

Rider Education: A continuing Awareness

In a split second.....

Wow, summer, great riding, what more could you ask for? There are lots of activities that we all enjoy during the summer season. Riding a Gold Wing is just one of them. This article is not about riding, it is about safety. Of course there are lots of safety related items that we should all know and practice about riding, but today I would like to talk about another aspect of safety.

Every summer we host a float trip down the Cowlitz River. There is of course the get together of all your good friends and family, lots of food, what good Gold Winger doesn't know about that, a few drinks here and there (no riding of course) in fact there were no motorcycles at the house other than mine put away out of the sunshine and hot weather. The reason for the float trip is to lay back enjoy the warm and lazy float down the river. We have done this float many times in the past few years and always have a great time. As in the past we take along all the food and other items that will keep you from starving or going dry. None of which is ever done in excess!!! Well we had been floating down the river for a couple of hours and one by one we attached ourselves to one another by ropes as to cut down on the need to paddle in excess to reach the floating food and beverage dock. This activity has served us well in the past and surly would be just fine again. Every year the river shows us a new look as the winter brings many logs and other items to navigate around, of course there is always a lot of trees that have fallen in as the annual high water will always bring down lots of trees to create obstacles to get by as we float down the river.

Navigation is a simple activity for most of us with two people and two oars in the boat the getting around downed trees and other obstacles is not much of a problem, however, when you are attached together in an armada the activity becomes a little more difficult. We had encountered of few of the overhanging branches and an occasional log or two and were able to get around them with minimal effort. This of course builds up your confidence to make you think your ability to navigate is bullet proof. (this is also an activity that occurs with riding)

This is where the safety comes in.....we had just left a rest stop so that a few of us could create room for more liquids....attaching ourselves again so that we would not have to work so hard at getting to the beverage dock, when we were coming around a bend in the river and noticed a very large tree in the river, as we were in the middle of the bend and not able to change direction in a hurry we were pushed by the current into the branches of the downed tree. Well, it would not have been a problem if the boats weren't made of rubber. The last raft in the armada caught a branch the wrong way and was impaled. The ensuing confusion and panic were not soon to be forgotten. As the raft lost its two occupants and all the other items, camera, food, ext. the first of the occupants went under and resurfaced down river between two other rafts with a look on his face of sheer terror. As we tried to get him in one of the rafts we were also trying to get to the other person who was now left behind hanging on a branch of the tree. We were unable to stop or get to the edge of the river as the downed tree was so big that we could only continue down river and try to get to the river bank at some point not to far away from the hapless rafter left hanging. To add to this problem the water is so cold that hypothermia is a real concern, as the person left on the branch could not swim and was not wearing a life preserver. A little further down the river we were able to get to the side

and one of the rafters was able to get out of the raft only to be unable to get up the riverbank as it was so steep, at which point the rest of the armada unable to secure itself was moved down the river even further into another downed tree. This time the rafts were secure enough to allow the rafters to get out of the water and onto the shore where they could try to get back to the person still on the branch. The first person who got out back up the river was finally able to get up the bank and try to work his way back to the person still hanging onto the branch. The rest of the crew further down river were now in the woods full of stinging nettles, black berry and other sharp bushes trying to get to the person hanging on the branch. Unable to get to the person on the branch the first person now sees a boat coming down the river (fishermen) and attracts their attention. The fishermen are now the only people who can render assistance to us as they are the only ones who can get close to the stranded rafter. A few minutes later they have the person in the boat and safe from the terror she had been enduring.

The rest of the rafters are now half stranded in the river hanging onto branches and waiting for the rest of the people falling and stumbling around in the woods trying to get back to the rafts. One of the rafters has a cell phone and dials 911 to get the two rafters who were in the water to a hospital. The fishermen take the hapless rafters into Toledo to a waiting aid car and medical attention. In the end, no one was injured with more than scrapes, cuts, bruises and one embedded fish hook in a finger.

There is a lesson to be learned here. Safety is something to be practiced in all aspects of our lives, I'm sure that each of you can see the errors of our journey and can learn from our mistakes. I for one have learned a lesson that I will take to the next float trip.

Rider Education

Life Education

Jim and Hazel Townsend