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What do I need to know about motorcycle safety?

From riders to other drivers, there's a lot that can be done to stay safe

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A class is reflected in a motorcycle mirror at the YTI Career Institute's motorsports technology program in Manchester Township. May is Motorcycle Safety Month, and there are a number of things you can do to get ready for the riding season. (Kate Penn — Daily Record/Sunday News)

As temperatures warmed across York County, many drivers put their tops down or got their motorcycles out of the garage.

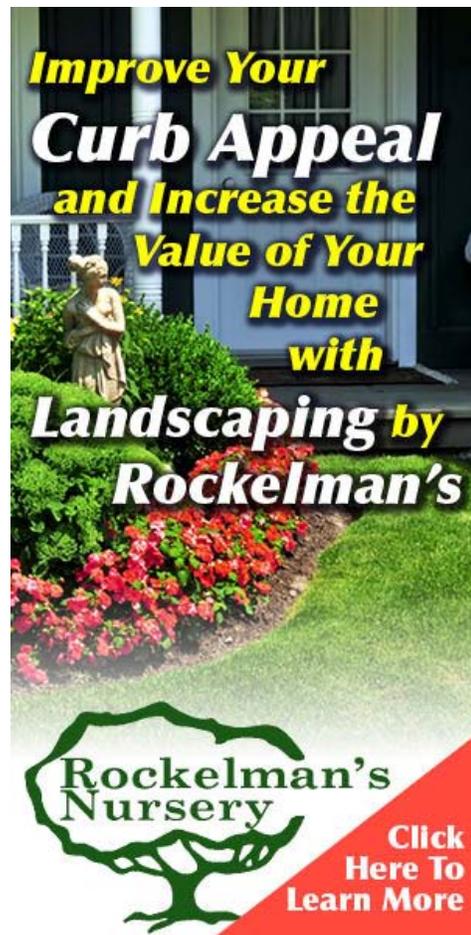
Those bikes are hitting the road as May has been declared Motorcycle Safety Month.

The number of crashes statewide went down in 2014, but the number of fatalities rose. The number of licenses in the state have also risen by 700, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.



Patrick Cuda of Columbia reaches into his toolbox while doing valve adjustment exercises in a class of the YTI Career Institute's motorsports technology program. (Kate Penn — Daily Record/Sunday News)

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There's a lot that can be done to help keep riders safe — from prep riders should do to get their bikes ready, to other drivers taking a second glance before changing lanes.

We checked in Frank Sanfilippo, the associate director of YTI Career Institute's Motorcycle Technology Program to get some answers to our questions.

Q

What is the most important thing motorcycle drivers need to check on their bikes for spring/summer riding?

A

Riders should regularly do a visual inspection of their motorcycles — brakes (pad wear, fluid level, brake line condition), battery condition (state of charge, if applicable fluid level), electrical function (lights, turn signals, horn, and indicators), steering condition (steering head bearing movement and excessive head bearing movement).

Also check for engine oil leaks in the engine and gearbox. And check the coolant, especially as the temperatures begin to rise. It's important that the coolant is clean and has no signs of oil content such as small floating multicolored bubbles.

Old gasoline is another thing to watch out for. Motorcycles that are properly winterized will have either had the fuel drained out or added a stabilizer. If you didn't do that and your bike sat unused for several months, it's a good idea to drain the fuel and add fresh gas.

Q

What should riders know about checking tire pressure/tread on their bikes?

A

Tire condition (thread depth, excessive dry rot) and tire pressure. Properly inflated tires that are in good condition are essential for safe riding. If your motorcycle sat in the garage all winter long, be aware of potential "flat-spotting" on the tires.

Check for tire wear, too. Spring is a good time to replace tires. That way you know you're on solid footing for the entire riding season.

Q

How are motorcycle tires different than car tires?

A

Car tires tend to last a lot longer. The reason is motorcycle tires are softer. The softness helps them stick to the road better, which is great for performance, but also means that they wear out faster.

Tire pressure should be checked weekly — pressure can be lost daily. Also, cars have four tires and motorcycles have two or three, which give them less surface on the road.

Q

What should riders look for when checking the braking system?

A

People often forget to check their brake fluid, which attracts moisture straight out of the air. It's a good idea to do a complete flush of the brake system and fill it with new fluid at least every other year.

At the very least, riders should check and top off fluid levels, inspect linings and pads, rotors and drums.



Roberto Caban of Staten Island, N.Y., works on valve adjustment exercises in class. (Kate Penn — Daily Record/Sunday News)

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Q

What is a common mistake people make when caring for their motorcycles?

A Dead batteries are a common issue after a winter hiatus. A battery maintainer is a good investment — it keeps batteries fully functional by keeping the electrons in motion. It's also a good practice to top off any maintenance-style batteries with distilled water.

Q

What about for those people considering learning to ride? What would you suggest they do?

A People who are new to motorcycles should definitely take a safety course. The PA Department of Transportation administers the Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program that is free to class M license holders. For more information, visit www.pamsp.com.

Even experienced riders should take the time to practice their skills. A big danger comes when riders get a little experience and become overconfident. And of course, always wear a helmet.

Q

I don't ride a motorcycle, but I'm used to them on the roads. What part can I play in keeping them safe?

A

The biggest thing is to pay attention. Motorcycles are harder to see than cars and trucks, especially at night.

Check your blind spots before changing lanes, and use caution when making left-hand turns. Always leave plenty of space when following a motorcycle — their smaller size means they can stop a lot faster than a car.

Pay attention to where the sound is coming from also, many times a loud motorcycle will seem as if it is appearing from the opposite side than it actually is coming from.

By the numbers

Take a look at the number of motorcycle fatalities and crashes on York County roads over the years.

2010

11 fatalities, 203 crashes

2011

11 fatalities, 164 crashes

2012

9 fatalities, 194 crashes

2013

7 fatalities, 153 crashes

2014

10 fatalities, 169 crashes

Source: Wayne Harper, Center for Traffic Safety

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Instructor Andy Bevilacqua, right, demonstrates soldering, crimping, and heat-shrinking wires for students, from left, Richie House, Joel Monroe, and Eric Maisonet during class. (Kate Penn — Daily Record/Sunday News)

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