

## **How much experience do you REALLY have?**

**By Mark Caldwell**

When I meet someone new and find out that they ride motorcycles, one of the most common questions I ask (after WHAT do you ride) is, “How long have you been riding?” And the assumption is that the more years someone has been riding, the more experienced, and therefore safer of a rider he or she is. But is that really true?

Of course the answer is NO. But why? One of the first reasons is that you know that taking a safe riding course is not required in order to get your license endorsement in Washington. (I’m going to assume that we’re only talking about people who ride legally / licensed.) Somebody can read the book, practice a few skills, and take the DOL’s tests. They are now licensed, but are not necessarily a safe rider, and may never learn safe riding skills. A second reason the person may not be a safe rider is that, while they took a class and passed, they didn’t retain the skills and don’t practice them. For them, the class was just another notch on the belt; something they conquered but did not benefit from.

The two examples above are usually pretty easy to identify quickly. But the third person is the one I worry about the most. This person took a class, learned and retained some of the skills; practices them occasionally, considers himself to be a good rider, and has done that for years and years. Many people mistakenly think this rider has years and years of riding experience and skill, when in reality; all they have is one year’s worth of skill that has been repeated for several years. If you are not learning new things, practicing, honing your skills, taking refresher courses, discussing riding scenarios of the past and future, then you have probably just been repeating your first year’s experience over and over without really getting better. Don’t confuse a rider who is lucky to have not been in an accident with one who is a skilled, knowledgeable, safe rider.

There are several opportunities on the calendar for you to improve in 2004. These range from the Experienced Rider Course (~\$100) to the Road Captain seminar (free), and several in-between (especially the District Rider Ed workshop at the end of February). I hope to see everyone attend at least one training event this year. Let’s all learn, grow, improve, and most important, come back here next year.