

A Simple Ride in the Desert

By AT2 Jake Dobbs

One beautiful September day in Nevada, my friend and I decided to go motorcycling. Looking for that mental release from the pressures that come with an air-wing detachment to Fallon, we borrowed motorcycles and protective gear from some squadronmates. Fortunately, their gear fit us perfectly. Unfortunately, it's the only thing that went right.

My riding partner was inexperienced and unfamiliar with the area, so we decided to take a slow and relaxing ride over the mountains and into the foothills. First, our plan was to pick up oil for the motorcycles' 3,000-mile change and then return.

As we left the curve-filled portion of the ride, my friend and I entered a section of straight road, grinning. I noticed the local speed limit sign read 35 mph, so I glanced down at my speedometer and it read 33 mph. Just as I looked down, I felt a slight bump, and then the rear tire began sliding to the right. I jerked back to avoid hitting my friend, not realizing that I just had hit a rabbit. I should explain here that, with a 155-pound rider and a max weight of 300 pounds, the 160 bhp available on the rear wheel of the 2002 Yamaha R1 often causes it to become a unicycle. As the rear tire slid off of the dead rabbit, the tire gained traction and caused the bike to show its unicycle-like tendency. I tried to control the bike, but it just kept coming over backward until the tail section dragged on the asphalt. In hindsight, I realize I should have used the rear brake to bring the nose down.

As I flew off the back of the bike, my head bounced off the ground, and I remember thinking, "Wow, that was like hitting my head on a pillow!" The Shoei helmet was well worth the \$650 my friend had spent. What a great buddy!

As I slid across the pavement on the borrowed leather jacket and the butt of my "Lucky" brand jeans, I watched the bike flip over and slide across the oncoming traffic lane into a gravel ditch. About that time, my feet came over my head, causing a series of summersaults. After about three or four flips, I finally came to a stop on my feet and gave my partner a "thumbs up" to let him know I was OK.

I then made my best attempt to run across the street to examine the bike but could manage only a weird hobble. My riding partner came to a stop with his jaw hanging out from under his helmet and helped me pick up my bike off the gravel. We lifted the mangled bike and noticed the engine's "life blood" pouring out onto the shoulder of the road. I couldn't help but think that there were much easier ways to remove the oil from an engine! Of course, it could have been my life's blood leaking out of my body.

I then had to make the worst phone call ever.

"Hey buddy, I wrecked your bike," I told my friend.

"Stop playing!" he screamed.

"I'm serious, and we need a trailer," I managed to respond.

I'm sure you can guess where it went from here. When all was said and done, I ended up with a sprained wrist, sprained arch in my left foot, a few bruises, and some road rash—no bigger than a silver dollar.

Despite my minor injuries, I did some significant damage to my friend's bike. Even with that, the results of the accident were as good as could be expected. In fact, the only reason I'm writing this article from my work center and not from a hospital bed is that my friend bought high-quality safety equipment, which happened to fit me properly.

Even on the best of days and the nicest of roads, accidents can happen. Even if you obey all the rules of the road and use all safety precautions, other vehicles, pedestrians, or suicidal rabbits still can turn a pleasurable ride into a rotten experience. You can help yourself with the right helmet and durable, protective clothing. 

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Motorcycle mishaps are on the rise. As of early January, the Navy had doubled its limit for the entire year, and the Marine Corps isn't far behind. Too often, speed, fatigue, alcohol, or the lack of training, experience or safety equipment cause mishaps and death. This Sailor had all the proper safety courses, PPE, and documentation to ride a motorcycle. However, he failed to expect the unexpected, and his quick glance at the instruments couldn't have come at a worse time. Sounds like that rabbit must have been a jackalope to get that bike to pop a wheelie.—Ed.