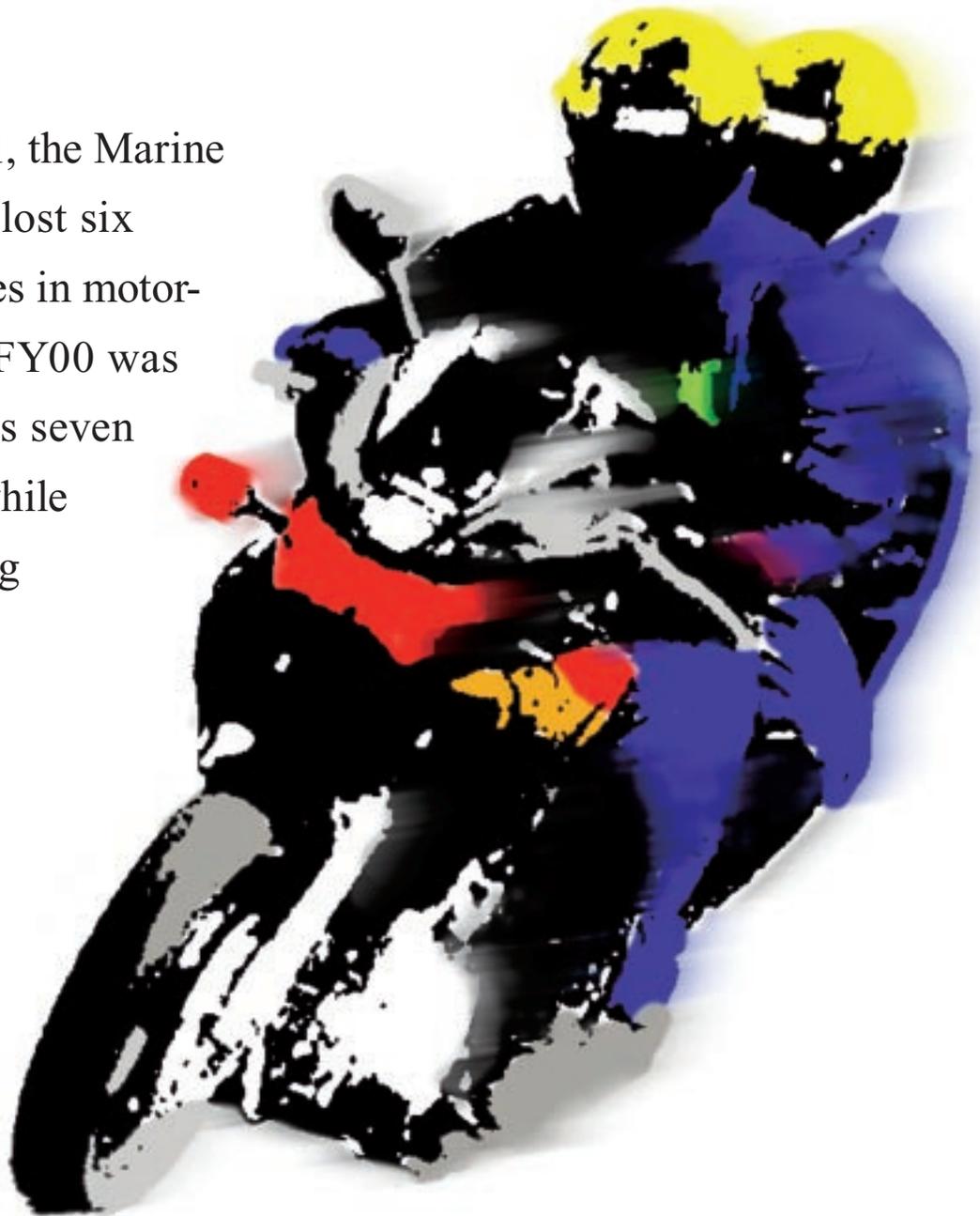


# The Borrowed MOTORCYCLE

*By Lynn Blevins*

**I**n FY01, the Marine Corps lost six Marines in motorcycle crashes. FY00 was a worse year, as seven Marines died while driving or riding motorcycles.



Marines riding motorcycles are 16 times more likely to die in a mishap than those driving or riding in cars and trucks. Personal protective equipment (PPE) plays a key role in survival. Nearly one-third of motorcyclists wearing helmets survive crashes. Research shows that a rider's judgment and visibility is critical to arriving safely to his destination. Definitely, there is a continuing need for rider education.

Why do Marines ride motorcycles? Motorcycles are fun to ride. Owning and riding a bike gives a "cool" image—one that impresses friends—and many Marines enjoy the thrill of operating a high-powered, high-performance machine. That's why riding motorcycles is often considered a power sport. However, the excuse to the family for buying the bike is often that it's easier to find parking.

### **Typical rider**

Many first-time riders are 21-year-old single males. Most are corporals who use a high-performance bike as their sole transportation. Experienced riders usually are married males in their mid-30s, and, in most cases, they are senior enlisted or junior officers who tend to ride cruisers, custom or touring bikes. They have conservative attitudes, are low-risk takers, and stay within the speed limits.

### **Typical scenario**

A young Marine buys a new motorcycle with more power, more speed, and a bigger engine than he really needs or has the experience to operate. He gets a motorcycle endorsement on his license and signs up to take the required motorcycle-training course. However, enthusiasm gets the best of him and he rides the

bike before completing the course. As he's showing off to other Marine friends, they ask to take the bike for a spin.

After a few beers, the unlicensed, untrained, inexperienced driver and a passenger take the bike for a ride. They usually don't wear a helmet, gloves, vest, or hard-soled shoes. With inhibitions reduced by the alcohol, the Marine is thrilled with the exhilaration of riding a bike for the first time. He is soon speeding and taking chances. As the passenger urges him on, he loses control and slams into a tree. Neither survives.

### **Risk factors**

How can this type of mishap be prevented? By avoiding these hazards: unfamiliarity with a borrowed bike, no license, no training, drinking alcohol, no PPE, and speeding.

The military recognizes the inherent risk in motorcycling. For this reason, MCO requires that riders have a motorcycle endorsement on their license, that the vehicle is registered, and that motorcycle equipment complies with all requirements. We require protective equipment be used on and off base and that the motorcycle is insured. Riders must participate in training whether they ride on or off base.

### **Here's another story**

A car pulls in front of a rider who has a high-level of skills, is an experienced operator and is licensed. He recognizes a potential hazard but does not have enough time to stop or swerve. The rider brakes hard and crashes into the vehicle at the slowest speed he can manage. Because he was wearing the required protective gear, his injuries are minimal.

In this scenario, the rider's skill allowed him to use his brakes to reduce the speed and force of the collision. The helmet, leather jacket, heavy pants, motorcycle boots, and leather, full-fingered gloves minimized the extent of his injuries.

The fact remains—on a motorcycle, the likelihood of being killed or seriously injured is 16 times as high as when operating a car.

If you are interested in thrill rides, go to an amusement park. If you want to ride a motorcycle, take responsibility for your risk exposure and get your license endorsed, complete a training course, follow the rules, and always wear a complete set of protective gear. 🍀

As the passenger urges him on, he loses control and slams into a tree. Neither survives.