

Motorcycles



Getting Started

You've purchased your first motorcycle — now what?

If you've bought your first bike, you're not alone. Motorcycles are more plentiful — and powerful — than ever. That makes for a very fun ride. At the same time, however, these are unique machines with their own quirks and risks. Here's how to get started:

SAFETY FIRST

Riding safely begins with the use of a helmet, but it certainly does not end there. Be honest about your level of experience and knowledge. Consider enrolling in a training course. Always conduct a thorough inspection of your bike. Unfortunately, car and truck owners don't always notice motorcycles while out on the road — and now distracted driving has skyrocketed. Combine that with the fastest bikes ever produced and you have a very hazardous environment for riders. Take every necessary precaution to ensure your own safety.

SELECTING A HELMET

When selecting a helmet, explore the latest styles and technologies but make sure above all that it fits properly. Wear one every time you ride, even if not required by law: Government studies consistently show that helmets significantly reduce a motorcyclist's risk of injury. Tragically, hundreds of riders without helmets lose their lives each year,



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while survivors face an incredible threefold increase in the likelihood of sustaining a brain injury.

NEW RIDERS

New riders should avoid purchasing a motorcycle that exceeds their capabilities. Consider starting with smaller,

more manageable models before moving up to larger bikes. To determine what suits you best, talk with experienced riders. Ask for their insights and whether you can conduct a test ride or two. Online research can help you identify which size and model meets your individual requirements.

Review customer testimonials and comments on manufacturer websites and relevant online forums.

IMPROVING VISIBILITY

Wear brightly colored clothing to improve your visibility with potentially distracted drivers. Light-colored helmets can

help, too. Make sure your headlight is functioning and leave it on at all times, whether during the day or at night. Consider applying reflective decals on your motorcycle. As you decelerate, flash your brake light to make it more noticeable. Don't hesitate to use your horn when necessary.

Motorcycle Maintenance

There are some critically important things to do before heading out on the road.

Like any other engine-powered vehicle, a motorcycle only runs as well as it's maintained. Inspect your oil and the air in the tires regularly. Keep a close eye on the treads for wear and tear — and don't forget other fluid levels.

STAYING ON SCHEDULE

Motorcycles come with a recommended manufacturer's maintenance schedule, which should be followed to the letter. If you bought a used bike, a printed version of these schedules may not be included but you can typically find them online. Being vigilant as a motorcyclist can be even more important than it is with passenger vehicles because bikes don't have a cabin to provide protection in the event of an unexpected breakdown. Most motorcycles don't provide storage for additional oil or other important fluids, so check levels before starting up.

YOUR TIRES

Improperly filled motorcycle tires can lead to life-or-death situations out on the road. Recommended PSI levels can be found in the owner's manual, along with heavy-load pressure recommendations. Since motorcycle tires wear down faster than others, experts



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recommend checking pressure levels before any ride. Look for molded arrows on the sidewall of your tires. They point to built-in treadwear indicators. If the tread has worn down to those set levels, immediately replace your tires.

OIL CHANGES

Oil changes are typically

done every 3,000 miles or so, while the filter should be switched out every other time, or at 6,000 miles. The manufacturer of your bike may set a specific frequency for these changes and sometimes the recommended brand. Remember to use specially formulated motorcycle oil, rather than fluids meant for cars and trucks.

They're designed to better protect your bike's internal parts, including the sensitive clutch that transfers power to the drive train.

OTHER FLUIDS

There's more to monitoring the bike's fluid levels than keeping an eye on the oil. Routinely check coolant levels to

avoid major damage, even in more temperate locations, since motorcycle engines operate at high heat levels. Low brake fluid might lead to difficulty in stopping at the worst possible time. Motorcycles with separate gearboxes require their own fluids, and they'll need to be monitored, as well.

Don't Lose Your Bike

Tens of thousands of motorcycle thefts happen every year.

Bikes remain a popular target for opportunistic thieves, with more than 45,000 annual thefts in the U.S. alone. One of the best and easiest ways to stay off that particularly unwanted list is to always lock your motorcycle when parked. You may consider various alarm systems. Sometimes, even where you park can serve as a big deterrent. Here's how to keep your motorcycle safe from theft:

LOCKS AND CHAINS

Consider purchasing a strong U-bolt to link your bike to a solid object. For those who choose a chain, remember that thicker options do better at standing up to a determined thief with bolt-cutters. You can also thread the chain or lock through your helmet and other gear, leaving your hands free while on a break from riding. Always park your motorcycle in wide-open or well-lit areas to discourage thieves.

ALARM SYSTEMS

Combining an alarm with a lock gives you twice as much protection, since alarms are effective in startling any would-be thief. The best types of alarms are hidden out of view, so consider attaching the alarm under your bike cover. Your alarm will sound the instant someone starts



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tampering with your cover. Thanks to the latest technology, many of today's alarm systems can be tied into your smartphone. The benefit is that you'll receive an instant notification even if someone sets off your alarm while

you're away. You can alert the authorities or fellow riders.

DON'T FORGET

Just because your bike is stored in your garage or shed doesn't mean it's safe. Use your lock and alarm at home the

same way you use it in public. A security system for your home that includes the garage is a smart investment, especially if you have had theft issues in the area. Many systems have mobile applications that make it possible to

monitor your home and bike when you're not there. One free and simple way to beef up your security is by using vehicles or shop items as obstacles that make it harder for a thief to maneuver the bike out of your garage.

Before You Buy

Completing a motorcycle purchase can be far different than passenger vehicles.

Using a checklist can help you attend to all the details when buying a new motorcycle. You'll need special insurance and gear. Smart buyers create a budget and stick to it.

SMART BUDGETING

You want to purchase a motorcycle and get out on the open road, but the costs don't end with a signed purchase agreement. Factor in the additional expenses associated with becoming a motorcyclist. Shop around for the best insurance rate, and price out needed items like a helmet, a jacket, gloves, boots and pants. Factor in routine maintenance when estimating your future costs, especially if you are buying used.

ADVANCE PAPERWORK

Long before you purchase, you'll have to have a special license. States require a separate qualification process to ride a bike, so that will mean a trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles before you sign on the dotted line. Insurance policies differ as well, so talk to your agent about driving a motorcycle rather than a passenger vehicle. A special motorcycle policy is required by law in many states — and



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your rate may change.

TAKE A COURSE

Motorcycling can be one of life's most exhilarating experiences, but there are inherent risks. Consider taking a course like those administered by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation,

if it's not already required. They are modeled like a driver's ed course, only with a focus on the unique challenges presented to bikers. Consider a refresher if you're an experienced motorcyclist but haven't taken a course in some time.

SPECIAL GEAR

Because motorcycles expose riders to unique dangers that drivers of cars and trucks don't experience, it's smart to purchase specially designed gear. Start with a Department of Transportation-approved helmet. Consider one with a visor

to block out some of the sun's rays. Helmets are required in many states. Save yourself a ticket by researching these various laws before making any long trips. A good rain slicker is recommended since weather conditions can change without much notice.

Motorcycle Safety Tips

Take special precautions to ensure the safety of everyone out on the road.

Safety should be key for everyone, whether you're a new, experienced or returning rider. Recommended precautions can range from wearing the proper gear to taking the latest safety training from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation or similar organizations.

How you prepare yourself for trips says a lot about how committed you are to a safe experience. Are you quick to grab the keys and hit the road? Or are you more apt to plan for inclement weather, study the route to your destination and pack extra safety gear? The work you put in before you mount your bike can improve your odds of returning home safely.

SMART CHOICES

When shopping for a new bike, know what you're getting into and never buy more than you can handle. How do you know how much you can handle? Take a test drive. Ask around. Do some research on which type of bike will fit your needs.

Just like any other big purchase, read buyer reviews and testimonials on online forums or manufacturer websites. The more you know about what you want in a bike, the smarter purchase you will end up making.



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SOBERING STATISTICS

By now, motorcyclists know the risks associated with not wearing a helmet. Government studies show that riders without a helmet are 40 percent more likely to suffer a fatal head injury in a crash and are three times more likely to suffer brain injuries

than those with helmets. In states that have repealed helmet laws, there was a 20 to 30 percent increase in motorcycle fatalities.

OTHER KEY TIPS

Remember that motorists often have trouble seeing motorcycles. Make sure your

headlight works and is on day and night. Leather or other thick clothing can protect you. Choose long sleeves, over-the-ankle boots, long pants and gloves. Wear eye protection if your helmet doesn't provide it, bright clothing and a light-colored helmet.

Use reflective strips or decals on your clothing and on your motorcycle. Be aware of blind spots in the cars and trucks around you.

Flash your brake light when you are slowing down and before stopping. If a motorist doesn't see you, use your horn.



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Hauling Your Motorcycle

The thrill of the journey is best felt from the seat of a bike. But riding may not be an option due to external factors.

Thankfully, transporting your motorcycle on a truck or trailer is as safe as it is easy — provided you take the proper safety precautions.

WHY NOT RIDE?

So, why haul your motorcycle? You may have recently purchased a new

home and find yourself driving a moving van. You might be going on a long camping excursion in your RV. Then there are the riders who've experienced an unfortunate breakdown.

PLANNING AHEAD

Transporting a motorcycle requires careful planning to avoid more potential expenses and damage. You can't simply place the bike on the back of a truck or on the trailer. Improper towing could lead to catastrophic damage. Shipping services and insurance companies sometimes require the motorcycle to be completely drained

of fluids. So, talk to your agent before hauling.

WITH A TRAILER

The choice of trailer can significantly affect the safety and security of your vehicle. Open trailers are suitable for shorter journeys, but enclosed trailers are recommended for longer hauls. They provide essential protection against wind and weather conditions while in transit.

Before loading the motorcycle, make sure the trailer is properly hitched and level. Secure the front wheel with a wheel lock and deploy the kickstand. Use heavy-duty tie-down straps to

securely anchor the motorcycle, attaching them to rings at both the front and rear of the trailer. Tighten the straps using a ratchet until there is no slack.

ON A TRUCK

To load a motorcycle into a truck, you'll need a reliable bike ramp and tie-down straps. Make sure someone else is around to help. One person should push the motorcycle while the other steers. Engage the wheel locks and lower the kickstand. Configure the tie-down straps at 45-degree angles on the frame and handlebars, using at least two straps at both the front and back to create a secure hold.

The Best Helmets

Helmets have been proven to save lives — but which one is the perfect fit for you?

Every year, helmets save thousands of lives. At the same time, hundreds needlessly die because they lacked proper protection. If you're going to ride a motorcycle, it's important to have a well-fitted helmet for personal safety. The numbers tell the story.

INSIDE THE STATISTICS

The dangers are real: Motorcyclists are nearly 28 times more likely to be killed in a traffic crash per vehicle mile traveled than occupants of passenger vehicles. Helmets help. They can decrease the risk of head injuries by 69% — and the likelihood of fatal injuries by 42%.

In states without universal helmet laws, the number of fatalities among non-helmeted riders was 10 times higher. Even in states where helmet use is not mandated, it's smart to protect your personal safety by choosing appropriate headgear. Because of lowered medical bills and fewer insurance claims, helmets are said to generate billions in annual economic savings.

SELECTING A HELMET

The goal is to select a well-fitting helmet that provides the durability needed for life-saving protection. Most helmets come in standard sizes similar to those used for



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baseball caps — small, medium, large or extra-large. Industry experts have established helpful guidelines that lead to an optimal fit.

Be sure that the cheek pads make contact with your cheeks without causing any discomfort. Check for a secure fit at your temples. There

should be no gaps between your skin and the brow pads. The neck roll should not push the helmet away from the back of your neck. With the straps fastened securely, test the helmet by moving it up and down as well as side to side. Your skin should shift in response to these movements.

INNOVATIVE FEATURES

The latest helmets are equipped with a series of innovative features that improve both safety and convenience. Look for models that integrate with your smartphone for hands-free calling. Some offer Bluetooth connectivity for music

playback. These advanced helmets may also serve as keyless ignition devices, meaning they will prevent the motorcycle from starting until the helmet is detected. Some provide wireless charging capabilities for your devices and can even send alerts in the event of an accident.