

Lessons learned

In 1971 I was enjoying a brief spell in Bermuda as my Royal Navy frigate was based there for a while. It was a tough life, beautiful beaches and girls, crystal clear blue seas and a leisurely pace for motorists due to the very low speed limit. Well someone had to be there!

Hiring mopeds was common practice, especially amongst the abundance of American tourists, but protective gear was frowned upon; how else was a girl supposed to maintain her tan? Accidents were not uncommon resulting in a condition known as “mobey rash”, now commonly referred to as road rash

On a borrowed motor scooter, I was heading back to my ship. I had a helmet on, but being young, stupid, invincible and cavalier the strap was not fastened so off it flew, just before I flew off the scooter. To accompany my mobey rash I had a hairline skull fracture and nasty scar of which the remnants are still visible today

Hop on mate

Fast forward to 1975 and my subsequent frigate was visiting a small town in Western Australia of the type that features in cowboy movies. Dust roads, raised pavements and bat-wing doors to the bars. The town was a long way from the small port so I decided to walk to the main road and hitch a lift which was never a problem in uniform. A large motorbike loomed into view and screeched to a halt in a cloud of dust. “Hop on” said the rider. I explained that the last time I was on two wheels I fractured my skull and as he didn’t have a spare helmet I asked if he could take it easy. His idea of taking it easy didn’t coincide with mine, so when we arrived at the town I was shaking with anxiety. “Where to mate?” he yelled over his shoulder? “The nearest effing bar” was my squealed response. Boy, that first whisky tasted good for the nanosecond that it took to slide down my throat.

Bad passenger

I haven’t been on the back of a bike since and to this day am the world’s worst car passenger. I explain this to anyone who gives me a lift, otherwise they cannot understand my gasps, or eye shielding. Last week a friend was driving me; he had been a London black cab driver for many years so was a professional with reflexes like a fighter pilot. I was in safe hands, so why did my right foot keep hitting the carpet? There was no brake pedal for me to touch, I also took to warning him of potential hazards ahead. I apologised to him and said that I really must change my attitude; he smiled in agreement

At least I recognise the problem and as a former counsellor said, this is a major step to dealing with the issue, so I continue to work on it, but be aware if I ever get in your car. The same attitude prevails with boy racers who just have to be in front of you, tailgaters who want to intimidate and the road- rage merchants who absolutely cannot be in the wrong. Interesting that these folks are nearly all male. The ladies drive and park differently but as thin ice is approaching I will skirt around this subject by for the moment

Be safe

Back to bikes. I occasionally take my 125 cc out for a spin and although I envy those that ride in shorts, T-shirts and flip flops, I wear protective clothing as head-butting the tarmac is not pleasant and even at say 20 MPH, the skins tears off so easily when in contact with a rough surface. For the same reason the seat belt is always on as steering wheels and windshields are great for taking out the teeth. Odd that people ignore such basic safety measures, but like a serious illness it is never going to happen to us, right?

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