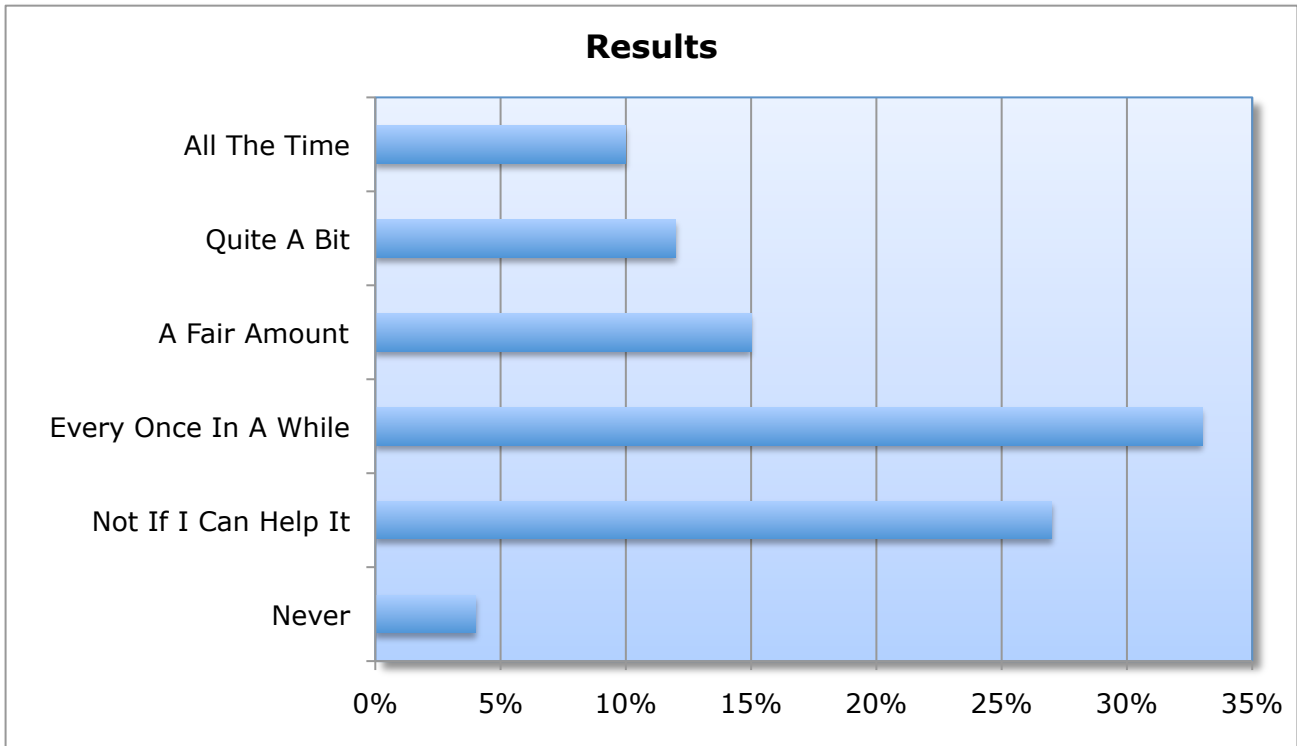


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Night Riding

I. So, the poll question was this...

"Do you ride at night?"



(2008 Poll conducted by Axis Safety Consulting - 1000 respondents)

It's interesting to note that over 60% of the respondents reported that nighttime was not when they preferred to ride. And over half of *them* would rather have a root canal than venture into the night. But let's face it, there are going to be times when riding at night (or in low visibility conditions) is unavoidable. Because conditions are ever changing, never assume you won't have to eventually ride in less than perfect conditions. Who knows when you might get caught out in a rainstorm...or some unforeseen circumstance requires you to ride at night?

Believe it or not, night riding is one of the most enjoyable experiences you will encounter on your motorcycle (e.g. starlit sky, full moon, cool breeze, etc.). That being said, night motorcycle riding can also be an extremely hazardous activity, mainly because it is difficult for some motorists (a) to see you and (b) to respond by avoiding you.



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As Jack Dempsey used to say, "Your best defense is a good offense." In this case it means you should ensure that you visibly *stand out* from your surroundings.

The most common cause of accidents and death for riders is a motorist turning left into the pathway of the biker claiming he *never saw* the motorcycle. Rear-end collisions and collisions at intersections are other common accidents where motorists *not seeing* the motorcycle is also a major factor. According to the US Department of Transportation, motorcycle accidents are more likely to occur while riding at night (60% of all motorcycle fatalities occur after dark).

II. Safety Risks

Riders are more at risk of a fatal accident at night than other motorists. Much of this has to do with the fact that motorcyclists are considered very vulnerable road users and are more likely to be injured in accidents and by road hazards.

If you decide to ride after dark, consider the following risks that can seriously interfere with your safety:

Drunk drivers and distracted drivers:

Intoxicated and inattentive drivers may swerve or otherwise drive unpredictably, creating a distraction and danger for you. Stay well away.

Lower visibility:

Motorcycles have smaller headlights and running lights, making them harder to see at night. And because visual acuity and depth perception decrease as the sun goes down, you may have a more difficult time judging the safety of the road ahead.



Animals crossing:

A motorcyclist who hits an animal crossing the road, such as a deer, is more likely to be critically injured than an automobile driver is.



Safety comes through your increased visible road presence. Even though your bike is about 1/10th the size of a typical SUV, there are some steps you can take to increase your road signature to something much larger. It's a proven fact that larger vehicles are easier to see and avoid.

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III. Preventative Measures

Here are a few safety precautions that can help you to be more easily noticed and lower your risk of an accident at night:

Wear bright colored clothing:

Those black leather jackets look good in the day, but for the night, you might want to consider wearing something bright that catches the eye.



Reflective clothing, gear and graphics:

Wear reflective clothing (e.g. a reflective vest or jacket) when riding at night so other drivers can see you more easily. Reflective strips and graphics can be purchased at most motorcycle stores and placed on bikes, jackets and helmets.



Don't speed:

Speeding decreases your ability to stop suddenly or safely swerve around an obstacle. Follow the speed limits and slow down if your visibility decreases (especially if the road narrows or curves).

Avoid unpredictable vehicles:

If you see a car swerving, driving without lights, braking for no reason, or straddling the lanes, the driver is likely drunk, sleepy, or otherwise distracted. Keep your distance.

Using your lights at night or low visibility:

- Always use your high-beams unless you are in a well developed area, following another vehicle, approaching an oncoming vehicle, or passing another vehicle.



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- On empty roads, especially outside the city, bright lights increase your visibility and allow you to see any obstacles that may be ahead, including cars without lights or animals crossing the road.

- Consider adding dual running headlights to your motorcycle. Three properly aimed headlights are much more noticeable than a single headlight.



- Clean your headlight frequently, as more than 50% of your beam can be diluted by dust and dirt.

- Check before every ride to make sure that all lights are working (front, side, back, and brake).

- Make sure that your headlight is angled as high as your state allows. This ensures that your light(s) shines at the appropriate height for other motorists to see you.

Note: Avoid tinted visors and goggles at night.

IV. Tips

To maximize your safety, make yourself and your bike as visible as possible (in other words, make your presence known). Here are a couple of suggestions that will help.

- Ride near the center of the lane when practical. This is where you are best seen. Riding on the edge of the road causes you to blend in with the street lighting. (Caution: Riding in the center of the lane can be problematic as it's usually the dirtiest and most slippery part of the road.)

- Always give yourself plenty of room when passing other vehicles traveling in the next lane in case they decide to change lanes while you're passing. This will give you more time to react. Never ride in their blind spot.

Hope this helps.