

Riding a Motorcycle "Under the Weather"

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It was a gloomy day in Southern California. I was at the end of my sea tour, and my roommates were moving out of our Thousand Oaks bachelor pad. The last one had gotten orders to England to work with our trusty Brits, and he needed my help because he couldn't wait for the movers to pick up his motorcycle at home for shipping.

My friend had sold a Harley Night Train to a police officer in Texas, but he planned to ship his newest Harley, which he had acquired during our most recent WestPac deployment. I volunteered to ride his bike to the base at Pt. Mugu in the morning so the movers could pick it up there.

When I left the house at 5 a.m., it seemed like another great day in the suburban Los Angeles area—a perfect morning for riding. Once I headed toward Pt. Mugu, though, I realized the weather was cool, and a lot of moisture was in the air.

I leaned into a turn atop the western edge of Santa Monica Mountain and started down the hill. From this point, I usually could see what the weather was like down in the valley. Because it was mid-April and 5 o'clock in the morning, however, I couldn't see below the mountain toward the coastline.

Down the hill I went, with the moisture getting thicker as I descended toward Pt. Mugu. I knew I was in trouble when, halfway down the hill, the fog hit me in the face like a blanket. My helmet visor started picking up so much moisture I couldn't see anything. My breathing also was picking up under this stressful environment. I had to use my leather

gloves to wipe off excess water droplets from my shield—a process I had to repeat several times during the next five minutes, which was how long it took to reach the bottom of the hill.

The fog wasn't getting any thinner. In fact, it was so thick I couldn't see more than 25 feet in front of me. I finally had to raise my visor and ride bare-face into the wind. Many thoughts crossed my mind: What if a rock hits me in the face? What if a driver behind me doesn't see my brake light? I'll have to lay the bike down on the side of the road and may suffer massive bodily damage from serving as a speed bump. I crawled my way into Pt. Mugu at about 10 mph and got to the hangar in 50 minutes, instead of the usual 25.

The fog lifted at noon, and the movers arrived soon afterward. Only a few water spots remained as they packed the bike.

From this incident, I learned it doesn't pay to be cheap when it comes to motorcycle-safety gear. If you can afford to spend \$1,500 on leathers and boots, go the extra mile and spend \$20 for anti-fog-film inserts that mount to the inside of your face shield. They are a permanent fix for misting visors. I also should have called the assistant squadron duty officer before I left the house and asked for the current weather observation. In other words, I should have used risk management.

It's dangerous to ride a motorcycle "under the weather." Always expect the worst, and be prepared for whatever Mother Nature throws at you. Stop if you feel the need—so you can live to ride another day. ■