

KEEPING IT UP: Dangerous Emotions



You are riding on a busy four-lane road heading for an appointment. Suddenly a car swerves immediately in front of you into your lane. You have to brake hard to avoid running into it. The car then speeds off and quickly changes to the left lane. You think, "What a fool!" You feel your anger rising.

OR

It's late at night and you are riding in an unfamiliar neighbourhood. A vehicle comes speeding up behind you and sits right on your tail. The driver starts flashing the headlights back and forth from high to low beam.

What should you do?

Riding can be a frustrating experience at times. How can you control your anger while riding?

Emotions are powerful forces that can interfere with the concentration you need for riding. When you are feeling angry, anxious or sad, you become less alert. Your thinking becomes unclear. Your safety and the safety of others is in danger. At times you may become angry or impatient because of something in the riding environment. Crowded traffic conditions and high-speed freeway riding often cause stress. Being slowed by other traffic when you're in a hurry produces tension. Riders who are tense or stressed are less tolerant of the mistakes of other riders and road users.

It is often difficult to know what to do when faced with road users who are aggressive. Their lack of courtesy and bad driving habits can lead to crashes. Although extreme aggression, or road rage, is not common, mild aggression can escalate if you are not careful.

Whatever the cause of your upset, it is important to look at your emotional fitness to ride. Sometimes it's best to stay off your bike.

Strategies for Controlling Emotions

Here are some things you can do to help you stay calm and in control while riding:

- Keep learning. Analyze previous stressful riding situations you have experienced and figure out what you can do next time to be calmer and safer.
- Plan ahead. Increase your chances of staying calm by choosing a route that avoids crowded traffic conditions.
- Allow yourself plenty of time. Being in a hurry can cause you to become angry or frustrated. Realize that if you leave late, you'll arrive late.
- Think of your own safety and the safety of others. This can help you calm down and focus.
- As a rider you are vulnerable. Never return aggression — avoid eye contact and don't gesture back. Keep away from erratic road users.
- If you're in a situation in which you feel threatened, get help. Ride to a location where there are plenty of people (e.g., a shopping mall or police station).
- Do not go home if you are being followed.
- If you can't keep it under control; stay home, someone is going to get hurt.

