

WIPEOUT at 75 MPH



By April Phillips

Aviation Structural Mechanic Third Class Justin Clark, stationed at Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 116, was like a lot of young Sailors and Marines who purchase motorcycles. He wanted to go fast. In March 2007, he bought a motorcycle that could help him accomplish that – a used Suzuki GSXR-750. He had no past experience with motorcycles, but he got a loan from the bank and was able to purchase the bike. The very next day, he was out on the roads and logged a hundred miles.

One thing Clark didn't have was the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Basic *RiderCourse* under his belt. He thought it would be a hassle to take the course and figured he could learn on his own.

"A buddy of mine found out I'd bought a bike and called to see if I wanted to ride," he said. "He didn't know that I didn't know how to ride yet, and I didn't tell him."

Clark, who is stationed in Point Mugu, Calif., soon found himself riding down the scenic Pacific Coast Highway.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'Man, this is amazing!' I had never done anything like that before," Clark said.

With speeds creeping up toward 150 miles per hour, Clark was finally experiencing the adrenaline rush he was hoping for. However, he got more than he bargained for when he drifted across the centerline into oncoming traffic. Clark said he'd been going into a sharp curve at 90 miles per hour and had only slowed down to about 75 when he swerved into the shoulder and lost control.

"It happened so fast," he said. "I did a bunch of flips

and rolls, and the next thing I knew, I'd landed against the side of the mountain," he said.

Clark got up immediately, and at first, he thought he was ok. Actually, he was in shock, but he refused an ambulance ride.

"I hadn't completed the safety course, and I knew it was a requirement. I didn't want anyone to find out," he said.

Clark and his friend loaded his bike onto a truck, and that's when the full extent of his injuries hit him. He felt a little woozy and decided to go to the hospital after all. He had a nasty gash in his arm that needed to be stitched up, but thanks to the fact that he was wearing all the required personal protective equipment, Clark had no serious injuries.

His cuts and bruises stung, but so did the price tag for getting his bike repaired. He paid \$4,000 to buy the motorcycle and had to pay an additional \$2,000 to get it back in good working order.

The accident didn't keep Clark off his motorcycle, but it did make him a lot smarter about how it went about riding it. He did what he should have done before he even purchased his bike and took a motorcycle-safety class.

"I learned a lot of amazing things," he said of the course. "I think everyone who rides or is thinking about riding should get the safety course completed."

Clark said he rides his motorcycle every day, but since the accident, he's learned to keep his need for speed in check. He wants to take more advanced rider courses and plans to take his bike to the track next time he feels the need to go fast. ■