



Your Child and Motorcycling

What a Parent should know!

By Denny "Budman" Kobza Jr.

Dear Parent,

Motorcycles and scooters are an offshoot from your child's days on their bicycles and many will want to ride as transportation or for fun as they reach driving age. There are many benefits to riding, including the cost of gas and the attention required to ride the machine itself. However, there are some things that you should know to make their endeavor a safer experience. Both motorcyclist and scooter riders face the same dangers on the road so don't be fooled into thinking that just because your child may be on a scooter they are not at risk. They are.

My goal is to inform parents who may not know about two wheeled vehicles so that you can make an informed decision and help your child become a safe part of the riding sector. I have included my email below and am happy to answer specific questions or point you toward the information you may seek.

I will focus on three basic elements.

- ***THE RIGHT BIKE***
- ***THE RIGHT GEAR***
- ***THE RIGHT TRAINING***

THE RIGHT BIKE:

Today's motorcycles are much different than what we grew up with. In many cases, they have been designed after modern racing machines and are far more capable than the new rider. The manufacturers have brought larger displacements into the norm and while that may be great for experienced riders, but new riders can find themselves in trouble quickly with this technology. Riding an elite sport bike is an expert riding task and while they may be better handling, brake quicker and really cool to look at, they can be deadly in the hands of a novice.

A 1000cc engine size sport bike is capable of covering $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from a standstill in less than 11 seconds and reach top speeds of well over 160 miles per hour. Many kids are attracted to the 600cc versions, but what you need to know is that these are almost as fast as their big brothers and take just as much skill to ride. They will do the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile in about 12 seconds and still reach speeds over 140 MPH. So if your child says "it is only a 600" don't expect it to be $\frac{1}{2}$ as fast or powerful. Most are race inspired with supreme handling and incredible power.

Today we have an assortment of machines to choose from. Many riders will take an older model or standard design (upright handlebars) and enhance them with better brakes and suspension providing a worthy mount for a young rider to develop their skills on. However, a 125cc to 500cc machine is a much better choice for them and for your piece of mind than a 600 or 1000cc motorcycle.

They may also consider learning in the dirt where there are no cars to deal with and the uneven terrain makes them understand how a motorcycle works very quickly. I started on the dirt at 8 years old and by the time I was 15 and ready to start on the street I had developed an intimate knowledge of how the machines worked.

When choosing a motorcycle, remember to leave enough money to buy the proper gear and of course insurance. You should require that your child wait until he/she or you can purchase both. All too often, riders spend all of their money on a bike, yet neglect the safety gear. This goes for scooters as well. Sliding on pavement at 40MPH feels the same whether on a scooter or a motorcycle.

THE RIGHT GEAR:

The gear that a rider wears is the first line of defense from injury and modern gear has been designed to provide the maximum amount of protection. Do not skimp on gear. The first thing you need to look at is the **helmet**. A good full face helmet will often save a rider's life. Many riders will want open face helmets or even the small "brain buckets" that many older cruiser riders wear. The diagram below provides an analysis of the distribution of impact locations on motorcycle helmets. As illustrated, having the jaw area, and the sides and back of the head protected is of utmost importance. Helmets should be SNELL approved and have a DOT sticker on the back.

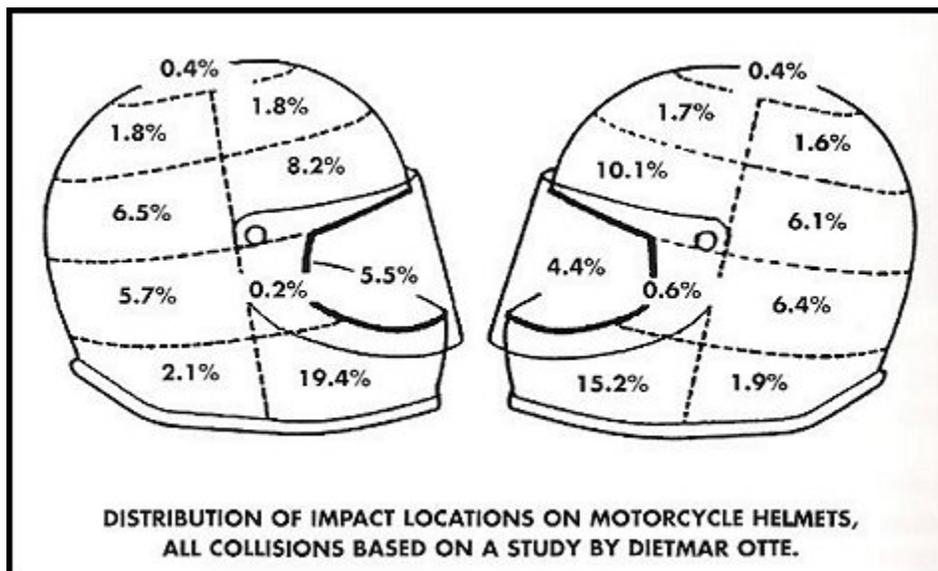


Diagram by: David Hought / Courtesy of Proficient Motorcycling.

The technology of a current helmet offers more than just style. Impact zones inside are made to breakdown and slow the transfer of force to the brain. A helmet that is involved in a crash or even dropped can be compromised and should be replaced or evaluated by the manufacturer. If there are any visible impact marks or the rider suffers a good blow to the head replacement is necessary. The materials within the helmet will break down over time. Shelf life for a helmet is

about 5 years so buying one that is 5 years old and “never used” is not a deal. Over the years my helmets have saved my life several times and they are always replaced when damaged.

Gloves, boots and clothing have evolved over time as well and there are many options available. These items can be OK if used. I say OK because if they have apparent flaws where stitching is coming lose or holes from previous crashing, they are not.

The leather suit or other outerwear

The **leather suit** is still the best outfit to wear. From head to toe leather will resist abrasion and when modern armor is installed it will be even better for the bumps and bruises that occur from simple falls to more severe crashes than other gear. While they may be uncomfortable in hot conditions, road rash (the scrapes from the asphalt) is far more uncomfortable. Jeans are not enough!

There are options, including **textile suits** that offer superior protection than jeans and will help with lessening the injuries suffered in a crash. They can also offer great weather protection and a little more flexibility than leathers, but the bottom line is good old cowhide specifically designed for motorcycle use still provides the best protection. After 50 years of riding and racing, I still have no road rash and that includes spills up to 120 MPH. Don't be fooled by casual leather clothing. They are not designed to withstand the impacts and have inferior stitching that may fail in an accident. Good gear is something you can control for your child. It can also be a cool factor for the child as it can be stylish and speak to the riders understanding of the sport, giving your child a sense of pride similar to the sports uniform they may wear for school or other sporting activities.



Blue jeans just don't cut it.



Neither do black jeans.

Pictures provided by Ride2die.com

Gloves are always a necessity. The first thing you do when you fall down is try to break the fall with your hands. Every human has a natural reaction to do this and even the most skilled riders still do it. Gloves vary greatly in their protection and their price. I use racing gloves both on the track and on the road because they are specifically designed to resist the high speeds that occur while racing and the quality of the stitching and leather is what sets them apart. Just because they look cool does not mean they are good. Your local motorcycle shop should be able to point you in the right direction.

Boots are also very important. The picture on the above right shows what happened to a young man falling in just tennis shoes. They came off! They don't offer any ankle protection or armor

in key places that many of today's riding boots provide. Boots are often a neglected piece of protection because of the cool factor or desire to be in casual clothing wherever the rider may end up. Being cool is not worth the injuries that can occur because of the lack of quality footwear.

Back protectors have come into general acceptance to help lessen potential spinal injuries. They disperse the impact away from the spinal column to the rib cage and muscle structure. They are light and don't affect the riders ability to maneuver their machines. However, you need to buy the right size jacket to work with them. Some jackets have them built in, but I feel the accessory designed protectors offer the best safety. The built-in models still offer some protection and if your child will likely pass on wearing the protector when riding may be the better choice.

Chest impact protectors are a more recent development. These are designed to spread the impact to the rib cage and away from the heart and lungs. Some riders don't like the extra bulkiness in the front area, but if many racers can deal with it so can your child.

Eye Protection is another key to riding safely. The assumption here is that a full faced helmet with the shield down offers the best protection from insect or debris that could cause injury or a crash. Sunglasses are not likely to be impact resistant and don't provide the wind protection that a shield does. Tearing of the eyes blurs vision and that can lead to an accident.

THE RIGHT TRAINING:

Motorcycling is a skill and getting trained on how to do it is supremely important. In California, everyone 20 years old and younger must attend a State Sponsored motorcycle safety class in order to obtain a motorcycle license. The CMSP Basic Riders Course covers not only basic control and operation of the vehicle; it also provides street strategies and accident avoidance techniques.

Having "street smarts" is key to staying out of trouble. Several factors account for having "street smarts" including:

- Anticipating what other vehicle may do
- Using constant visual surveillance (eyes moving side to side and far to near)
- Controlling the motorcycle
- Understanding the limitations of your motorcycle
- Understanding road conditions
- Avoiding drugs and alcohol

Training is an ongoing process and like any other physical skill, practice is important for improving the rider's skill set. Time spent practicing in parking lots or semi-controlled environments helps improve the rider's ability to cope with sudden changes. Advanced rider courses are available for more skilled riders through the Total Control / MSF, and others. There are options available.

Dirt bikes can be a great way to start riding; that is the way I started. By the time I reached the street I had been riding for 7 years and had excellent control of the machine and basic skills locked in to my muscle memory. In other words, the ability to react quickly to changing situations became second nature through repetition. Like any good athlete the repetition of movement becomes part of the quantified reactions and the body and brain make those responses automatically.

Dirt bikes also offer an environment that does not have cars and trucks as part of the mix. Focusing on skills, learning to read the ground (traction and surface irregularities) and basic balancing techniques can be acquired quickly. Dirt bikes tend to provide more input to the rider, allowing more balance and throttle control to be learned quickly with less of a risk to the rider. Several dirt bike schools are available to your child. Danny Walker's American Supercamp and Rich Oliver's Mystery School both provide smaller motorcycles for students, so even if your son or daughter has no bike or has started to ride on the street, they can expand their skill set and understanding of motorcycle control in the safest environment possible. I attended both after decades of riding and there is real value to the motorcyclist by giving them a try. Plus they are loads of fun!

Should you have specific questions please email me at thebudman@kobza.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denny Kobza is a former racer and lifelong motorcyclist. He has been riding for 50 years starting on dirt bikes as a child and moving onto the street at the age of 15 ½. After college, Kobza began racing motocross and then moved on to road racing in his mid-twenties. He qualified for Suzuki Cup finals, became a 24 Hour endurance champion before retiring from racing at 31. He continues to ride on the street and the track. In 2002, he joined the Bay Area Riders Forum www.bayarearidersforum.com, one of the first on line motorcycle communities, and soon took ownership of the forum. This allowed Denny to expand his reach, educating riders and sharing the good times motorcycling offers.

*In 2006, he started providing high school safety seminars for young adults to teach the best ways to pursue the sport or handle the streets as a commuter. In cooperation with the CHP and local police departments, he continues his outreach and launched the **1Rider** program in 2008. Because of the reach of Bay Area Riders Forum, he has access to a continuous stream of information and has taken the website to a new level with interaction from CMSP/MSF instructors, Police Officers and motorcycle school personnel. As a result of this effort, he was invited to and attended the first ever California Motorcycle Safety Summit to provide the State feedback on safety measures and his considerations for increasing safety among California's riders. He was the only internet-based business (motorcycle forum) invited to do so. He worked on AB 51, which led to codifying Lane Splitting and is working with the CHP to issues their guidelines for the practice. He continues his effort to inform riders that education and training are the key to a successful life in motorcycling. He is committed to keeping the sport healthy for future generations and to keeping riders learning the right way to become a skilled motorcyclist.*

Abbreviations:

CMSP	California Motorcyclist Safety Program
cc	cubic centimeters
MPH	miles per hour
MSF	Motorcycle Safety Foundation
OTS	Office of Traffic Safety