



A Top Rider's Top 10

Text by Jon DeVecchio

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Are you an above average rider? Odds are you view yourself as one. But what is your self-evaluation based on? With the riding season just getting started, here's a "Top 10" list of things to do right now that will make you truly rise to the top among riders.

10. Do one new maintenance task on your motorcycle. All riders should have a basic understanding of how their motorcycle works. Sure, there are 24 hour towing services and mechanics to bail you out. But owning a motorcycle requires more hands-on commitment to keep the bike and rider happiest. Good tasks to tackle if you haven't done so already are changing tires or liquids. Lubing cables or adding an accessory are also simple things most people can do. Be careful with things like valve adjustments and brakes. Those jobs are achievable for some, but for others best left to the pros.

9. Assess your riding gear. Riding gear can be costly and inconvenient. It can also be worth the expense in comfort and safety. Gear is definitely worth the effort to research and use. Go through your current riding apparel and fill in gaps. Are you in need of a good rain suit or prepared for the heat with a sturdy mesh jacket? Make sure to consider hi-viz options. Even smaller hi-viz accents or jogger waist bands can be enough to get people's attention if you aren't keen on full day-glo jackets.

8. Get back to basics. Over time bad habits tend to creep in. It's the finer details that separate the truly elite from the average riders. Reviewing the basics doesn't mean you're ignorant, but reinforces what you've already learned. For example, how do you shut down your motor? If you use your ignition key or side stand instead of the engine cut-off switch you may be sending the message that precision riding isn't your style. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation shares its handbook for free (<http://www.msf-usa.org/downloads/>

BRCHandbook.pdf) and there are many basic riding books available. Also, try to follow the rules of the road as if you were taking your first DMV road test. You may be surprised at how far from proper your driving behavior has become.

7. Get your eyes checked. When's the last time you saw an eye doctor? Ninety percent of information gathered for making driving decisions comes to you visually. Any degeneration should be treated immediately to reverse or minimize the negative effects. You should explore strategies on how to compensate for any sight deficiencies.

6. Be courteous. Motorcyclists get a bad rap in the media and within the non-riding public. Add roadway stress to the mix and riders are now fighting for space on the street. Be courteous. Let mistakes of others roll off your back. Keep a cool head. Riding aggressively in traffic only confirms the stereotype that we aren't concerned with our safety. Waving to others along the roadside when appropriate communicates a more friendly image.

5. Visit local dealerships. With the explosion of online retailing, motorcyclists may rarely step into a dealership or repair shop. Sure, some places of business are more welcoming than others. And brick and mortar stores may have higher prices on some things. But you will find bulletin boards with local events, coffee, the latest motorcycles on the market and enthusiasts like you walking through the door. Keeping local shops open for business is something we all benefit from. Bring riding buddies and try to visit one per month.

4. Take the long way. With our hectic lives it's easy to simply ride our motorcycles from point A to B. Or after a Sunday ride go straight home after

breaking off with buddies. Sometimes it's rewarding to take that extra turn or pass your street and keep on going. You'll be glad you rode those additional miles when you have to stop for the winter or hang it up altogether.

3. Start a riding club. If you're not in a riding club or group, the likely reason is you haven't found one that fits you well. So what can you do? Start your own! You create the vibe and set the tone. While there are many ways to do this, meetup.com a good local community building service to use.

2. Offer to mentor a new rider. Most new riders aren't going to come right out and ask for advice. In fact, it's usually the opposite. Newer riders don't want to come across as newbies so they try to talk the talk from the start. Often these riders will say or do something that makes it obvious they lack certain knowledge. Experienced riders should pick up on this and offer to show them the ropes. How many aspects about riding could you have learned the easy way if you had a person to go to? Mentoring doesn't mean having a sidekick on every ride. It means you're there to guide someone to reach a higher level of enjoyment they wouldn't have otherwise.

1. Thank the person that got you into riding. Most of us can think of a person that directly or indirectly got us into motorcycles. Sometimes that person isn't around anymore. Occasionally, it's a close friend that you still see often. Make the effort send them a note or stop by and see them on your bike. Ed Milich's books make great gifts and he'll even inscribe them personally for you.