

motorcycle to the tune of \$9,000. Miraculously, he emerged without a scratch to his body and only a minor concussion, which caused him to miss just one day of work.

Clearly, this incident was a disaster narrowly avoided. When asked today, Sgt. Cantrell will testify that his helmet saved his life. It took all the

force of the collision. Motorcycling hazards can be mitigated. Ride safely, wear protective gear, and learn from others' experiences. ■

The preceding is a shorter version of an article that appeared in the summer 2003 issue of the Naval Safety Center's Ground Warrior magazine.

Not a Scratch, Thanks to Riding Gear



Note: This rider lacks the required eye-protective devices.

By Lt. George Hartwell,
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It was around 6 a.m. one morning, with the sun just starting to show, as I headed to work. Traffic was stop-and-go, the norm for this stretch of road.

I hadn't gone very far when I suddenly heard a noise, then saw a lot of steam and smelled a putrid odor. A quick look revealed something I didn't want to see: My bike's cooling system had sprung a leak. Hot antifreeze was spraying all over the inside of the cycle's instrument area, on the front tire, and down the radiator—the source of the steam I was seeing.

At this point, the drivers of the cars in front of me decided it was time to hit the brakes, and I immediately realized I had a big problem. I was in heavy traffic on a two-lane road, with nowhere to go. On my right was a steep embankment, and to the left was oncoming traffic. I had to hit the brakes or hit the car in front of me.

As soon as I squeezed the front-brake lever, I knew my day had gone from bad to worse. Anyone who rides motorcycles knows that one of the most slippery substances is radiator fluid—especially when it coats a front tire sliding about 25 or 30 mph. As a last-ditch effort, I applied a little rear brake, which only exaggerated my slide. I had to make a choice: Put down the bike, or rear-end the car ahead of me. With the distance closing quickly, I opted for the first choice and laid down my bike. It was a fashionable demonstration—I crushed the entire left side of my motorcycle.

Luckily, I was wearing all the required protective gear, including a bright, reflective vest. The articles that provided the most protection were my boots, gloves, helmet, and, most of all, my leather jacket, with integrated armor in the shoulders, elbows, forearms, and kidneys. Without that gear, I may not have been able to walk away with no broken bones. As it turned out, I immediately got up and didn't have a scratch on my body.

Perhaps you're wondering how long I've been riding to have let something like this happen to me. The answer is 16 years—and that doesn't include two years of amateur road-racing experience. Incidents like mine can happen to anyone. You have to be prepared to react in a split second. When I realized I had to put my bike on its side, I was glad to be wearing some of the best protective gear money can buy. Otherwise, I feel sure my story would have had a grotesque ending. ■