

The Lure of a

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Motorcycle advertisements are hitting their target, as evidenced by those Sailors who flock to local dealers to purchase one. Unfortunately, some who buy motorcycles aren't really prepared for two-wheeled transportation.

In FY2004, the Navy had 25 motorcycle fatalities, four total disabilities, two partial disabilities, and 51 Sailors with major injuries (missed five or more workdays). The previous fiscal year's totals were 23 motorcycle fatalities, one total disability, two partial disabilities, and 49 Sailors with major injuries.

What do these statistics say to me? When you're in a motorcycle crash, it's either very minor, or it's fatal. Given that fact, every Sailor who rides a motorcycle or is thinking about buying one should be aware of the risks and the rules that apply—some are common sense, but others are Navy law.

To obtain a base decal, a motorcyclist has to be licensed, must have insurance, and must have graduated from the Navy's motorcycle-safety course. The bike also needs to be registered and to have a valid safety inspection.

Sailors who operate motorcycles—on or off base—have to meet the requirements outlined in OpNav Instruction 5100.12G (Navy Traffic Safety Program) for standard dress. They must wear a DoT-approved helmet, long trousers, long-sleeved shirt, full-finger gloves, hard-soled shoes (with heels that protect the ankle), protective eyewear, and a reflective vest. These rules are not negotiable, and failure to comply can spell disaster for your health, life or military career. If you disregard OpNav Instruction 5100.12G and are involved in a motorcycle mishap, you can be charged with

failure to follow a general lawful order (Article 92, UCMJ). Also, if you're injured and require convalescent leave, that time can be added on to your expiration of active obligated service.

"How would the Navy know if I broke the rules?" you may be wondering. It's really quite simple. Navy Shore Patrol monitors all police-radio traffic and is notified anytime a service person is involved in a mishap. Shore Patrol responds and files a preliminary report that indicates whether a motorcyclist was wearing the required safety equipment. Every motorcycle crash involves a line-of-duty misconduct investigation, and one of the determining factors is whether the motorcyclist was complying with OpNav Instruction 5100.12G.

My goal isn't to alienate those who own and operate motorcycles. I'm confident most handle the machines safely. Every once in a while, though, I read a report that makes me shake my head in disbelief. For example, a Sailor was traveling an interstate highway going 115 mph. When he started to pass an SUV, he misjudged his speed and distance to the SUV and hit it. That Sailor isn't with us today.

Before you hop on your bike the next time, I urge you to think hard about what could happen. You may be a great driver, but are you willing to bet your life on the skills of all the drivers around you? While you never can eliminate all the risk that comes with riding a motorcycle, you can reduce the danger by being smart. ■

