

What Can a Few More Laps Hurt?

By AME1(AW/NAC) Lance Scott, VQ-4

Assignment in Oklahoma means I have a choice of several local motocross tracks. One beautiful Sunday morning, my friend, Josh, and I unloaded our bikes and got ready for a perfect day of riding.

The track had been groomed, and the water truck was watering a few dry spots. The faces of the jumps were nice and sharp, and the berms were loamy. The only thing missing on the track was me.

After the water truck had pulled off the track, every rider was cleared to enter. I finished putting on all my protective gear (motocross boots, pants, jersey, gloves, helmet, and goggles) and was ready to hit the track. I took a few laps to get the feel of it, then decided to pick up the pace. I started taking some of the jumps—nothing I wasn't accustomed to—the occasional tabletop and a few of the doubles.

I rode for a few hours before taking a break for water and a bite to eat. It was as another satisfying day at the track was coming to an end that my decision-making faltered, and I decided to take a few more laps. I already was tired from riding all day and felt a little sore from the workout.

While coming out of a turn, I shifted up to third gear, grabbed a handful of throttle, and twisted it so I would have enough speed to clear a double and not "case it" (land on the peak of the second jump). My plan didn't work out as I had hoped. I came up the face of the jump with the throttle pinned, causing me to inadvertently wheelie out about 12 to 15 feet in the air. At that moment, I realized there was no way I could save the landing. I decided to bail off the bike and to take my chances with the ground.

I landed straight on my left leg. All the forward momentum I carried caused me to tumble forward, head over heels. I finally rolled to a stop and crawled off the track. The rider behind me stopped to ask if I was OK. I said I was, but my left ankle was throbbing. Josh rode over and asked what happened. I briefly told him the story, then he went over and checked the damage to my bike—it looked promising, with the exception of the mangled handlebars.

We rode back to the truck and headed to an emergency room for what turned out to be a three-hour



Photo by LCpl. Ryan Walker, USMC

visit, with multiple X-rays. I was discharged later that day with a severely sprained ankle and broken big toe. When I returned to work on Monday, I was downed from flying for a month and bore the brunt of some jokes from my fellow flight engineers.

What can we all learn from this incident? First, always wear the proper safety equipment. Had I not been wearing mine, the results would have been a lot worse. Second, don't ride above your limitations. Know what you're capable of doing and stop there. Finally, when you're tired, call it a day—there's always next weekend. Make risk management an integral part of everything you do—at work or at play. ■

As I read this article, I couldn't help wondering if the rider had completed the required motorcycle-safety course before riding his bike. Dirt-bike riders often fall through the cracks because their bikes usually don't have to be registered, but that fact doesn't excuse them of their responsibility.—Chuck Roberts, head, traffic & off-duty recreation safety division