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Situational Awareness

How aware are you of your surroundings? To what degree can you take small clues and “connect the dots” to identify potential hazards? Are you conscious of your intuition? Answers to these questions can help you to determine your level of “situational awareness” (SA).

SA is a concept used to describe the level of awareness and perception of an immediate situation. Someone with well-developed SA is able to “see the big picture” and to accurately evaluate likely outcomes.

SA has a big role in safe group riding. Right from the beginning, it’s important to evaluate the participants. If the group seems to have a race-ready attitude, it may be smart to graciously opt out.

Often a group doesn’t show its true colors until the ride is underway. The situation can be either a too aggressive pace with unsafe passing and bravado, or a group of riders who show little skill in motorcycle control or group riding etiquette. Either way, it may be time to kindly indicate that you’re going a different direction and detach from the group.

Well-organized group ride leaders pride themselves in following procedures that take various levels of skill into account by posting “sweep” riders in the rear to keep an eye on everyone. Also, the chosen route and the pace are designed to keep the group within the comfort zone of the least experienced rider. But, most group rides are less organized, often consisting of between three and 10 riders who simply meet up for an impromptu ride. Rarely will the group participants address an individual rider’s level of experience, opting to defer responsibility to each rider to “ride your own ride.” Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for this type of scenario to lead to a crash as a newer rider tries to keep up with the more experienced ones.

The new rider must make him or herself aware that this scenario is riddled with risk. To help evaluate the situation, it’s smart to ask about the expected pace and route before venturing out with a loosely organized group. If they are planning on riding faster than you feel comfortable, you can either not ride with them or ask that they wait at turns for you to regroup safely.

Being situationally aware means being tuned into your surroundings and riding environment. Learn from your “close calls” to prevent the situation from happening again.