

Transcript: Behind the Wheel: Motorcycling in Maine Part I (May 2021)

Welcome to Behind the Wheel, an audio interview series where you can learn about motor vehicle topics in the State of Maine. Here is your host Larry Boivin.

Thanks so much for joining us for our premiere edition of the program and we'll be featuring different topics and folks that work with the main bureau motor vehicles. Over the coming months we'll explore everything from driver licenses to registrations to titles and so much more, so we hope you'll enjoy the program. With warmer weather, May is motorcycle awareness month so it only seemed appropriate to have as our first guest Maine's motorcycle safety coordinator John Kohler. John welcome to the program.

Thanks, Larry it's great to be here.

So John first I think it would be appropriate to talk about experience in your own personal experience in riding.

Well, I started uh riding motorcycles at a very young age and then just fresh out of the service a friend of mine saw an ad in the paper for motorcycle safety instructors back in uh in the 90s and he said you know that'd be a great job for you and so that's how I got started and that was in 1994, something like that and um and then in 2003 I was able to, I was just fortunate enough to be at the right place at the right time to become a certified trainer to train instructors and then one thing led to another and here i am in Augusta, Maine.

So, as the safety coordinator how long have you done it how long have you been with the bureau?

I've been with the bureau since 2013 this this position was uh not being utilized for about nine years before I came on board it was it was uh they didn't have, the bureau didn't have anybody with the background to do this kind of thing so anyways I was hired in 2013 and since that time it's, it's been quite an experience.

We're obviously going to talk about some of the safety awareness tips for all of us that drive a vehicle or truck what have you sure but before we get to that, to get a motorcycle credential in the State of Maine there's a process.

There's a process. So right now everyone in the State of Maine who wants to ride a motorcycle legally on our roads needs to take the basic rider course from the motorcycle safety foundation. There is also a three wheel version for people who want to ride a three wheel motorcycle and they take that course if they're successful they earn their waiver for the road test; they don't have to take a road test with the state examiner if they pass the knowledge test. But if they're unsuccessful with the skills test they earn their permit which is good for two years and then they can take a road test with the state examiner as many times as they need to in that two years to uh to pass that test and get their endorsement. If they can't get that done in two years they go back to the beginning and start over with another training course.

So what does the course itself entail?

The course itself the curriculum is, first of all the motorcycle safety foundation has been around since 1972 and so this curriculum has been developed and changed and updated and research and development and studies and so forth and so on over the years. The latest version we have is called the BRC updated and so there's 14 exercises and in a nutshell it covers the basic skills to ride a motorcycle riding in a straight line, turning, stopping and shifting and then we move on to more advanced skills of riding on the road, interacting with traffic, how to deal with uh swerving, maximum braking, stopping in a curve, starting in a corner, just endless.

You know having taken that course myself several years ago it gave me a greater appreciation for the complexity of actually riding a motorcycle and one of the things I don't think most of us is just general drivers realize is you're really using all of your limbs and you're trying to take into account a variety of traffic situations all at the same time so there's a lot of coordination.

There is, there's you know uh as my grandson's karate instructor says you know what is coordination she's teaching these kids it's doing more than one thing at a time basically so and that's very true because the motorcycle controls are basically just an extension of your body and your mind controlling that motorcycle as smoothly as possible to deal with the situations that you come across.

I remember taking the course one of the challenges and you referred to it a little bit was about stopping and as I remember the emergency sudden stop maneuver in the class that I took and quite frankly as I was preparing to do that maneuver I was certainly more confident than I should have been for my skill set at that time and I did the terrible thing of grabbing the front brake and literally ended up flying over the handlebars myself so it really it's an eye-opening course.

It is um you know that that kind of stuff happens, the instructors are trained on on how to deal with that and um you know we teach people; I mean the maximum your front brake is about 70 of your stopping power and a lot of the little training bikes have the same brakes that the larger street bikes have so that they can be very powerful.

Thanks for listening to this episode of Behind the Wheel a production of the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles in collaboration with Secretary of State Shenna Bellows. For more information on a variety of motor vehicle topics visit our webpage at www.maine.gov/sos/bmv