

Crashes Don't Care About Rank

Everyone Benefits from Training

By April Phillips

Rear Admiral Christopher J. Mossey, Commander, Naval Facilities Atlantic, has been riding motorcycles for a long time. He first began learning how to ride in high school, and when he was a sophomore at Cornell University in upstate New York, he bought a brand new 1979 Honda Hawk. He zipped around campus and even took extended trips in the cold to visit a girlfriend 90 miles away. He thought he knew plenty about riding, but when he was commissioned into the Navy in 1981 and then stationed in San Diego, he wasn't allowed to ride on base because he didn't have a documented training course.

"San Diego was the perfect climate to ride a motorcycle, and I planned to ride it to and from work, so I had to take an MSF course. I'd been riding for three years in college, and I thought I knew all there was to know about motorcycle safety," Mossey said.

He sucked it up and took the course, and he said it surprised him.

"I became a much safer rider," he admitted. "Just because I could ride a bike and drive a manual car didn't mean I could safely ride a motorcycle."

He learned that most accidents happen at intersections and that the motorcyclist is often not at fault.

"A lot of drivers don't see you. They're not expecting to see you, so you just don't register. They're expecting a big blue minivan, not a motorcycle," Mossey said.

Now he has the opportunity to pass the wisdom of his nearly 30 years of experience down to a junior officer – his aide, Lt. Jennifer Steadman-Murphy. When Murphy was deployed to Sasebo, Japan, last year, her name was placed into a raffle when she contributed to the Combined Federal Campaign. Her name was drawn, and she's now the proud owner of a new Harley-Davidson Sportster.

A Harley Sportster is a dream bike. Many motorcycle enthusiasts salivate at the thought of hopping on and twisting the throttle, but Steadman-Murphy has kept a level head.

"It's delayed gratification. I go look at my beautiful, shiny, red motorcycle, but I'm not legal," she said.

Steadman-Murphy rode motorcycles briefly when she was in college, but several people she was close to were involved in accidents—one was killed. It was enough to make her stop riding for awhile. When she got her new Harley back in October, she said she was excited about riding again but smart enough to realize that she wasn't ready to just hop on and ride off into the sunset. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation always stresses that skills are



perishable. Steadman-Murphy had never been a really confident rider to begin with, so she knew she needed training before she could ride safely, not to mention legally.

"I haven't ridden in so long that, by now, I'm a rote amateur, and I treat myself that way," she said.

Even though her job as Mossey's aide keeps her busy and traveling all over the world, Steadman-Murphy decided to hold off on riding until she is able to enroll in not one, but two safety courses. The first she plans to take is through the Commonwealth of Virginia. For this, she will ride a small loaner bike and relearn the basics of motorcycle operation, such as clutch and throttle techniques and cornering and braking. She'll get licensed through this course, as well. Since she's changing duty stations soon, Steadman-Murphy signed up for an MSF course that she'll take on her Harley once she moves. It doesn't hurt one bit that her new duty station is in Hawaii – the perfect place for motorcycles. Her husband, who has taken both the Virginia and Navy MSF courses, has already left for Hawaii and took the bike with him.

"It's there for him to ride and maintain. He's taking good care of it," she said.

Mossey and his aide have had plenty of opportunities to talk about smart riding, including personal protective equipment. Both have chosen to wear full-face helmets.

"You don't get bugs in your teeth," said Steadman-Murphy. Mossey agreed.

"If you get hit by a bug when you're driving down the highway, it hurts!," he said. "Also, I wear contact lenses, and the full-face helmet blocks the wind and doesn't irritate them."

All this talk has Mossey ready to get his motorcycle out of the garage and back on the highway. He's kind of partial to his bike. He's still riding the same 1979 Honda Hawk he bought in college nearly 30 years ago. ■