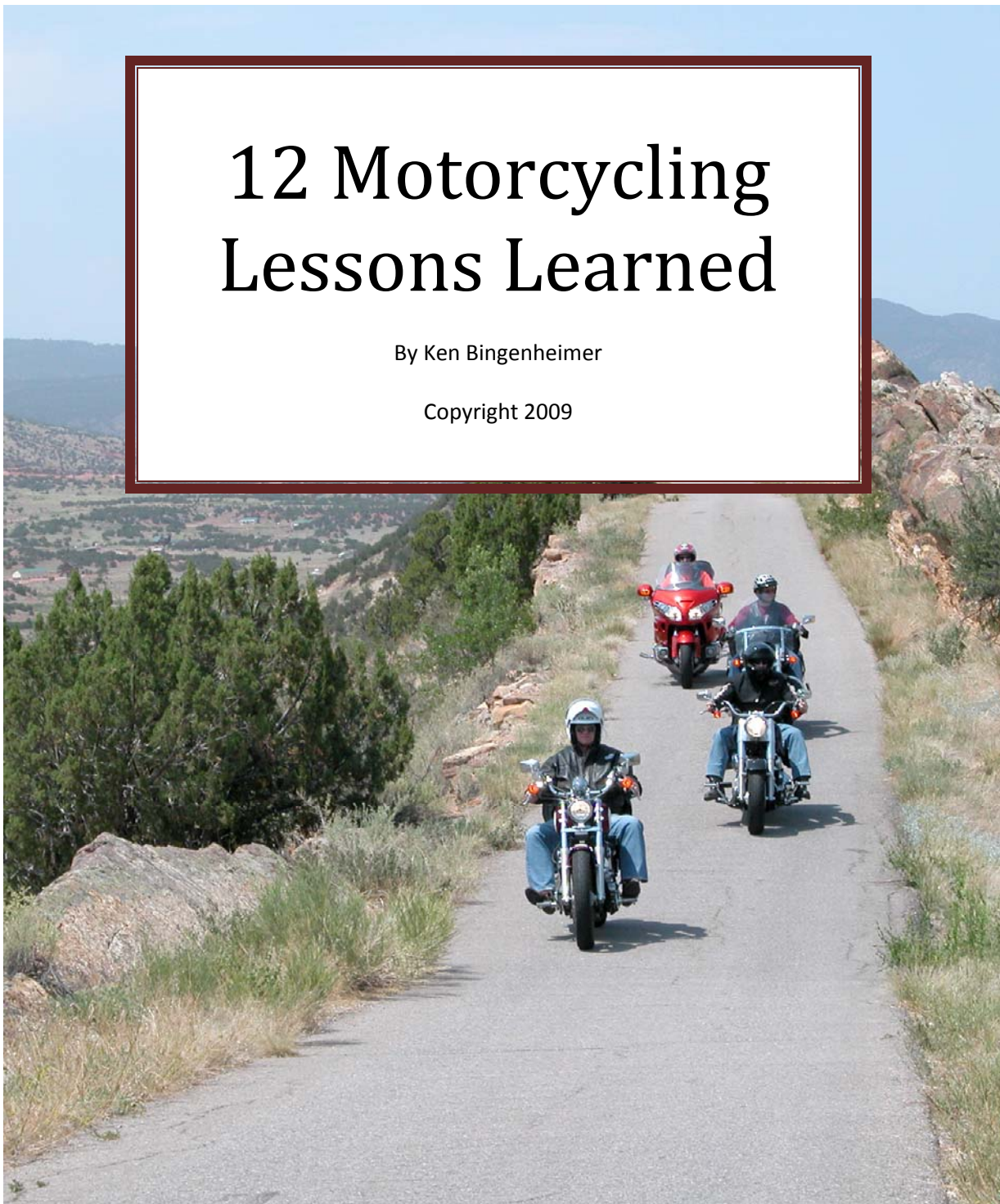


12 Motorcycling Lessons Learned

By Ken Bingenheimer

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#1 - Have riding buddies

I've put 62,000 miles on one of my bikes and 24,000 on the other, plus more on a few other bikes. So I've done some riding.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I've learned a few things over the years and over the miles. In this series I figure I'll share a bit of what I've learned.

Have riding buddies

As with most things you enjoy, sharing the experience with friends can make it even more enjoyable.

Riding is itself a solitary activity. (Unless, of course, you have a passenger or a bike-to-bike intercom system.) You ride along and you're on your own, in your own thoughts, and in your own world.

Even the committed lone wolf, then, has time to himself, and welcomes a chance to talk with the guys at stops. Stopping for lunch? Do you prefer to eat alone or would you rather eat with your friends? Having riding buddies is a good thing.



Plus, if you're in the middle of glorious nowhere and your bike breaks down or you run out of gas, that glorious nowhere is a lot less suddenly dismal if you are with someone who can help.

You never know, either, what your buddies might know that will make for a highlight on your ride. "There's a side road up ahead that is longer but a lot more scenic." "I know a terrific restaurant we'll be coming to in about half an hour. Anyone for stopping?" That kind of stuff.

That's not to say, unfortunately, that more is always better. When my group, the OFMC, was just three guys we could go where we pleased, when we pleased, and make decisions on the fly.

Our regular contingent is now nine and we don't dare head out on our summer trip without our route laid out and motels reserved. There were times as it was when the three of us got the last room in town, and a couple times when there was nothing at all to be had. Extrapolate that to needing three or four rooms in the middle of the tourist season and the problem is obvious.

The result of our growth was summed up a couple years ago by Randy as we left Jerome, AZ. "This is a great little town! It's really a shame we can't stay another night." But we couldn't. We had a schedule to keep.

Small group or large group, however, you share a lot of good times, and maybe some tough times with your riding buddies. And there will be all those stories to tell and retell, and memories to share. That's what friends are for.

#2 Signal your intentions

For 20 years now my OFMC buddies and I have taken long trips each summer. I've picked up a few pointers along the way and that's what this series is about.

Signal your intentions

Can you read minds? Neither can I. Nor have any of the OFMC guys shown this particular aptitude. So what do you do when you're all alone on your separate bikes in your own separate thoughts and you need to communicate? Or, perhaps more importantly, how do you avoid potentially hazardous lack of communication?

You know the answer of course: you use signals. Does your riding group have agreed-on signals that everyone knows and uses? The OFMC worked out just a couple, very specific signals early on and we've added a few more over the years. Here's a link to a number of [hand and foot signals](#) you may want to adopt.



But as I indicated above, it's not just a matter of letting the other guys know when you want to make a pit stop. In all our years of riding we very fortunately have never had anyone get hurt--not that we haven't tried. Individually we have all had our close encounters with cars turning left in front of us and all those experiences every biker has. The closest we've ever come to a serious accident, however, was a completely internal affair.

We were going up some mountainside one day, with me in the lead, and it was gorgeous. I was going at an easy pace, enjoying the view. Just up ahead, on our left, was a pull-out with a terrific view of the valley below us. I decided to pull over.

Apparently, at just about the same moment that I decided to pull over, Bill decided he was tired of my lazy pace, and that he would take the lead. As I was about to pull left--without using my turn signal, I will add--Bill shot by me on the left. A second sooner on my part, a second later on his part, and the the collision would have been unavoidable--and nasty.

Of course some motorcyclists have intercoms rigged up in their helmets. That's a whole different matter when it comes to communication. My recommendation if you want to go that route is to buy the best. We tried some cheapo communicators many years ago and quickly discarded them.

Whatever methods you use to communicate with your riding buddies, the bottom line is simple. They can't read your mind. You've got to signal your intent.

#3 Ride your own ride

Riding with friends is one of the really enjoyable things you do with your motorcycle. In fact, for those who buy bikes but just let them sit and gather dust, I suspect that is largely a result of not having riding buddies.

One of the greatest benefits of having riding buddies is that you call each other and say, “Hey--let’s go ride!” And so you do, whereas left to yourself, you might easily allow chores and other demands to overrule your impulse to get on the bike.

That said, it’s a fact that not all riders have equal riding skills. The natural tendency to stay together on the road as a group can sometimes lead a less-skilled rider to push beyond his comfort zone, trying to keep up. This can lead to disaster.

Ride your own ride

The simple lesson here is that you need to ride your own ride. If your buddy is taking sharp curves at a faster pace than you’re comfortable with, don’t try to be macho and do the same. Slow down and take the curves at your own speed. You’ll catch up later.

Anyone who has ridden for long has their stories of times they failed to follow this bit of guidance. In fact, those experiences are probably part of their schooling in the need to ride your own ride. Who

hasn’t experienced a moment of powerful anxiety following a buddy into a curve only to wish intensely that you weren’t going quite so fast?

At other times, attempting to keep the group together can lead you to try passing in a more reckless manner than you should. Sure, you can count on a good twist of the wrist to rocket you ahead in a flash, but we all make mistakes. I remember one time going up a canyon watching the guy in front of me pull out to make a quick pass on a blind curve, only to have a car come around the other way. I watched in horror, convinced I was about to witness the most terrible thing I’d ever seen. Fortunately it didn’t happen but it could not have been closer.

Interestingly, Eric Trow, the riding safety columnist for *Rider* magazine, touched on this subject of group riding safety and trying too hard to stay close in his February 2009 column. Trow said, in part:

When we ride in groups of motorcycles, it pays to adopt the same rules we apply when we follow any other vehicle. We don’t tailgate (right?). . . . Why should following a motorcycle be any different? There is simply no substitute for sufficient space and time to respond.

Ride your own ride.



#4 - Don't hesitate to ride alone

I've spoken at length about the pleasures and concerns of riding motorcycles with friends and companions. For many of us, the social aspect of riding is perhaps its biggest draw. But there are times when none of your buddies are available to join you.

Maybe it's a gorgeous Saturday and you just want to get up in the hills. Or maybe you want to take a few days and get away. But none of your buddies can join you. What do you do? You go alone.

Warning: You may enjoy it on your own so much that you start riding alone a lot.

The road is only open when you ride alone

Have you ever had to compromise because your companion wanted something different than you did? That's what's so great about riding alone. You're in control. You were heading that direction but this road looks interesting. You were planning on making it to that town, but you're hungry and here's a restaurant with a mom and pop motel next door. You were planning on stopping here but it's early and you just feel good in the saddle and you're not ready to stop.



Great. Do it! It's your choice. You're calling the shots and there's not a single person who's going to argue with you.

But what if you're out 40 miles from Nothin'ville and you have a flat or run out of gas or the bike just stops? Then what? Surely it's better to have a buddy who can lend a hand.

Well sure, of course it's better if you do have problems. But when was the last time that happened to you? Has it ever happened? And if it did, was it something you could have prevented if you had only paid attention to maintenance?

So sure, don't be stupid. Make sure your bike is in good running order and don't pass that gas station figuring you'll fill up down the road. And carry your cell phone. Of course you can generally flag down a passing car if you need help.

Beyond that, accept that life does throw you some curves at times, and Murphy's Law is in force in all 50 states, but as long as the difficulties you encounter are not fatal, years from now you'll have a great story to tell. It's all about the stories.

And if you do get stuck way out somewhere, it helps to be prepared. So carry some food and water. Carry a tent and a sleeping bag. The better prepared you are to make the best of a bad situation the less likely it is that that situation will occur, isn't that right? That's Murphy's Corollary, isn't it?

Here's the bottom line: If you're looking for the freedom that is so often associated with riding a motorcycle, nothing delivers that freedom in spades like riding alone. Just do it!

#5 Carry proper gear

We were really gung-ho when my buddies and I bought bikes back in the mid '80s, but we didn't think ahead all that much. No surprise then that one of the earliest lessons we learned is that riding motorcycles is a whole lot less pleasant when you run into bad weather and you're totally unprepared.

The Boy Scouts have a lock on this concept and bikers would do well to follow their lead: Be Prepared.

We got our first inkling that being prepared was important one day as we came north out of New Mexico headed for Alamosa. Rain began falling but because we didn't have rain suits we just kept riding. It was a matter of getting wet sitting still or getting wet riding. Besides, we're used to Colorado weather and we knew the rain would blow over and we'd air dry.

Sure enough, both those things happened, but what we did not figure on was the loss of body heat we would suffer as the drying took place. We got to Alamosa, found a place to get some hot coffee, and shook and shivered violently for more than an hour. We were suffering from hypothermia. Now we all have good rain suits and, by golly, we're not afraid to use them! In the photo at right you see my two-piece rain suit as well as waterproof mittens that fit over gloves and water-proof booties that slip on over my boots. If you're not spending at least \$100 you're not getting a good rain suit.



In another instance, we were prepared but we saw a lot of other bikers who were not. We took a Sunday cruise down to Cripple Creek but on the way home the weather turned. Everyone put on their rain suits but it started snowing hard. The group stopped at the Sedalia Grill to get warm and it was there that we observed more than a few bikers who had come out in just their T-shirts. These same guys got back on their bikes and rode off into the storm in those T-shirts. Not fun!

Nowadays we all have bags on our bikes and the weather gear is permanently stashed in the bags.

Another type of gear you may be extremely glad to have with you is camping gear. When the OFMC first started doing its summer trips we always carried tents and sleeping bags. We never made reservations. Most days we'd roll into some town and decide to spend the night. In most cases it was just a matter of finding the cheapest motel that met our standards but on occasion we were in for a surprise: There was no room at the inn. Not at any inns.

No problem. We had tents and sleeping bags. We planned on camping some nights as it was; we ended up camping some nights we hadn't planned to.

These days, the OFMC has grown and we simply can't ride into some small town and assume we'll find accommodations. So now we plan and make reservations. It takes some of the enjoyment out of the freedom of the road, but it's necessary with a group of this size.

Even with a smaller group, or just on your own, you'd better have a plan and alternatives. One time my lady friend and I took off on a four-day trip and arrived in Gunnison planning to spend the night. Wrong. College graduation was going on that weekend and the town was full. Because there were two of us on the bike, we didn't have camping gear: she was sitting where I usually packed my gear.

Luckily we found a cabin up the road toward Crested Butte.

The next day we headed south into New Mexico. Chama was a nice looking spot but we had plans to stay at Ojo Caliente and soak in the hot springs, so we pushed on. Did we have reservations? No.

Luck was with us, sort of. We reached the inn and managed to get the very last room they had. Of course, the hot springs were closed for the day so forget soaking.

But there was no place within 30 miles to get anything at all to eat. We were very hungry and will forever bless the couple who arrived just ahead of us. These two shared their meager supply of cheese and crackers with us, even though it would not have been enough to satisfy their hunger alone. Now I always carry trail mix and/or granola bars with me when I travel.

So you have a choice here. Learn from me, and carry the right gear and be prepared, or learn your own lessons. They'll stick better if you take the latter course, but you'll have more pleasant rides if you take the former. Your choice.

#6 Know your bike

How lazy are you? Come on, admit it. Most of us are really good about putting off doing things we know darn well we should do, we just don't feel like it. But with a motorcycle more than most things, you've got to take care of it if you want it to take care of you.



For bikers, indolence often takes the form of failure to check the pressure in our tires. What the heck, they're still round. They're not flat. What's the problem?

Of course, if you ride you really ought to know what the problem is. Under-inflated tires can shed tread about as quickly as a snake can shed its skin. And then you're either riding on dangerous tires or you're spending way too much money on tires.

Full disclosure: I have been a bad bike owner. I have neglected my tires.

Take my Kawasaki, for example. It consistently measured low on air but that wasn't enough to persuade me to check it regularly. Then one Saturday morning I was meeting up with some buddies to go ride and one of

them looked at my front tire and said, “Dude, your tire is low.”

Low is hardly the word for it. Nearly flat would be a better description. I took care of it and we rolled but ever since then I’ve been a lot better about it. As it is, that tire lasted about half as long as it should have. I finally solved the problem of the ever-leaking front tire. Turns out the valve wasn’t screwed into the valve stem sufficiently and was constantly leaking. Now my tire holds air just fine, but I still check it regularly anyway.

The point is, you really need to know your motorcycle, and you need to take proper care of it. If you don’t want to find yourself stranded by the road in the middle of nowhere you’ve got to treat your bike well.

Here’s another learning experience I had. I was all set to take off on our summer OFMC trip on the Kawi for the first time. I had bought the Kawi the previous year after the trip so this would be its first long run. It had trouble starting, which it had never had before, and being a pretty new bike it shouldn’t have. I got it started and it ran like a dog. I went four or five miles and then turned and headed to the dealership.

They had no idea what the problem was and they sure weren’t going to fix it on the spot, but that was OK, I had my Honda at home. I unloaded my gear, called a cab to take me home, loaded the Honda and took off.

The dealership never could figure out why the problem developed. They saw easily what the problem was but not what had caused it. So then, sometime later, I’m off again with the OFMC boys and once again the Kawi is running badly. We got to Loveland and I headed for the dealership there. Same problem as before. But why?

When we finally figured it out I really felt stupid. The petcock on my fuel line has three settings: Run, Reserve, and Prime. Apparently, on both occasions, when I



thought I was shifting from Reserve back to Run, I was in fact shifting to Prime. I just didn’t pay attention to what I was doing. That meant there was a constant flow of gas seeping past the rings down into the crank case. That’s why in both cases they found my crank case full of gas. And the machine doesn’t run very well in that condition.

So come on. You love your bike, don’t you? Well, then take the time to pay attention to her needs and try to understand her. She’ll pay you back in kind either way.

#7 Get training

Did you take a driver's education course when you were learning to drive a car? The answer is probably yes. Then why would you think you can just hop on a motorcycle and know how to ride well without being trained? Because you have ridden a bicycle? It's really not the same thing.

So, did I get rider training before I started to ride? No, I'm like you. I just learned by doing. Did I have some close encounters? You bet I did.

I remember one of my earliest experiences on a motorcycle. A friend had two and he said "Let's go ride." I had no experience with counter-steering, so I tried to steer as you would on a bicycle.

And I pulled out of his driveway and immediately crossed the street and ran into the curb. Later on the ride, I almost hit another curb going quite a bit faster. That was very disturbing.



Another early experience was doing a bunch of wheelies--unintentionally. It was a torquey bike and I couldn't coordinate release of the clutch and roll-on of the throttle so as to pull away smoothly. Some kids thought I was pretty cool but I knew I was out of control.

Even years later, with a lot of riding under my belt, I knew I wasn't as good a rider as I could be. My buddies in the OFMC did a lot of dirt riding when they were kids--which I didn't--and they were a lot more confident as riders.

They'd hit a bit of gravel on a curve and that rear tire would slide and they'd just handle it. They were used to sliding around. That same patch of gravel was a major threat for me and I would slow way down.

Nor could I hope to keep up with them in the twisties. I was always slowing down on the curves that they would just power through.

And then I took the ABATE Experienced Rider Course. And I learned a few things.

I learned for one thing that in a curve you need to be looking as deeply into the curve as you can. The bike will go where you're looking, but if you're only looking a short distance ahead you're constantly resetting your target. Look way out ahead and that's where you'll go, easy as pie.

I also took a lesson on a track one day. Track days are a great opportunity to really focus on skills development without the concerns of traffic or road hazards. Plus, you've got an instructor observing you who can point out wrong things you don't realize you're doing and show you how to do the right things.

For instance, I'm much more comfortable keeping up with my buddies on the curves now because I look deep into the curve and I now consciously shift my weight and lean. This keeps the bike more upright and keeps it a lot more stable.

I'm still no pro, and Nicky Hayden has nothing to fear from me, but I'm a better rider than I used to be. That makes riding more fun. And hey, that's why we ride, isn't it?

Do yourself a favor: get trained. You'll be amazed at what you don't know.

#8 Assume you're invisible

Most motorcycle accidents are not primarily the fault of the rider. That is an established fact. They are the fault of motorists who violate riders' rights of way in one of several ways:

- turning left in front of the biker
- pulling out of a driveway or cross-street into the biker's path
- crossing the center-line head-on into the biker
- changing lanes without looking to confirm that the lane is clear

Do these cage-bound fools not care if they injure someone? Do they think it is somehow OK to "share" our lane because we don't need it all? Do they even pay attention to whether we're there?

The most common answer given when a motorist is asked about violating a motorcyclist's right of way is simply, "I didn't see him."

And you want to know the truth? They really, honestly didn't. It's not a valid excuse, but it is a fact.

I know this because I've been one of them. I was driving down the street one day and just as I started to turn left my passenger screamed "Stop!" I hit my brake just in time to see a motorcyclist do a wobbly swerve past my left front fender, narrowly avoiding me. I was stunned. I had not seen him.

I've been on that guy's side of the situation any number of times since then. It's like we're invisible. And if we're effectively invisible then we'd better ride as if we are actually invisible. This is defensive driving to an extreme.

Does an oncoming car look like he might turn left? Slow down, shift your lane position, do whatever it takes to create a cushion of safety. Assume he doesn't see you.



Does that RV have a line of traffic behind it? Assume that some impatient soul will try to pass, figuring you, he, and the RV will all fit in two lanes. Or assume he just doesn't see you. Be prepared to brake, swerve, or do whatever is necessary.

Are you overtaking someone in the next lane? Assume they're going to want to change lanes and assume they will not turn their head to check for traffic. Cover the brake as you slip into their blind spot and then juice the throttle to shoot ahead, out of their blind spot, as quickly as you can.

What about when you're not even moving? Do they see you then? I know a guy who was stopped at a red light and some fellow in a truck totally creamed him from behind. He "didn't see him." Watch your mirrors when you're stopped and keep the bike in gear, in case you need to move quickly.

You've got to use your mirrors, scan for danger, assume the worst, and plan your escape route. Constantly. They really are trying to kill you out there; they're just not conscious of their intent.

But if you always ride as if you were invisible you'll be two steps ahead of them, and with a little luck that should be enough.

#9 Take your time

Let me state the obvious: a motorcycle is not a car. So when you take a motorcycle trip, why would you want to act as if you were traveling by car?

You know what I mean. Jump on the interstate and blast along as fast as you can just to put those miles behind you. If you're going to do that, why not just drive the car?

One of the first things you notice when you start riding is how aware you are of your surroundings. In a car you're shut off from the world you're passing through. On a bike you notice the smells, the temperature fluctuations, and how you can see it all, not just the rectangle visible through a windshield.



There are reasons bikers prefer the two-lane roads. They're less crowded, you get to see a whole lot more, they're more relaxing to ride, and it's easier to stop and stretch a bit. Take your time. The reason you're on a motorcycle is to enjoy the trip.

And there's nothing more enjoyable on a motorcycle than exploring. Unlike the interstates, where

there is one route only, the smaller roads wind and intersect and if you want to, you can cover a lot of miles without going very far. But you can't be in a hurry. It's the journey, not the destination. Or really, the journey IS the destination.

When you explore, the things you find can be amazing. Some of the best parts of our trips have been totally unexpected. We were wandering through western Nebraska one day and decided to pull off alongside a bit of woods. Noticing that there was a path through the woods, we decided to explore. Imagine our surprise when we stumbled upon Car Henge. Never heard of Car Henge? Check it out, you don't know what you're missing.

Another time that taking our time really paid off was at the Beartooth. The Beartooth runs from Cooke City and Yellowstone park over to Red Lodge, MT.

We came through the park with intentions of reaching Red Lodge that day but were taken with the quaint, rustic charm of the town. "Hey, let's stop here. We don't have to reach Red Lodge today."

So we spent the night. The next day we were awed at the ride, and at the length of the extremely high route. More importantly, when we stopped at the little store at the top of the pass we got to talking with the proprietor, who told us what we missed the night before.

It seems there were some bikers who headed up the eastern end of the pass about the time we would have been starting up the western end. They reached the top chilled to the bone just as the shopkeepers were ready to head down to Cooke City.

At the bikers' request, the shopkeepers drove close behind the bikes with their brights on to help illuminate the road. Time and again the folks in the pick-up watched one bike or another slide and fishtail on the now icy road. It was a long, tortuous ride down. That could have been us.

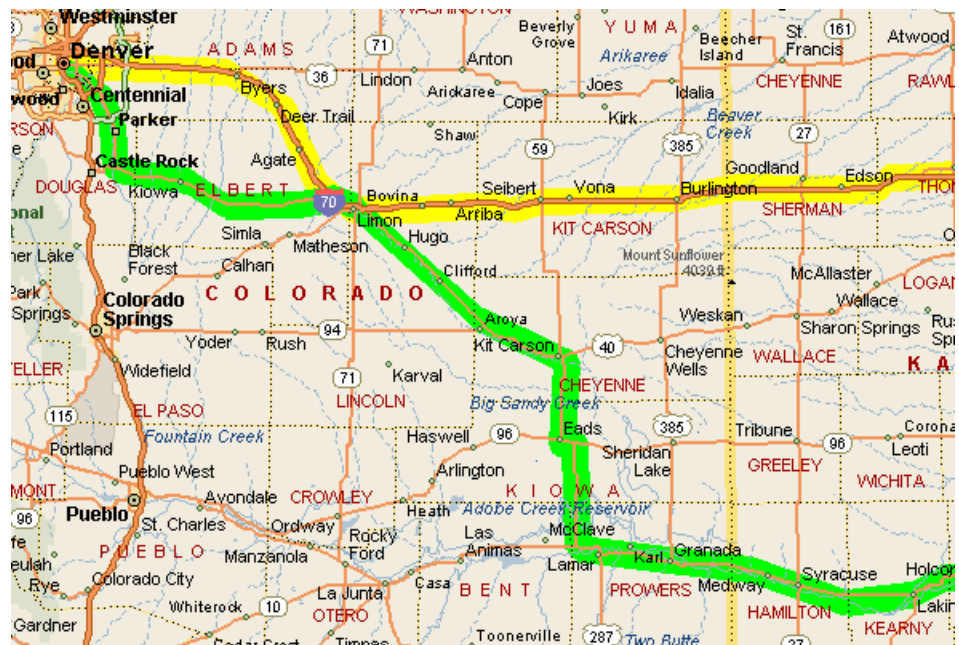
So take your time. There's no hurry. What matters is to enjoy the ride.

#10 Explore

Choosing the road less traveled can make all the difference, and that definitely applies to your own established routes.

What I mean is that even if you have favorite routes that avoid the traffic and are really sweet rides, you need to shake things up on occasion. Who knows, you may find something even better.

You know, the longer you live somewhere the more often you ride the same roads just to get out of town. They can be roads other people come from thousands of miles away to ride, but if



you've ridden them 500 times you're probably a bit jaded.

Let me give you an example. As the OFMC headed out on our summer trip one year we were headed north and west. Right off the bat, John decided he would lead us out of the Denver metro area and on up to Loveland on a lesser road we had never taken. I don't even remember what road it was, and I ought to ask him because it was really nice. And I never knew it was there.

Then, after John got us to Loveland, I took over the lead and showed the guys another road I knew about that they had never seen. This was the [Buckhorn Canyon/Stove Prairie route](#) that gets you into the Poudre Canyon without having to come anywhere near the congestion of Fort Collins. And this time it was John's turn to say "Wow, I never knew this road existed."

Heading out another year, this time going to the Sturgis rally, we were figuring to just jump on I-25 and blast. But no. John suggested we go up U.S. 85 through Brighton and Greeley and reach Cheyenne that way. Again, this was a sweet little ride, and I had never been on 85 north of Greeley. And practically anything is preferable to blasting on the superslab anyway.

Maps and spontaneity are your best friends when it comes to keeping it fresh. In our group, John is Mr. Maps. John has a map of the western United States on which he highlights in yellow all the roads we ride. The map is a mass of yellow. He looks very closely at any area that is not yellow.

I tend to be Mr. Spontaneity, but spontaneity is easier when you're by yourself. I once delivered a buddy's bike to him in St. Louis and I had no plan at all for getting there, other than "go to St. Louis." The map shows in green how I started the trip. The yellow would have just been blasting to St. Louis, and not a lot of fun.

I took any road that looked interesting, covered a lot more miles than I had to, and had a terrific three days. I'd do a trip like that again in a heartbeat.

According to one source I checked, there are 4 million miles of paved highway in the U.S. Why ride the same roads over and over again? You'll never ride all 4 million miles, but you can try.

#11 - Be opportunistic

I never let a month pass without getting out on both my motorcycles. Not too difficult as long as you're willing to ride in some really cold weather, right?

Actually, that is correct--most of the time. We'll come back to that "most of the time" in a moment.

Just because you're willing to ride in cold weather doesn't mean you have to punish yourself, though. This is Colorado and while it might be bitter cold at night, sunny days can climb into the 70s. You just can't count on it.

You have to be opportunistic.

OK, let's say it's been cold with highs in the 30s all week. Now it's Saturday, and while the high is expected to reach 40 today, tomorrow's high should be 55. You want to ride but you'll bag it for today and plan on tomorrow.

Bad choice.

You make that decision and today's high gets up to 48 and then an unexpected snowstorm leaves you waking up Sunday to 6 inches of white. You blew it.

Sure, this doesn't happen every time. But it does happen, and it's not even uncommon.

The summer is one thing. You can ride any time you want in the summer. But in the winter you've got to go for it, because all too often, you snooze, you lose.

This isn't just one day vs. another day. If it's 50 degrees now, but you've got something else you want to do first, you may find yourself later riding in 40-degree weather. Or 35-degree weather. You snoozed and you lost.



On other occasions, being opportunistic means making your own opportunities. Remember a couple years back when we had all that snow and it didn't melt? You remember, it stayed cold and the city finally broke down and used every piece of equipment they could commandeer to bust and scrape and gouge 6 inches of ice and packed snow off every street in town.

It was near the end of January and I hadn't been able to get out on either of my bikes since December. The cross-street at the end of our block was mostly clear but our street was 6 inches of ice and ruts that I could barely get my car up. I was getting desperate.

On the last day of the month it finally got a bit warmer. All the sidewalks on our block had been cleared but there was packed snow on some sections and the freeze and thaw had left other sections covered in ice. But the sidewalk would be my escape route.

I went out early and scattered sand and salt on all the iffy spots between our house and the corner. An hour later I took an ice scraper and cleared off what I could. Then I spread more sand and more salt. A little later I did it all again.

Finally, in the early afternoon, I'd done it. I had a clear shot. Climbing on the first bike I rolled down to the corner and then my wife helped me walk the bike over the last 20 feet or so of ice that I needed to cross. And then I was off!

When I got back I parked the first bike, rolled and walked the second bike out, and rode off on that one. Then Judy helped me cross the ice again and I rode back up the sidewalk to home. Take that Jack Frost!

So the point is, the opportunities are there. Sometimes you need to help them along, but they're there. You can either park the bike all winter or you can ride year round. And if you're going to ride year round it doesn't have to mean freezing your butt off. You just have to jump at the opportunities when they knock on your door.

#12 - Know how to pick up your motorcycle

Have you ever dropped your bike? That sucker probably weighs 500-800 pounds. Was it easy picking it up?

Oh, you had buddies there to help. What if you'd been alone?

I had to pick up my CB750 one time when I was out on a dirt road in the middle of Nebraska. It went down because the dry surface of the road concealed the fact that underneath there were about 6 inches of mud. When my front tire plunged into that muck the whole bike did a slow-motion roll to the right, dumping me on my back in the slop.

Now think about this. I had to get firm footing in order to stand the bike back up, but I was in a mudhole. A bit of a challenge. And no one else around.

Anyone who rides a motorcycle needs to know how to pick the thing up all by himself or herself. You're not always riding with friends, so you can't count on them.

Fortunately, it can be done if you use the proper techniques.

The first thing you need to understand is that you're not going to just reach down and pick that thing up. The only thing you'll get from that effort is a hernia.

What you've got to do is this:

1. If the bike is on its ride side, extend the side stand to catch it when you get it upright.
2. Get around on the top side of the bike, crouch down facing away from it, and snug your back and hips up against the saddle.
3. Take hold of the hand grip for the side of the bike on the ground, and grab anything you can get a good grip on with the other hand. At this point you should have a firm grip with both hands on both sides of your body.
4. Pull the grip in to the bike as much as you can, plant your feet firmly, and start to stand up, pushing back and up against the bike while you do so in order to lift it. Let your legs do the work or you'll hurt yourself!

That's really all there is to it. Is it easy? Heck, no! Can you do it? Yes. I've seen small women lift Gold Wings using this technique. If they can do it you can do it.

So what about me and the CB in the mud?

First of all, in a situation like that you have to try to get solid footing while standing in the mud. Secondly, raising the bike up and letting it flop over onto the side stand won't do any good when that stand is just going to sink into the mud and the bike is going to fall the other way.

How did I do it? I dug with my heels as deep as I could go until I reached firmer ground below the mud. And I slipped and lost it several times in the process.

Then when I finally got the bike upright I ever so carefully turned around, climbed on board, started it up, and very, very carefully and slowly worked my way to dry ground.

Back in civilization I stopped at the first car wash I saw and cleaned up the bike. And that night in my motel room I spent a long time cleaning caked mud off my leather jacket.

And I have a great story to tell. It's all about the stories. Be prepared for yours.