

November Safety Article: The Midnight Rider

There are two seasons during my year: riding season and deer season. What deer season doesn't realize is that riding season will always and forever take precedent over deer season. Therefore, since I can't go hunting the deer because of my riding addiction, I have to always be on the lookout for the deer that jump out of the dark at me and find amusement in seeing how closely they can time their highway crossings in relation to my path of travel. Deer hunting necessarily takes on a different form for me. It's one that doesn't involve a rifle or arrow, but one that involves light and vision.

I have an obsession with vision. It's not overrated and the older I get, the worse mine is. In fact, I recently bought a new high-definition television but couldn't understand what all the fuss about a high-definition picture was until I bought a pair of glasses so I could actually see the high-definition picture. The same thing holds true with riding your motorcycle at night.

Having appropriate light and lenses is imperative for riding at night. Some of my most memorable rides have been on wide, straight, safe roads in the middle of the night with little else around me except moonlight and the sound of my Evo and Twin Cam engines. A ride in the cool of the evening makes for an A+ and I absolutely love riding at night. I also, though, like seeing, and being seen while doing so.

I was recently studying a motorcycle parts catalog, and comparing light patterns from various headlamps, when a disturbing thing occurred to me in my analysis of the diagrams. Many of the bikes that are on the road today have low-beam lighting that stretches real hard to get out to 250-300 feet in front of the bike. That doesn't sound too bad. Three hundred feet is a football field length, right? I was accepting of that, until I started doing some math. On a good day, when alert and caffeinated, it can take as much as a full second to see a hazard, get my brain to move my hand or foot into brake application mode and actually initiate stopping power. At only 40 mph, I have already travelled about 60 feet in that one second. That's 60 feet I'll never get back and leaves me only less than four seconds to get my half-ton of self-and-bike stopped or appropriately rerouted. That doesn't feel like much time or distance to me. At 60 mph, that distance per second increases to 88 feet, leaving less than three seconds to have appropriate action taken. Those kinds of numbers sure make quick work of a football field's worth of distance. It also makes it easier for you to find a deer laying across the front fender of your ride, which is great if you strapped it there after you killed it with your Henry rifle, but not by ramming with your Road Glide.

High-quality headlamps, fog lamps, driving lights, theater spotlights, aircraft landing lights, and even lighthouse beacons are all worth the money to help you see and be seen. Using your high beams when appropriate should be a standard procedure for you. It is also a best practice to keep fingers covering a brake lever. It will save reaction time, for those feet of stopping distance become precious quickly! If you happen to be wearing some of the safety orange from your real hunting excursions, it makes being seen even easier. Never, ever, presume though, that just because another vehicle's operator may see you and your bike-mounted sunshine, that they will make a choice in their driving behavior that will be safe for you. That, however, is a story for another time.

Light up your life and the lives of those you love. Cover your brakes. Be safe, arrive alive, live to ride another day, and, "Hey...let's be CAREFUL out there!"