

“We have met the enemy and he is us!”

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The Idaho motorcycle crash numbers for 2007 have come out. There's some good news and there's some bad news.

(<http://itd.idaho.gov/ohs/2007data/Analysis2007.pdf>).

THE GOOD NEWS:

Motorcycle fatalities are down. There were 38 fatalities in 2006 and 29 in 2007. That's a drop of almost 24%! The bad news is this is just about all the good news in the report.

THE BAD NEWS:

Crashes are up over 19%. Injuries are up over 22%. Of all riders in crashes, 86% experienced some kind of injury. What's most alarming, however, is what the numbers tell us about what we are doing to ourselves:

- Of all motorcycle fatalities, 31% involved riders who had been drinking
- Of all motorcycle crashes, 51% were single vehicle crashes (no cars, just the bike)
- Of all motorcycle fatalities, 69% were single vehicle crashes

So, what does this tell us? It suggests that most of our crashes and fatalities are resulting from rider error. Make no mistake – crashes and fatalities do occur as a result of driver error and inattention as well, but the numbers tell us that the majority are not the fault of the drivers.

Just what ARE these rider errors? Well, some of them are errors of skill:

- Braking and swerving at the same time
- Using too much rear brake and skidding into an obstacle
- Using too little front brake and not stopping in time
- Not looking far enough through the turn and running off the road (or head on into opposing traffic)

I would suggest that a large majority of these errors are errors of judgment. The decisions we make are just as important (if not more important) than our physical riding skills. Here are just some examples of poor judgment that can - and do - get us into trouble:

- Entering turns too fast
- Riding fast or accelerating into an area that you can't see
- Drinking and riding
- Competing with other riders on the road
- Trying to catch up (or keep up) with faster riders
- Wheelies and stoppies on the road
- Choosing denim (jeans) and cotton (t-shirts) as protective gear
- Believing “it'll never happen to me”

As the weather starts to change and the riding seasons starts to wind down, enjoy the last few rides of the year and remember that it's poor judgment rather than poor skills that often gets us into trouble. The upside is that good judgment can help keep us out of trouble. Let's all work on making the 2008 crash and fatality numbers even lower.