past 3 years.