

## Why I Ride - Michael Richardson

I started riding motorcycles in '94 after convincing my parents to buy me a '88 KTM 125 VC. I was lucky enough to live on 24 acres, so I rode that bike almost daily through the woods, trails, and paths I made. Once I was old enough, I immediately got my motorcycle license. For the test, I used my dad's current bike at the time, which was a '94 Harley Davidson XLH 1200. My friends and I would spend many days in the next few years riding dirt bikes at the local trails and occasionally riding street bikes, but my true passion through the '90s was trail riding, which led to me eventually selling the KTM and buying a Yamaha YZ250.

As happens in life, things slowly changed and hitting the trails every weekend was no longer in the cards by the early 2000s. So, I traded the YZ250 for a Kawasaki EX500, a street bike. I never rode the EX500 as much as the dirt bike and mostly used it for daily tasks such as going to and from work, visiting friends, and quick trips to the store. By the mid-2000s, I had decided to join the military, and once leaving for basic training, my motorcycle riding career suddenly stopped.

At my first base, there always seemed to be a lot going on, and getting a bike at the time was almost impossible. So, I never took the motorcycle safety course. I figured I would be out of the military in a few years and would not need to take the course once I got out anyway. But things changed again, and I stayed in the military well past my initial plan. I would look at bikes occasionally through the years, always telling myself I would start riding again once I got out. Eventually, I moved to a smaller base that offered routine motorcycle safety courses. It had been long enough since I last rode, so I signed up for the next class, which I completed a few days after signing up. The EX500 was still at my parent's house, but that bike would likely need work after many years of no use. So, a week after the class, I bought a KTM Duke 390.

The first ride on the Duke brought back a flood of memories. I suddenly realized why I rode bikes many years before. There is a level of fun and excitement riding a motorcycle that you rarely experience anywhere else. I could explain what makes riding a bike so enjoyable and thrilling, but it is one of those things you must experience to appreciate. Some may ride a motorbike and not understand the attraction, but for those people, they have something else that likely brings them the excitement that we motorcyclists feel when riding.

Something about that Duke reminded me of my days of riding dirt bikes; it might have been the riding position, which is more upright and closer to your body position when sitting on a dirt bike. I started to feel the desire to ride off-road again, which I did not want to do with the Duke. Therefore, I decided on a Triumph Tiger 900. With the Tiger, I rode a large portion of several adventure trails but also several significant parts of historic Route 66. I realized after a while that the 900 was not exactly what I wanted for off-road or on-road use, so I eventually traded it along with the Duke for a Triumph Tiger 1200, which I am using as my dedicated touring bike. Between weekends of 500–1500-mile rides, I am looking for a regular dirt bike to scratch the off-road trail riding itch.

In all my time riding motorcycles, I can only think of one incident that I consider a near miss. I was riding on a highway heading south toward a small town on my dad's Harley. It was on a two-lane road with a speed limit of 55 mph. Up ahead, I could see a line of cars following a much slower vehicle. Suddenly, a car started pulling out to pass, which caused me to roll off the throttle immediately. At first, I thought he would see me as he pulled into the oncoming lane and would pull back over, but he continued and

brought his vehicle into my traffic lane. All four limbs went into motion as I pressed the rear brake, grabbed a handful of front brakes, pulled the clutch lever and downshifted. I was quickly coming to a stop, and with the other driver showing no signs of changing their course, I shot over to the shoulder of the road, which was littered with rocks and debris and not very wide due to the encroaching grass. At this point, there was nowhere for him to go, he was next to the car he was passing, and I was on the shoulder of the road.

By now, I was hoping that he did not see me because if he did, the driver might have merged into the car he was passing, possibly causing that car to wreck and then, once meeting that car, overcorrecting into me. He could also have, upon seeing me, driven directly into me since people tend to steer towards the object they are looking at. If either of the two scenarios started to play out, I prepared myself to take the bike down the ditch, but the car zoomed by, seemingly oblivious to what had transpired. As I pulled back onto the road, I wondered if anyone would have believed the story if I did take the bike into the ditch, that is, that a 16-year-old took a bike into a ditch to avoid an oncoming car, and not that I was doing something foolish.

If there were any other near misses in my years of riding, I cannot think of them. As I think of some advice, I could give riders to help them avoid an accident or be better riders, a thousand things come to mind. Of those things, I caution riders to avoid excessive speed and acceleration, which I often see with motorcyclists. I add acceleration because when a bike leaves a stop sign, turns onto a road, or leaves a stop light, people trying to enter that same street a few hundred yards up the road expects the bike to accelerate at the same rate a car would. The problem arises when the biker decides to launch the bike at full throttle while they use the rev limiter as a shift indicator. On top of that, it is harder to tell the speed of a motorbike than a car as you see it from the front, coming in the distance. The combination of a vehicle thinking they have plenty of time to pull out and a biker thinking they have a wide-open road to accelerate ends in many near misses and avoidable accidents.

The last that I have is urging all riders to ride responsibly and safely while continuing to enjoy their time riding the highways and byways. Also, encourage riders of all levels to have and use the proper gear and maintain their skills through approved courses. And keep the chrome up and the rubber down.