

A Ride in the Country

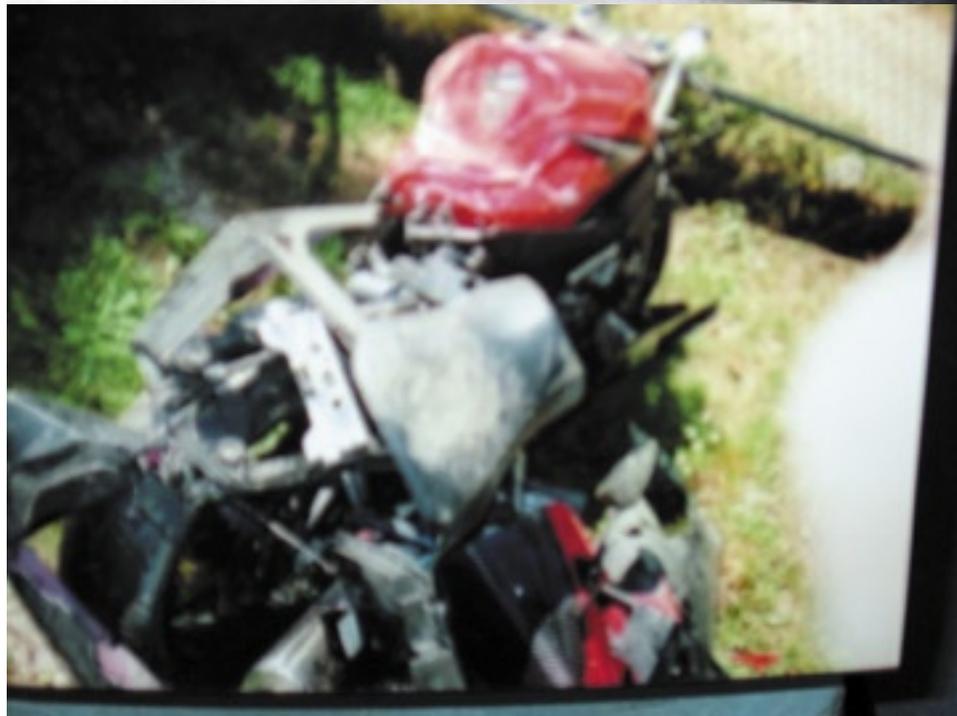
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There I was, waiting for the post office to open on an absolutely beautiful day in Washington. The plan was to pick up some parts (a carbon-fiber windscreen and titanium racing exhaust) I recently had ordered, fix my motorcycle, and then go for a ride.

We just had returned from work-ups the previous day, and I was anxious to enjoy the nice weather since we only get a few good, dry months a year. At exactly 0830, the post office opened, and a few moments later, I was on my way home to install the new parts. In another hour and a half, the job was complete.

I decided to run some errands and to find someone to join me for a ride. About 1100, I headed to a friend's house to see if he was interested. We both decided on a route and agreed I would follow him, since I was unfamiliar with the area. We left his house at noon and rode until my fuel light came on before stopping to fill our small 4.5-gallon tanks and to get some water. We chuckled at a newspaper article we saw at the gas station about a guy on a sportbike (like the ones we had) riding a wheelie somewhere in the Seattle area.

Once we were hydrated and our tanks were topped off, we headed toward Darrington, where we planned



Before and after shots of the bike.

to grab some food before heading back to Oak Harbor. The ride so far was going smoothly. We had hit some winding sections of road, as well as a couple straightaways, all the while maintaining the posted speed limit.

A few miles outside Concrete, we ran into a little traffic but were OK until we tried to pass a green truck that constantly was speeding up or slowing down. Each time we tried to pass, he would turn on his left-turn signal and take up both lanes. We eventually came to a section of road where we could pass.

I was ahead of the truck when I checked my mirror and turned my head to see if I had enough space to move over. I had the room, so I turned on my blinker and changed lanes while going 60 in a 55-mph zone. The next thing I knew, the bike started going down. I turned loose of the handlebars as soon as I realized there would be no recovery—a decision that probably saved my life. I rolled and slid about 40 feet, got right back on my feet, and went to my bike, which had wedged under a guardrail.

The next thing I knew, the bike started going down.

By this time, people had stopped, except for the guy in the green truck I had passed. Witnesses told me the truck took off after clipping my back end. After repeatedly having to tell people I was OK, I finally realized why they kept asking about my condition. My jeans were ripped open all the way down my left leg, and I had severe road rash. My left arm also wouldn't move for a spell, so I needed help removing my jacket. About the time I was able to move my left arm again, my buddy returned. He finally had noticed I wasn't following him any longer. Once at the crash site, he started picking up debris from the road.

It was when the ambulance arrived and the adrenaline had worn off that I realized I couldn't put any weight on my right foot. Another problem was blood gushing from a cut on my chin (caused by the chinstrap). Doctors at the hospital put stitches in my



The victim's road rash.

chin and cleaned the road rash to my left leg, left and right hips, and the outside of my right hand.

In talking to a state trooper, I learned that all the witnesses' stories had been the same and that this case probably would be ruled a felony hit and run. He said I had been doing everything right, including wearing all the proper PPE.

What did I learn from this incident? First, you can have an accident, even when you're doing everything correctly. I had taken all the proper classes, had all the appropriate documentation and insurance for riding my motorcycle, and was riding conservatively. Second, wearing the proper PPE can't be over-emphasized. You would be reading a very different article if I hadn't been wearing all the required safety gear. My initial investment in quality equipment more than paid for itself, given my lack of serious injuries in this crash.

Finally, we should have pulled over, taken a break, and let the guy in the truck put some distance between him and us. He obviously was having some issues with our trying to pass him. Although we had the laws and rules of the road on our side, we were vulnerable to his angry driving.

Thanks to having full coverage on my bike, it's now time to get a new one. ■

For more info, go to: <http://www.drdriving.org/>, <http://www.aaafoundation.org/quizzes/index.cfm?button=aggressive>, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/media/ashore/issues/Summer02/howtoavoid.htm>, or <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/outreach/dsweek/rage.htm>.