

B A S I C

# RIDER COURSE<sup>SM</sup>

## RIDER HANDBOOK



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Portions of this book may be reproduced by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation certified RiderCoaches solely to facilitate their presenting this MSF Basic *RiderCourse*™. Under no circumstances may a RiderCoach reproduce this material in its entirety.

The MSF Basic *RiderCourse* is based on years of scientific research and field experience. This current edition has been field tested and has proven to be successful in developing the entry-level skills for riding in traffic. Through its various iterations, more than three million riders have been trained since 1973.

The information contained in this publication is offered for the benefit of those who have an interest in riding motorcycles. In addition to the extensive research and field experience conducted by the MSF, the material has been supplemented with information from publications, interviews and observations of individuals and organizations familiar with the use of motorcycles and training. Because there are many differences in product design, riding styles, and federal, state and local laws, there may be organizations and individuals who hold differing opinions. Consult your local regulatory agencies for information concerning the operation of motorcycles in your area. Although the MSF will continue to research, field test and publish responsible viewpoints on the subject, it disclaims any and all liability for the views expressed herein.

Since 1973, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation has set internationally recognized standards that promote the safety of motorcyclists with rider education courses, operator licensing tests, and public information programs. The MSF works with the federal government, state agencies, the military, and others to offer training for all skill levels so riders can enjoy a lifetime of safe, responsible motorcycling. The MSF is a not-for-profit organization sponsored by BMW, Ducati, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Kawasaki, KTM, Piaggio/Vespa, Suzuki, Triumph, Victory and Yamaha. For *RiderCourse*™ locations, call 800.446.9227 or visit [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org).

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Welcome to the world of motorcycling. As a new rider participating in education and training activities, you're about to embark on an adventure that only motorcyclists can know. If you're an experienced rider who has taken some time off from the thrill only two-wheel exploits can bring, welcome back! You are certain to renew the habits and skills necessary for motorcycling enjoyment.

Motorcycling can be quite a challenge, not just in learning the controls and acquiring maneuvering skills, but also in finding a safe way through real-world traffic. If you're willing to embark on a journey that develops the special skills and strategies of a good motorcyclist, this course is for you. Your experience and participation will lead to a better understanding of the riding maneuvers and the mental skills necessary to enjoy motorcycling to the fullest. Through this process, you might even decide that motorcycling is not right for you.

This course covers the basic fundamentals for you to develop your capabilities to become a safe and responsible motorcyclist. It provides the opportunity for you to learn the physical and mental skills important for operating a motorcycle. In the classroom, you will learn ways to minimize risk and handle special riding situations. During the riding portions of the Basic *RiderCourse*<sup>SM</sup>, you will be coached to develop the physical skills of basic control that include: clutch/throttle control, straight line riding, stopping, turning, and shifting, and then move on to more advanced skills in stopping quickly, cornering, and swerving.

Your RiderCoach(es) are here to help guide you through your learning journey. Be sure to ask lots of questions and let them know how to help you.

The classroom activities include discussions with audiovisual support designed to prepare you with awareness and knowledge necessary for safe motorcycling. The riding exercises foster the development of fundamental skills and the riding finesse to handle complex traffic situations. Throughout the course you will have your questions answered and have your progress observed and coached.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation offers other courses and training opportunities as part of its complete Rider Education and Training System<sup>SM</sup> (MSF RETS), which is designed to provide you with lifelong learning opportunities to keep your skills and safety strategies fresh. After you've successfully completed the BRC, consider enrolling in one of our Experienced *RiderCourses*\* (Skills Practice *RiderCourse*, Skills Plus *RiderCourse*, or License Waiver *RiderCourse*) as soon as you buy a bike – or right away if you already own one. To stay sharp and stay safe, you can take a formal MSF riding skills course every year and every time you buy another motorcycle; you can also practice your skills on your own, using the exercises outlined in MSF's "You and Your Motorcycle: Riding Tips" booklet (viewable on our website).

Several non-riding training opportunities are available also. These presently include *The MSF Guide to Group Riding* that provides tips and techniques for safely riding in a group; *Cars, Motorcycles and A Common Road: A Motorist Awareness Program*, which acquaints motorists with the characteristics of motorcycling to improve sharing the road; the *SeasonedRider Module*, which addresses the effects of aging on motorcycle operation, and the *Riding Straight Module* that provides information about separating the social activities of drinking and riding. You may participate in these opportunities as a student, and when you feel comfortable, you could lead a group of people through the learning activities as a facilitator. Check the MSF Website ([www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org)) under "Host An Event" for details. There you will find information about training opportunities and Best Practices for conducting local seminars.

\* Availability may vary by state or training site.

## Section A Course Requirements

To successfully complete the course, you must: 1) attend all sessions, 2) achieve a minimum score on a knowledge test covering course material, and 3) achieve a passing score on a riding-skill evaluation. The riding-skill evaluation consists of four exercises that assess limited-space maneuvering skills as well as braking, cornering, and swerving competencies. Note your course schedule here:

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Successfully completing the Basic *RiderCourse* is not a guarantee that you will be safe on the road. Only you can choose the level of safety you wish to maintain. The course will provide you with the opportunities and experiences to acquire the basic knowledge and skills that enable you to continue to practice and develop your safe riding habits. Safe riding is also a matter of attitude, and only you can provide that.

## Section B Course Structure

While the topic of motorcycle safety is profoundly serious, the *RiderCourse* is designed to be quite enjoyable. The primary concerns in this course are your safety and learning. That is a responsibility shared by everyone. RiderCoaches will facilitate your development by using interactive classroom activities. On the range you will be coached in a way that guides your development in acquiring basic motorcycle maneuvering skills. You are not competing with anyone else in this course, so focus on your own learning and experience.

The Basic *RiderCourse* is conducted at a pace that results in successful completion for most novice riders. The RiderCoaches will help you learn to the best of your ability. If you have significant difficulty or become a risk to yourself or others, as determined by you or your RiderCoaches, you will not be permitted to continue to ride (other options may be available for developing your riding skills).

## Types of Motorcycles Section A

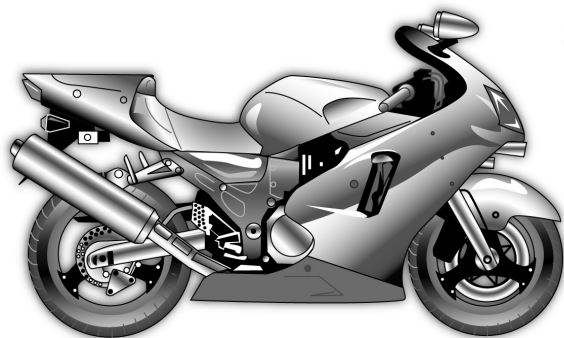
Motorcycles have been around since the late 1800s, and they have been used for all sorts of riding activities. There are three basic types of motorcycles: street, dual-purpose, and off-highway. Street motorcycles are designed for use on public streets and highways. They have all the equipment for safe and enjoyable street operation. Dual-Purpose motorcycles are equipped for use on the street and off-road trails. Off-road motorcycles are not street-legal, and are typically used for recreational or competitive use. Each type of motorcycle is available in a variety of styles and sizes, and you can have fun shopping to determine which one is right for you.



Touring



Cruiser



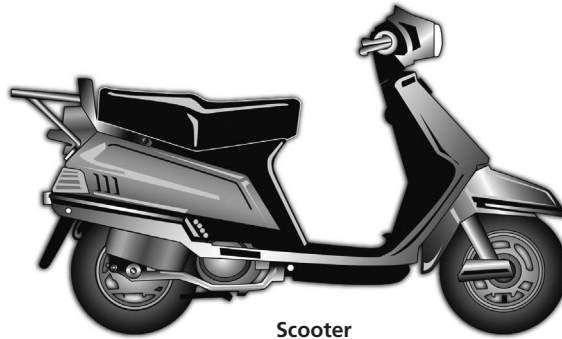
Sport



Standard

### Street Motorcycles

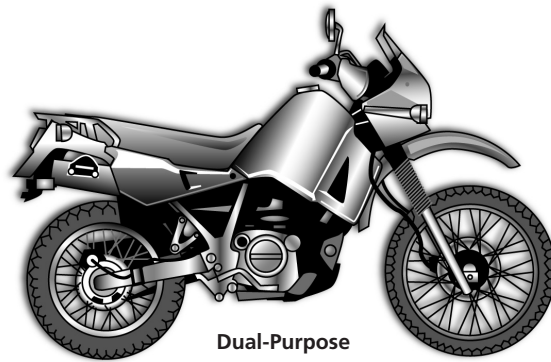
### Street Motorcycles (continued)



Scooter

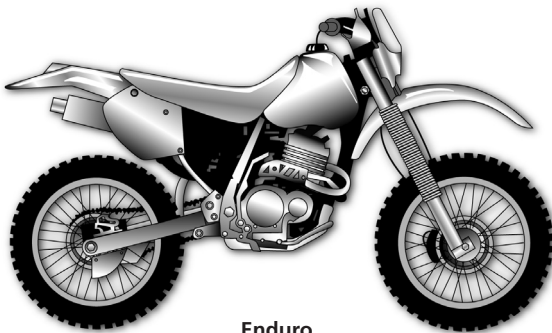
*ScooterSchool* is a hands-on, half-day, entry-level training and education course, designed to help riders of scooters acquire skills and learn about important street-riding strategies. Students may use their own scooters (up to 200cc), and in some locations scooters are provided. For more information, call toll-free 800.446.9227 or visit [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org).

### Dual-Purpose Motorcycle

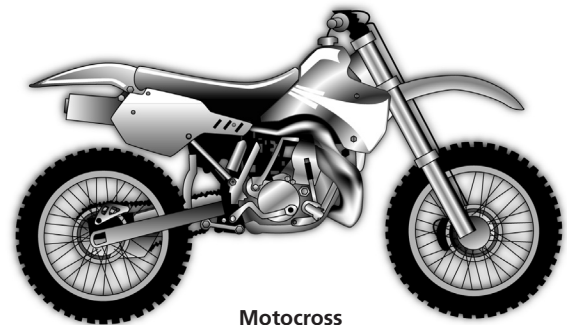


Dual-Purpose

### Off-Road Motorcycles



**Enduro**  
(Recreational trail riding)



**Motocross**  
(closed-course competition)

Open to riders age six and older, the *MSF DirtBike School*<sup>SM</sup> is a hands-on, one-day training course for off-road (enduro) motorcycle riders. The *MSF DirtBike School* is an excellent introduction to motorcycling and can be used by inexperienced riders as pre-training for the MSF's street motorcycle-oriented *Basic RiderCourse*. Off-road experience may also enhance street riding skills. Class content includes riding skills, risk management and environmental awareness components. For more information call toll-free: 877.288.7093 or visit [www.dirtbikeschool.com](http://www.dirtbikeschool.com).



**Trials**  
(low-speed skills competition)

**Risk Awareness Section B**

Riding a motorcycle involves some risks not encountered when driving cars and trucks. Motorcycles do not have the stability of cars because they must be balanced, and motorcycles leave you more vulnerable in a crash because there is less protection. Motorcycles are not as readily seen as cars, trucks, or other motor vehicles because of their size. Other motorists, particularly those who don't ride a motorcycle, may not be looking for motorcycles in traffic. This places the motorcyclist at risk, particularly at intersections.

A good question to ask is "How good am I as a car driver?" Most car drivers rate themselves above average when asked. Since no one is a perfect driver or rider, there is always room for improvement. Striving for excellence is one of the more challenging aspects of being a motorcyclist. No one expects to become a crash statistic. But the reality is that car drivers and motorcycle riders are involved in thousands of crashes each year.

Many motorcyclists say they are better, more alert car drivers because they have learned to be more attentive in traffic. Not all risks to a motorcyclist are due to the motorcyclist's own behavior. While it is possible to reduce much of your own risk, safety in traffic is a responsibility shared by everyone.

## Section C Risk Acceptance

Have you ever thought about how much risk you accept? We each live with the results of our decisions, and we have full responsibility for the actions we take in traffic. A person who has several “close calls” or near misses when driving a car may be prone to similar behavior when operating a motorcycle. It’s something to think about....

People take a variety of risks every day, but some take more risks than others. For instance, imagine a “ladder of risk.” Picture a tall ladder reaching to the top of a building. For an experiment, would you climb up on the first rung and jump off to the ground? How about the second rung? Third? Do you know anyone that would climb up to a rung higher than you and jump onto the ground? Some people are higher risk takers than others, but the important point is to think about the risks you are willing to take. Only when you think about the risks of riding in traffic can you manage the variety of factors that happen while riding.

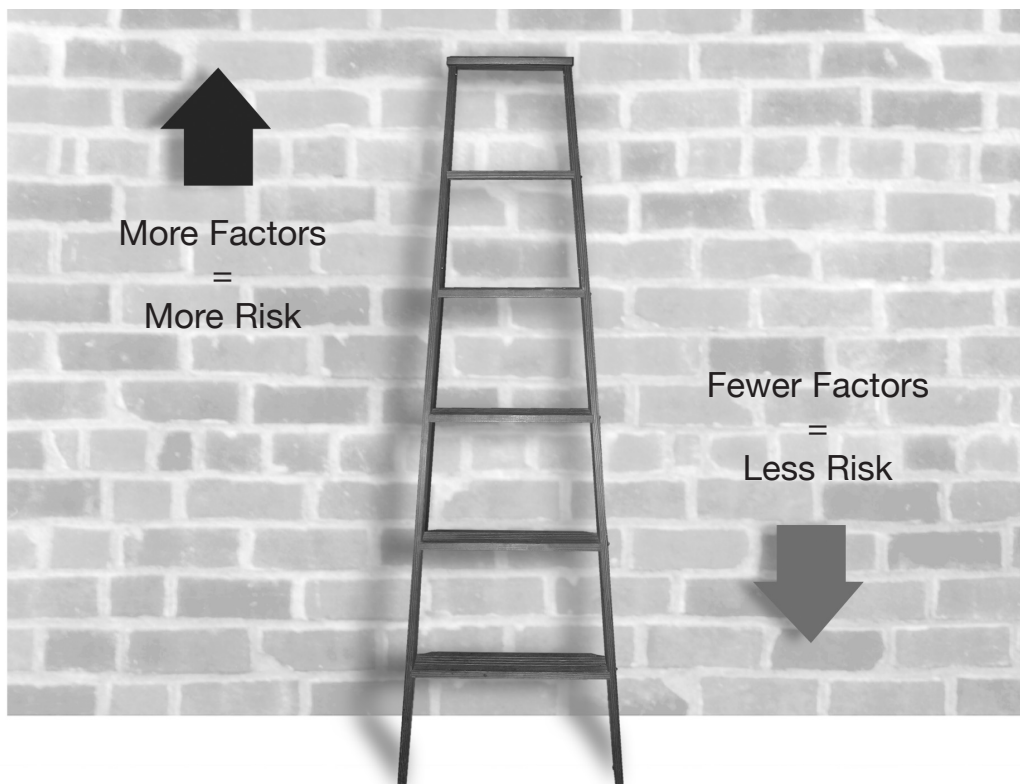
Once you become aware of the risks associated with motorcycling, and once you accept that risk, it is time to learn how risks can be managed. Choosing to accept the challenges of being a responsible motorcyclist means to think about the consequences of your riding behavior in traffic. It also means accepting personal responsibility for the results of your decisions and actions, as well as developing good skills and judgment.

Knowledge of what causes crashes is helpful in managing the complexity of riding situations. How would you answer this question: “What is the primary cause of motorcycle crashes?” There are several ways to answer. Perhaps you thought of such things as speeding, inattention, distraction, drinking, or carelessness. All are good answers. Read the following crash scenario, and see if you can determine the primary cause of the crash.

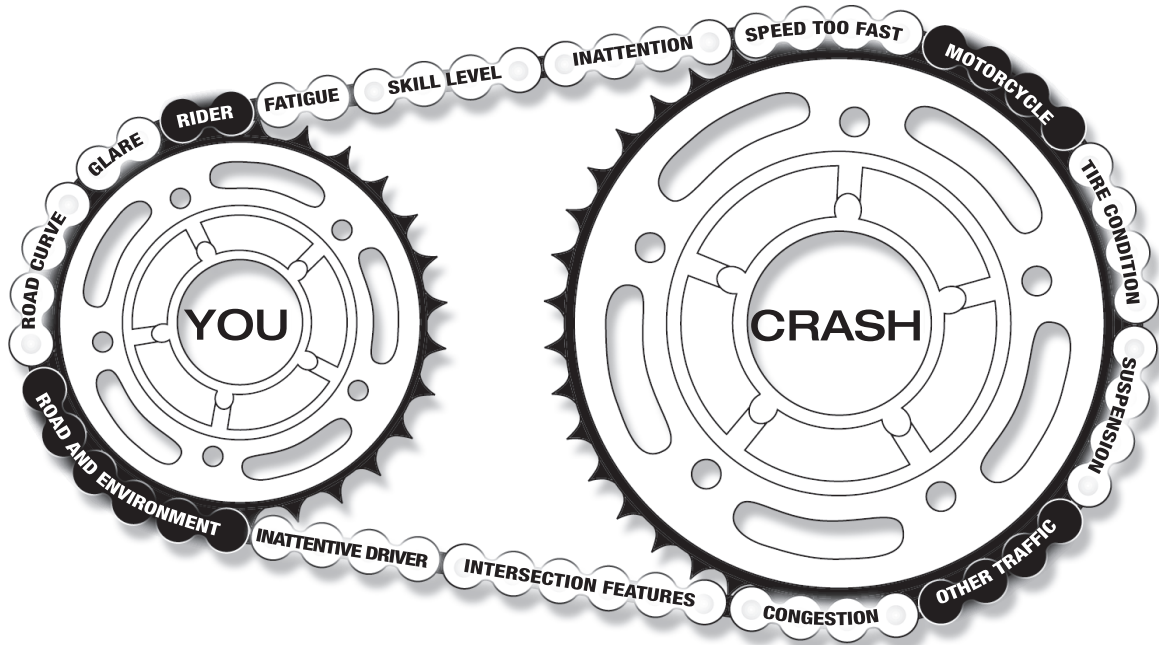
*A rider is cruising a country road at 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon, heading home after finishing a grueling day at work. Still thinking about some of the projects not finished that will have to get completed tomorrow, the rider rounds a slight curve in the road and approaches an intersection. There is a car on the right and the rider thinks about slowing. Suddenly the vehicle pulls out. The rider tries to swerve around the car to the right, but the car stops in the middle of the lane. The front tire of the motorcycle hits the left rear of the car, sending it out of control and into the ditch along the road. The helmet saved the rider’s head, but the rider’s knees were bruised, and the bike couldn’t be ridden. Investigation showed that the car driver was a young person without a license, who was distracted by the glare of the setting sun. There was no alcohol involved, and no one was speeding.*

What was the primary cause of this crash? Since there were multiple factors, it is difficult to determine the primary cause. So the lesson in this crash, as in most crashes, is that there is rarely a single cause. There is usually an interaction of factors that accumulate, and at some point in time they come together in such a way to produce a crash. Many safety professionals do not like to use the word "accident." Most crashes are predictable and preventable.

How could the above crash have been prevented? Would a cloudy day have prevented the sun glare from partially distracting the young driver? Should the car driver have paid more attention? Should that driver have been behind the wheel in the first place? Would a better prediction by the motorcyclist have provided that extra moment to stop or swerve to miss the car? If the rider had been less distracted by the events of the day, would the rider's response have been quicker? Remove just one factor, and this traffic conflict may not have developed into a crash.



**Ladder of Risk.** Each rung of the ladder represents a factor. More factors result in more risk; fewer factors result in less risk. Good riders keep the number and significance of factors in check.



#### Crash Chain

Here's one time when breaking a chain is a good thing. In this diagram, factors from four categories (dark links) interact to form a chain of events that link you to a crash. Removing just one factor breaks the chain and may prevent the crash. To what degree do you control each of these factors?

One way to think about the causes of crashes is to imagine a crash chain. Crashes occur because factors interact and develop into a hazardous situation.

Have you ever had a close call while driving? What kept it from becoming a crash? Usually someone took action to prevent it. Good riders are ready to take action to minimize factors and maintain a margin of safety.

Hazards are everywhere, and good motorcyclists will be quick to notice what's going on all around them. Hazards can be anything from road debris, to sun glare, to other traffic. Sometimes one factor alone is hazardous and sometimes it takes several factors to produce trouble. Look for ways to break the crash chain of events. Sometimes removing just one factor prevents a crash, but continuously keeping the number of factors to a minimum is a good way to manage your risk.

## Section D Risk Management

What do you think of when asked, "What is a good motorcyclist?" Is it one who obeys the laws? Is it one who has superior riding skill? Is it a rider who can negotiate curves fast? Is it one who rides slow and anticipates hazards? Is it one who doesn't crash?

Whatever your definition of a “good motorcyclist,” a key element for a good rider would be to have the desire and motivation to choose to reduce risk while riding. It takes superior riding skill; and of course, a positive mental attitude helps. But a fundamental trait of all good riders is that they have a strategy, a way of thinking and planning to avoid trouble.

A good motorcyclist reduces factors that lead to problems by applying a STRATEGY. Responsible riding is more than just having good skill, and more than simply having a good attitude. It means thinking before acting. It means considering the consequences of actions. This is the mental preparation that helps to reduce risk.

All physical activities have an element of risk. It is important to recognize that risks can seldom be completely eliminated, but they can usually be managed or minimized. One of the surest ways to manage risk is to first be aware of the potential risks, and second to have a specific plan for minimizing the risks.

One way to think about your personal safety when you ride is to consider your personal margin of safety. This means to consider the “margin for error,” or how much extra time and space you need given your skill level.

**SEE<sup>SM</sup>** — a simple and powerful strategy of MSF — is to **S**earch, **E**valuate, **E**xecute. It is the strategy to help you understand what is going on in traffic and to be constantly planning and implementing a course of action. To SEE is to Search for factors that might lead to risky situations, to Evaluate how the factors might interact to create risk, and to Execute an action to maintain a margin of safety. To SEE is to ask yourself such questions as: What’s the other person going to do? What if that driver doesn’t see me? What if there’s gravel in that curve ahead? What if that car doesn’t yield the right-of-way at that intersection? These everyday riding situations have something in common: if a strategy for dealing with them isn’t employed, they can easily lead to a crash. To put it simply, you must continually **SEE**.

As you develop riding skills on the range, which is similar to mixing with other people on road, apply the SEE strategy to give yourself time and space. It works anywhere, and can help to ensure your safety and the safety of others.

Getting ready to ride is a matter of being responsible about preparation. It is important to know how to prepare yourself and your motorcycle, and to take the action steps to ensure a safe and enjoyable ride.

MSF's **SEE<sup>SM</sup>** Strategy:  
**S**earch  
**E**valuate  
**E**xecute