



## Top Cats Four 'R's!

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Please Not Another Safety acronym!

As experienced riders, it is not uncommon for new riders to seek advice or for older riders to become mentors. Often, those older, experienced riders tend to gloss over the basics and assume that all riders, regardless of experience, know the basics. It's safer not to believe that and to assume that any rider who seeks advice needs to understand the very basic tenets of riding. Airline pilots start with the basics before each flight to assure safety.

There are some similarities between the causes of plane crashes and the reasons for motorcycle accidents: it's often a combination of factors, or risks, that cause incidents in both cases. And in both, the fundamental cause can usually be traced back to "human error." Just as in doing a preflight check before flying an airplane, a motorcyclist should take stock of the risk factors before their ride. Unlike the airline industry, which has many rules, regulations, and certifications in place to help prevent accidents, motorcycle riders are pretty much on their own.

Some of the most brilliant minds in the motorcycling community came up with acronyms to help us to ride safely. We have TCLOCK, AGAT, TPAD, MOTOPO, etc.

So, instead of another acronym, how about the Top Cats' **Four Rs** of riding to make us safer riders?

### The Rider

The question here is, are you physically and mentally prepared to ride safely? Here are some of the most important considerations:

Physical Fitness: Physical impairments, like injuries or lack of sleep, will compromise alertness and safety.

Emotional Fitness: Riders should not be preoccupied with emotional distractions.



Unimpaired: Clearly, motorcycle riding and consumption of controlled /

intoxicating substances is often a lethal combination. When we see a bunch of motorcycles parked outside of a bar there should be an ambulance on-site, like at racetracks, to pick up the pieces!

Proper Gear: That includes a helmet, proper boots, gloves, riding jackets and pants with armor. The more protective gear riders wear, the less the chance of serious injury.

Attitude Being arrogant and a showoff has no place in our group style of riding. Riders should display a proper attitude, and enjoy. Wheelies, stoppies, excessive speed, or other high-risk behaviors, inevitably, will lead to a rider going down and endangering themselves and others.

### The Ride

Mechanical Condition. Like the pilot who does a preflight before takeoff, riders should make sure their bike is ready to ride: properly inflated tires, turn signals and brake lights working, no obvious mechanical issues, etc.

Familiarity. When we ride an unfamiliar bike, and for the first time each season, it usually takes about 30 minutes of riding before we feel "dialed in" and fully in control of the motorcycle. It's important to take it extra easy and not push any limits until your confidence



level is at 100 percent.

Visibility. Are you riding a blacked-out bike (without reflectors or auxiliary lights) in black leathers, wearing a dark color helmet at night? One of the leading causes of accidents is other motorists not seeing the motorcyclist. Be visible!

Loading. If you are carrying a co rider and/or other cargo, the bike will handle differently: directional changes will be slower, braking distances will increase, and acceleration will be degraded. A slower responding bike requires adjustments to speed, following distances, and other similar riding considerations.



### **The Route**

Road Conditions/Hazards. Bad pavement, tar snakes, pot holes, animals, poorly maintained railroad crossings, road debris, and painted strips that denote cross walks, etc., can all increase the risk of a crash. Adjust speed accordingly when these are present.

Level of Difficulty. If you've just gotten your motorcycle endorsement, or it's the first ride following a long winter, riding technically demanding roads with steep elevation changes, switchbacks, and hairpin curves should be avoided

until your skill level progresses to meet such demands. Places like the Tail of the Dragon will still be there when you're ready for it.

Services Available. Riding in remote areas, where gas stations are few and far between and [emergency](#) medical service is not readily available, requires more planning and riding caution. These are typically major considerations of experienced road captains and riders.

### **The Riding Environment**



#### Time of Day.

Riding into the sun, either in early morning or late evening, can severely limit a rider's ability to see where they are going and avoid hazards. Animals are more active during early morning and evening also. Try not to ride at [night](#), because our ability to see and be seen is greatly compromised.

Weather. [Fog](#), [rain](#), snow, [freezing temperatures](#), extreme heat, thunderstorms, high wind, and other types of severe weather pose a much greater threat to a motorcyclist's ability to avoid hazards and be visible to other motorists, let alone the danger of being injured by the severe weather itself.

Traffic Congestion. With drivers talking on cell phones, texting, trying to read while driving, autonomous vehicles, and the myriad of other existing distractions today, the heightened exposure of riding in traffic is pretty obvious. Because many of those other drivers may not be alert to your presence, riders have to be extra alert to the threats developing around them. Remember, whoever has the most lug nuts also has the right of way!

If you start combining some of these hazards it's apparent that the risk profile can increase dramatically particularly in a group. If one rider goes down, it becomes a major hazard for the other riders.

Riders should continually assess the riding perils, both before and during the ride, so they can mitigate them. Sometimes, when the threat level is just too high, the best mitigation may be to (Ugh) just not ride that day.