

Biker Information Guide

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Putting a Face on It



Last month I wrote about helmet laws—the standards and science (or the lack of it) that goes into the helmet on your head. This month I want to consider helmets from another perspective. Besides what a helmet can do to your hair, it alters your appearance. So much so that there have been cases in other countries in which helmets have been banned—banned because they hide the criminal identity of the rider or passenger. Witness Vietnam, where according to an April, 2007, article in the Manila Times they banned motorbike riders from wearing helmets. It seems this helped law enforcement ascertain the identities of two-wheeled hoodlums. However, it also had the extra benefit of traffic calming, which was induced because riding sans helmet encourages riders to be less reckless on the roads. Odd concept—riding without a helmet makes you a safer rider.

Of course that is there and a case in the extreme. But back here at home the same phenomenon occurs; riders with full-face helmets are . . . faceless. It is this loss of face that is my focus. Think for a minute about what you see when you are driving: cars, trucks, buses, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcycles. How do you react to them? To answer that question, first, shift your point of view from being a motorcycle rider to a car driver. Consider how you respond to other cars or trucks or buses. I am willing to guess that you just see traffic—other vehicles that you need to navigate through to get to your destination. Some are slower, some faster; some are bigger and stronger, some smaller and easier to muscle past, but for the most part you don't see the people inside, anonymous in their private worlds. Perhaps they even feel invisible behind their tinted windows, surrounded by their music, air conditioning, and various distractions. You may even have seen other drivers doing things that they would be embarrassed to do in front of their friends or boss. They are secure in their facelessness because that is how they see other cars. The sole exception is when someone does something so lame that you just have to pass and take a look at them. Notice how they try to pretend you are not there, not seeing their face; some even look away, not willing to be face to face with you.

This anonymity does not apply to pedestrians and, for the most part, bicyclists. They are people, exposed and vulnerable, and we can see their faces. Think about how you respond to people in crosswalks when the light changes. Do you honk your horn at them or squeal your tires as you speed past their heels? Of course not. You see their faces and they see yours—your anonymous veil is pierced and they can identify you with your driving behavior. Thus, you unconsciously are urged to act respectfully.

Now, how do car drivers see motorcyclists? We often feel that they don't

see us at all (unless of course we feel they are aiming at us), but I do think, for the most part, they see us. They see a small vehicle in the traffic mix, too small to be any threat, something they can just bully around. Especially when they don't see our faces, which happens easily with full-coverage helmets. Add a tinted or mirrored visor and we become completely anonymous, just like them. In doing so, we lose that humanness that is usually accorded to pedestrians and bicyclists by most car drivers. Of course, if you are a motorcycle rider, you unconsciously relate to every rider, even while driving your SUV, but sadly, most American drivers have no such unconscious connection to motorcyclists. If they can't see your face, they just can't connect the dots to consider you as being a fellow human who might be vulnerable to their actions.

Am I suggesting that you wear an open-face helmet instead of a full-coverage one? No, not at all—wear whatever type of helmet, or no helmet, as you feel comfortable. But I am willing to make a strong suggestion. Think! Think about your perceptions of the vehicles around you when you ride and then consider how they perceive you. Also think about how some of this feeling of being anonymous can affect you and how you ride. After all, if you perceive yourself to be anonymous inside your tinted-shield-full-coverage-helmet, how are you treating other road users? So, full-face or open-face or no helmet at all, behind that pretty visage or grizzled mug you have the most powerful performance product on the highway—a human mind. Use it and think, then put your best face forward.

Hot Party Nuts

No biker party would be complete without a few nuts. Since I like honey-roasted nuts, hot nuts, and peanut brittle, I decided to create something that was the best of all three. Serve these at your next biker party and your friends will go nuts.

- 2 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ cup roasted cashews
- ½ cup roasted peanuts
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons honey

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

In a small frying pan, melt the butter over a medium heat. Add the crushed red pepper and stir well. Add the cashews, peanuts and salt, and stir well. Sauté for about 1 minute, being careful not to burn the pepper flakes. Add the honey, stir well, and remove from the heat.

Transfer the mixture to a small baking dish and bake until bubbly and brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Check often to avoid burning. Remove the dish from the oven and allow to cool on a cake rack. Cut the nut mixture into squares with a sharp knife and serve.

Makes 12 bite-size pieces

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