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

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We're talking with John Kohler, Maine's motorcycle safety coordinator and we're behind the wheel and being behind the wheel as a motorist it's incumbent on us to also watch out for motorcycles and as we start another riding season. I think of uh situations where there's a lot of sand in the road for instance.

Yeah absolutely you know the sweepers aren't out yet I just took the motorcycle in for service and they had a sign there at the counter said you know we're not doing test rides on motorcycles until April 19th because of the stuff on the road so keep that in mind you know make sure you're if you're taking your bike in for service are they doing a test drive but we're getting some rain now that helps wash it away. The street sweepers have started to hit the towns a little bit and that all helps.

As part of the courses that we've discussed in the program are all of these factors part of the course itself?

Yes, yes a lot of them are um right now part of the training course we have for the for the two wheel and the three wheel is MSF has what's called the e-course it's about a three-hour online course but once you sign up with one of the schools they'll give you um a link to get to the e-course and you take that e-course and there's little tests throughout the course and stuff and then you can access that with your code. You can access that forever to refresh your memory your skills and whatnot before you start riding again but that's they have to complete that before they show up to take the course.

And with a new riding season is there a break-in period even for an experienced rider?

Yeah it's you know we call that um we have in the curriculum we talk about a risk offset and what that is is it's the risk the the offset of the risk you have you take versus the skills you have. And so like anything I tell people if you think you know there is everything to know about motorcycling you need to park it for a while and and take a little deep breath and maybe read something and come on back to it um because you know I've been riding for I don't want to say but right now for almost 50 years. You know I'm still learning stuff, we still learn we learn from our students we learn from other coaches uh it's just never-ending. And so but that risk offset you know based on that I ride more much more cautious than the than the skills that I possess. I don't think I'm that good of a rider. I personally am always trying to be better.

Is it better to have a motorcycle that has loud exhaust versus one that's quiet?

Well in my opinion uh in my experience you know you hear people say well loud pipes save lives -- loud pipes do not save lives. Loud pipes make people aggravated and agitated and then they give lawmakers an avenue to restrict other things motorcycles can and can't do, so um no I'm not an advocate for loud pipes. They're against the law and um we want we encourage people to ride within the law of course. The answer the short answer is no.

We have about 120 000 I think endorsement holders for motorcycles in Maine. Is that number increasing or is it decreasing? What's going on with motorcycle riding?

Well let me tell you I looked up some stuff and we have in Maine just over a million people with a class c license and we have about 120 000 like you said with a motorcycle endorsement so that's about 11 and a half percent of the people with class c license have a motorcycle endorsement. We have uh we have over 800 000 people registered with cars but about 48 000 motorcycles, ballpark. So how we are in Maine here per capita number one state of uh people with motorcycles yeah number one state is South Dakota; there's more people in South Dakota per capita with motorcycles than any other state. Number two is New Hampshire. Maine is 12. We're number 12 in the country 26 people per bike okay so that's not too bad 12 out of 50.

And then looking at motorcycle fatalities, fatalities per 10 000 registered motorcyclist the most dangerous state in the country is Mississippi so I wouldn't want to be the program coordinator in Mississippi. Maine we're uh we fall down in uh number 32. So um the the worst state is 15.92 fatalities per 10 000. We're at 4.48 fatalities per 10 thousand. And the safest state was Montana with 0.72. We're the 12th state per capita with motorcyclists riding and we're the 32nd with fatalities so that's pretty good. Um we could do better we could do better um and we're trying we're always trying to do better, we do instructor certification courses and we have the advanced rider course and the experienced rider course that schools are starting to offer a little bit more so um so those are the four courses we have. We have the basic for the two wheel the basic for the three wheel, the experienced course and the advanced course.

And all of this can be found off of the bmv website?

Yes absolutely.

All right so as we wrap up give us as a driver of a vehicle and an operator of a motorcycle what you would perceive to be, from a safety perspective, the most important thing.

Well okay I can't give you one thing, but this segment is behind the wheel so uh I wanna, let's edit that for this first segment so behind the wheel and behind the handlebars okay? So so behind the handlebars aspect of it is um there's there's a few things that you can be safe when you're riding a motorcycle to make it more fun for you be visible, however you decide to do that; be sober -- a lot of our fatality statistics show a lot of alcohol involvement; be protected, wear your gear especially a helmet; and get training be legal.

And so if you do those four things we don't want to read about you in the newspaper or see you in our column of statistics or hear about you getting seriously hurt because once you get hurt it's not fun anymore. It's not fun anymore uh believe me, I know what I speak. And so uh to to continue it to be fun you have to stay safe and it has to be enjoyable and then you know I always-- the aspect of I didn't want anything to happen to my motorcycle. You know it's, people love their bikes they polish them they wash them they polish them they they wrap them in diapers and they store them and it's it's not how they treat people don't treat their cars as well as they treat their motorcycles. This is just how it is for that's how it was for me anyway growing up. So as the car driver yeah what can we do better wake up a little bit car drivers have to just take it easy um and slow it down and keep an eye out now for motorcyclists. They're out there they're not as big as you they don't have as many headlights or tail lights but you have to keep your eyes open and and think outside the box. Is do you know what's that motorcyclist going to do? What's that other car going to do? Separate these conditions and deal with them one at a time and just slow it down a little bit.

Is it still fun to ride?

For me? Sometimes. Sometimes it's not. You know I put on just under 5000 miles last year visiting all the different sites so riding now for me is work, I'm at work when I'm on a motorcycle. I still enjoy being on a motorcycle but it's not like it used to be it's not it's not the same as it was. In July of 07 I took uh the best the longest ride of my life a buddy of mine, Army buddy, we got together and we rode to Alaska. We hit 31 states three Canadian provinces 14 000 miles in a month and it was the greatest vacation and greatest ride and I have that memory but nothing nothing will ever compare.

So May is Motorcycle Awareness Month and you've given us some great information. John it's been a pleasure to talk with you.

Thank you Larry it's been a pleasure to be here and uh I just hope everybody can have a good safe season this year.

May is Motorcycle Awareness Month, hopefully all of us will be aware during the riding season to look out for motorcyclists and as John said be safe for the entire season and be aware of our surroundings as we travel behind the wheel.

*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 maine.gov/sos/bmv*