

Biker Information Guide

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"Biker Billy Cooks with Fire"



Trick or Treat

Over the past year or so, rocketing gas prices have affected everything we do, from getting to and from work to shopping and recreational activities. It's also affected how we do it—used SUVs are worth less than what their owners still owe on them, while used economy cars are fetching prices much higher than their value. Ironically, at the same time, motorcycle sales have slacked off after a long run of continued growth, due to things like the bursting of the housing bubble, general fears regarding the economy, and the protracted presidential season with the prospect of uncertain change.

Yet while motorcycles sales are down, small scooter and moped sales are booming. Motorcycles yield gas mileage in the 40+ mpg range—far exceeding the efficiency of cars, SUVs, and pickup trucks—but small scooters and mopeds can easily double that. They are cute, easy to ride, and less intimidating to the non-rider. They also have a lower purchase price, and depending on factors like engine size, maximum speed, and the local laws, they may not require vehicle registration, insurance, or even a driver's license to operate, dramatically adding to their overall savings. This has created a situation that allows economy-minded buyers to walk in and ride out—fully legal, but with little or no training.

With limited power and speed, however, these small scooters are not freeway capable, and have trouble keeping up on major roads. They do competent service on smaller city streets and country lanes, yet even there they often are unable to maintain the posted speed limits. In an effort to "help" folks save money on fuel costs, one elected official in my home state of North Carolina has proposed raising the limits on scooters and mopeds that can be operated without licensing—from 50cc to 150cc, and from 30 mph to 50 mph. This would allow the unlicensed use of two-wheelers that can travel much faster, thus, to paraphrase the elected official, "getting them out of the way" of drivers who are stuck behind them on narrow roads.

You may be aware that the number of motorcycle accidents and fatalities has been on the rise for several years, predating the current dramatic rise in fuel prices. Beyond the human costs this represents to us riders, it also places us at a disadvantage on the motorcycle-rights front. Negative statistics aid the enemies of motorcycling in their quest to remove us from the road, or at least to pass safety laws of dubious worth (think horsepower limits and airbags). Fair or not, anytime one of these not-quite-a-motorcycles is involved in an accident, it is still counted statistically as a motorcycle.

While that proposed raising of the limits for scooters died in committee this year, its author promised to try again next year. With the cost of fuel likely to continue to rise, ideas like this will find more and more supporters, even though funding for motorcycle safety is trending down right as the demand

and need for training increases.

Just the other day, a young employee at my supermarket asked if I could get his scooter started. While helping him, I discovered two things: his scooter was brand new (the plastic film was still on the instrument panel) and he had not read the user's manual. It turns out his battery was dead because he had left his turn signal on. I showed him how to use the manual to locate the battery inside all the plastic bodywork, and once the cover was removed, all we needed were jumper cables and another battery. All the while, a store manager had been watching, seemingly unable to offer any help. When I asked, though, he promptly brought his car and some jumper cables, and a few minutes later the young man was scooting his way home. This encounter showed me that even for people with the knowledge and tools to help fellow car drivers, two-wheelers are outside their comfort zone.

However, I suspect that many of us who ride "real" motorcycle also wouldn't have helped because we tend to look down on mopeds and scooters. In the growth trends I've discussed here, there lies the opportunity for both good and bad results for the motorcycling community. Left to the devices of politicians, insurance companies, and the safety Nazis, we could be in for a whole new world of bad laws and regulations. Or, if we step up to the plate and use our hard-earned knowledge and our political voices to join in with these new riders, we might just find a sweet reward in this growing interest in fuel-efficient two wheelers.

The future of motorcycling is knocking at our door—now we have the opportunity to decide whether it is trick or treat.

Yellow Bowl of Fire

Yellow is a hot August sun in the desert. The road invites you to ride – fast, faster. You feel the thump, thump of the motor as its heat rises to engulf you. The wind howls in your ears as the sweat runs into your eyes. Everything becomes a blur of speed and heat. Then suddenly you snap back to reality and reach for another chip full of this mind-bending salsa.

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 or more fresh habanero peppers, stemmed, seeded and minced
1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 large yellow bell pepper, cored
¼ cup water
¼ teaspoon ground white pepper
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon golden molasses

Heat the oil in a small sauté pan over medium heat. Add the habanero pepper and onion and sauté for 3 to 5 minutes, or until the onion is transparent.

In a blender or a food processor equipped with a chopping blade, puree the bell pepper and the water for 30 seconds. Add the puree, white pepper, salt and molasses to the onion mixture. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Serve warm.

Makes 1 cup

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