



## Motorcycle Safety Tips **What's so great about ABS?**

By Stacey "Ax" Axmaker  
Director, Idaho **STAR** Motorcycle Safety Program

A research report was recently released indicating that bikes equipped with Anti-Lock Brakes (ABS) are substantially less likely to be involved in a fatal crash. I'm sure you have heard folks say things like "I can stop shorter than ABS," or "I prefer to have full control over my brakes – ABS takes some of that away." I've heard that, too. I believe that ABS is one of the best advances in motorcycle technology we have ever had. Here's why...

### **Performance – when you need it**

I have been out on a test pad (no cars, plenty of space, designated braking area) and I can match and occasionally even beat ABS by just a bit. However, in all my years of riding, I have never needed maximum braking in an environment with no cars, plenty of space, and a designated braking area. The times that I have needed it have been when something suddenly went wrong (car pulled out in front of me, animal or pedestrian, vehicle ahead stops suddenly, etc.) In other words, my adrenaline was pumping and I had to take action right away. When this happens, performance drops – it's just a fact of human nature. ABS performs anytime, every time, no matter how startled you are or how much adrenaline you have pumping through your veins. That's when we need real maximum braking; that's what ABS delivers; and that's what I'm convinced most riders can't beat (I know I can't...)

### **"Controlling" a skid**

As many of you know, a rear wheel skid is not necessarily a disaster. If you know what to do, you can maintain balance and keep going in a straight line with a skidding rear tire. However, you do lose the ability to change direction or speed. When we say we can 'control' our motorcycle, what we are saying is that we have the ability to change our direction and speed as the situation warrants. Skidding the rear tire gives up that control. You may not crash, but you really don't have 'control.' ABS allows you to keep that control of your motorcycle by preventing the rear wheel skid.

A front wheel skid frequently does result in a crash. In fact, most of us know this instinctively and this is why so many riders under-brake the front tire – we are afraid to lock it up. ABS allows us to apply the front brake fully without the fear of locking it up.

### **Changing surface conditions**

As mentioned above, many riders can match or beat ABS in a controlled environment. However, the times that we really need maximum braking are not in a controlled environment. In addition to cars, animals, and pedestrians, the surface of the road itself may change. Something as simple as running off the road and onto a gravel shoulder changes the available traction significantly. Most riders will be overly cautious on the brakes under these changing conditions. ABS, on the other hand, instantly adapts to the surface and can keep you at maximum braking as you ride from pavement to gravel to dirt to grass to mud and back to pavement.

If ABS is an available option on your next bike, I hope you give it some serious consideration. After all, how many times does it need to prevent a crash to make it worth the investment?

Idaho **STAR** Motorcycle Safety Program  
[www.idahostar.org](http://www.idahostar.org)  
208-426-5552  
1-888-280-**STAR** (7827)