

BREAKFAST RIDERS

The Grumpales Grumblings

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This is a look into my brain and some of the many thoughts running around inside this cavern of darkness, light, and colors. I, Grumpa Les, am opinionated. Simply stated, I have opinions. Just as everyone in the world has opinions. I know my opinions usually do not matter to those around me. Thus I do not take myself too seriously, often. Nor should you take me too seriously. Also I may not stay within the boundaries of the article's title -- tough! If I have made any grievous mistake of the facts, then let me know. If I trample too hard on any of your sacred opinions, take me to a fine restaurant, buy me a steak, some veggies, a beer or two, and a slice of chocolate cake -- then we can discuss how your opinion is different than mine -- not better, not worse. Medium rare rib eye or prime rib, by the way, with straight horseradish. Not that creamy crud. Dark beer.

If you want me to wax eloquent on a subject relating to riding, let me know. I may add my educated, well rounded, correct, and obviously unbiased options to the matter before adding it to this pile of donkey doo. Tut tut.

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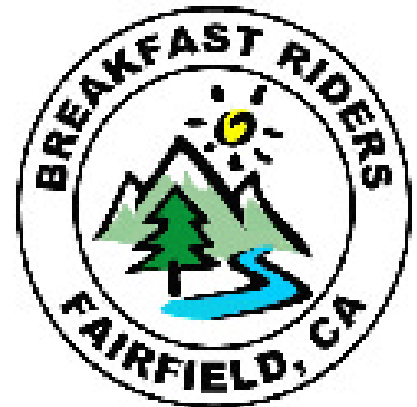
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Sport Bikes Vrs Cruisers Vrs Crossovers

I ride a cruiser that thinks it is a sport bike -- a Honda Magna. I have also ridden sport bikes, tour bikes, and standards -- though none for any great time. Each has their plusses and minuses. The manufacturers today have many of the market segments covered: The light weight cruiser, the power cruiser, the over powered cruiser (love the 'cubic envy wars'), the small sport bike, the power sport bike, the over powered sport bike, the tour bike, the sport tour, and those pesky dirt bikes that ride in the back of pickups (I will ignore those things as I am focusing on street bikes). Other small manufacturers cover the rad chopper bikes with over accentuated styling cues like ape hangers and idiotically fat rear tires that hinder riding in the mountain twisties. Only a very few bikes today can be classed in the old standard mold -- Moto Guzzi comes to mind. Overall there are very few clinkers in the modern bike market. Sweet! There is not one bike that is perfect for all riders. Vive la difference! On heavy cruisers, you think an action and you must DO the action. On light weight cruisers, you think an action and the bikes does most of the work, but you must still do the action. On a sport bike, you think an action and it has long since been done, well before you try to do the action -- you must control your brain.

Cruisers

Cruisers were not designed as a complete concept in one day, but instead they grew out of the bicycle mold and evolved over a long time. You sat upright as you peddled on a bicycle (I am ignoring the modern sport bicycle with swoop down handlebars). Thus they designed the early motorcycles for sitting upright also. Harley and Indian have been attributed by many to have created the real cruiser mold that is nearly cast in religious stone today. Few manufacturers ever step too far from those basic design features -- and wisely so.



Almost all of these bikes try to invoke that sub-brain image of Marlon Brando and the movie 'The Wild One'. The image we have is him on a Harley riding free, thumbing his nose at the whole world. But it was not a Harley and not even a cruiser as we now define that segment, but was instead a Triumph Thunderbird inline twin, what we would call a standard. The posters for the film also have him on a Moto Guzzi single, another standard. But for many, it is this bad-boy in leather image that we want to become when we ride cruisers. The cruiser is especially suited for the Midwest's vast, flat, straight, long roads. Many of these bikes fall short when it comes to running at full spark through the twisties. They touch hard parts too soon and are too heavy to flick. I think it is a great type of bike for couples. From 250 to 2000 cc's, these bikes are hopefully here to stay. I would say that comfort and style is their main focus, but some of these bikes just hurt me to sit on them. But besides style, many do have great comfort and are great rides.

Sport Bikes

I cannot sit on a sport bike for any length of time before I start hurting. I love the twisties, which mean I should favor the sport bike. Nope -- cruisers. Sport bikes were designed for the racetrack to go fast. They were not designed for comfort. They were initially sold to the public for amalgamation purposes. They grew out of the café racers of Europe and the modifications required to make the early standards really fast on the track. These



bikes are powerful, light, agile, and usually too much temptation for bad behavior on the public roads. The sport tour is a step in the right direction: Keep the power and handling, but add some comfort and cargo carrying capability. But these bikes still have too tall of a seat for most of the human species. We do not all have 36 inch inseams! I have watched many a sport bike rider wince as they get off the bike after just 100 miles. Some folks, though, just fit better on sport bikes and find them comfortable. To them goes the best. Others just have to get the most handling they can get for the mountain roads. They can take butt breaks as needed. TV and movies often portray sport bikes as used by the bad guys for that quick get-away. So cruiser are not alone with the bad-boy image.

Crossover Bikes

There have been very few crossover bikes ever made (ignoring those dual purpose dirt/street bikes). They try to be in two worlds at once. As a rule, this compromise seldom fits completely well in either. Some of the early designs, when looked at today, appear to be crossovers: Like the Yamaha SECA. But it was just a step from a standard towards a full sport bike. The Harley Buell is a successful crossover bike, but not in the direction I want. It takes a cruiser V-twin and makes a sport bike out of it. A very nice bike with great torque and great handling -- not high in the comfort camp. The Kawasaki Mean Streak also starts to be a crossover with the improved handling and plenty of power. The Yamaha V-Max has the more than sporty V4 engine in what could be called a standard chassis. But it has yet to address the sport handling adequately. Honda made the Magna. Yes. This is the right direction. Take a sport bike engine and drop it into an cruiser chassis, keeping some of the handling of the sport bike, but making sure to have comfort for the rider. But, I think Honda dropped the ball when they only made one major upgrade to the Magna in 20 years. My Magna (and yes, I am biased and opinionated) is nearly the perfect compromise with light weight, very good lean angles, the sweet, powerful, and smooth V4 engine, and cruiser comfort and styling. If they had kept pushing, tweaking, improving the design...then the other major manufacturers may have had to rise to the battle themselves. Just think of the modern performance cruisers (not just power cruisers) if that had happened: Powerful, light, able to make quick tight turns (smaller than a football field), comfortable, and still stylish (read "they look like Harleys and Indians"). I also know that not everywhere has the plethora of sweet, twisted roads that we do in the SF bay area. Thus the V-twins are still a needed component of the market. But, the motorcycle industry NEEDS to make another crossover bike like the Magna, actually many others. Each sport bike rider gets older and will start to want comfort -- thus we start buying recliners. But these same sport bike

riders will not want to give up all the performance they know can exist in exchange for a fat, slow cruiser that can't move through the mountains. Many will just put their bike in the garage or sell it and move away from riding. If each major manufacturer made a V4 or W3, sport oriented cruiser -- wow -- I would be in serious trouble! Which to buy (assuming my finances allowed me to)? I do not expect such bikes will ever take over as sales leaders -- I could hope. But shouldn't there be niche bikes as well as mass sellers? Heck, they can even make a Buell-like crossover bike -- BUT AFTER they make some sport, performance cruisers with good ABS.

Squids

The name is derived from 'squirrely' and 'kid'. That just about says it all. They are not all kids. There are older squids as well. These idiots buy powerful bikes well before they know how to use them, let alone how to behave in public without adult supervision. We have all seen some fool pulling a wheelie in traffic, or screaming by lane splitting at 30 to 40 mph above traffic's speed. And they always seem to wear tennis shoes, t-shirt, and shorts...real smart there, Captain



Road-Rash-To-Be. These dumb freaks cause me trouble because the sedate car-driving public puts ALL bikers in the same basket. This 'all bikers look alike' syndrome also applies to the damn loud pipes. I have been verbally accused of being a major source of death on the highways and hearing loss for stunts these squids perform. I have even had cars try to run me over and I attribute some of the this hate to the antics of squids. I remember one parent telling their child as I was putting my helmet on "Watch out for him. He is a biker. He doesn't belong near us". Another parent said "Your bikes need to be outlawed. You scare folks too much.". Yes both parents are idiots themselves, but this is what squids cause! Find these squids, slap them if need be, but get them the help they need. If you are gonna be stupid, then be smart about it. Do the dumb stunts away from John and Jane Q Public. I do not even care that many



riders demonstrate great riding abilities while doing these stunts. Do NOT do them where the bleating lambs can see. They may gang up and take our right to ride. You are only allowed ONE 'stupid' per ride. And that is throwing your leg over the bike. Every 'stupid' after that will likely cause pain! If not you, then the backlash will cause me or other riders anguish.

Crappy Road Maintenance

You have all hit that deep pothole and went ‘Oof!’. Or you have ran over the tarmac up-bump and been ejected from your seat. You name it, be it loose road surface, that slippery crack sealer that is made with ultra-super-slip (just read a term for these -- ‘tar snakes’), or the dug-in grooves as they move the painted dashes and then move them elsewhere. All these and more are a result of poor, stupid, shoddy road design and maintenance. And they can all end your riding or your life. Roads are designed and maintained for cars and to a degree, big trucks. Motorcycles rarely are brought into the main focus as to how roads are made and repaired. I have an affinity for the twisties (Tell us something we don’t know, Les.), so I find many instances of nearly criminal road surfaces. To the good side, I have also seen great repaving jobs that made a dangerous road suddenly sweet. Unfortunately, any time we go down because of these road mines, we will be called ‘at fault’ for going too fast -- even if we are within the speed limit. A lot of the problems are the result of monies for our roads not making it to the roads, but instead to the bureaucracy and the bureaucracy’s managers and directors. Yes, this can be said about most of our tax dollars,



but this rant is about roads. So how do we coexists on these crappy roads? We have to slow down. We have to be able to see before we crank the throttle. Even if we run the road twice a day for 10 years, it may have changed for the worse when you weren’t there. A truck may have dropped some of their load at THE most wrong spot. A rim from a big rig’s flat tire may have dug into the tar, leaving a nasty surprise. Often the tar or cement trucks, that are used to repair our roads, leave little piles of black or white pooh that never go away. They just upset your bike in the turns when you need traction the most. Again, you must slow down. Be wise, Grasshopper. Ride slower. Ride longer. And by riding slower (‘Slower’ is a relative term.), I mean ride well within your

limits, within your bike’s limits, and within the road’s limits.

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Bikers Vrs Motorcyclists

These terms mean different things to different folks. The definition I find cute is “Bikers look to the weather report to see IF they will ride. A motorcyclist looks to see what to wear WHEN they ride.”. For many, ‘bikers’ is a term used for the bike gangs with bad reps, like the Hells Angels. Others think that ‘motorcyclists’ refer to those who ride old British bikes, with scarves draped around their necks, wearing goggles (great image). They must be the same blokes that drive old MG’s with the tops down on the wrong side of the road. The terms ‘bikers’ and ‘motorcyclists’ are loose and can be used positively, but mostly negatively. Add squids, newbies, posers, rubs, etc and you have a pot full of useless, mostly negative words -- ok they can be fun if used in a well crafted insult. I would rather find some terms that cover the scale of riders without having any negative connotation -- good luck fool. But there are so many aspects that need to be looked at: What kind of skill does a rider have, how many years and miles have they logged, are they just out to be seen bar cruising’, or are they track testing the back roads? I favor a scale that would place the most emphasis on skill. This would go from newbie rider to seasoned rider. I do not want speed or style or bike type to be a part of the scale. I know great riders that hardly crack the throttle and other faster riders that could use training (I probably fall into that category -- as do we all. Training is good. Very good.).



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Safety Gear

I am just a carbine snick short of being a full on safety Nazi. Some may disagree and say I have jumped well over the line long ago. There are many cutsie pet phrases that try to get idiot riders into safety gear: "Ride for the crash, not the ride.", "There are two kinds of bikes: Those that are gonna crash and those that are gonna crash AGAIN.". I found any cajoling is nearly useless once a rider has been on the bike for awhile with little or no safety gear. Ya got to get to them young. And that may not work even then. So instead, I try to lead by example without too much head bashing or verbal abuse. Safety gear for riders needs to handle three main distinct problems: Impact, intrusion, and abrasion. Not an easy task. This is before the gear can be made comfortable while on the bike. And throw stylish out the door or at least down to the basement. Intrusion can be likened to a knife or sword entering your body -- not a good thing I would guess. Impact would be like a 2x4 hitting you, but not penetrating. Abrasion is taking a power sander along your skin (Get rid of wrinkles quick! Try Dr Crashos simple slide on the road solution. Add those sexy scars for life!). Safety gear should also be brightly colored, but more likely it will be mostly black. Don't get me started on flat black paint jobs. Looks cool -- until night time when you now become invisible-est.

Helmets



Top of the list of what safety gear to wear is the helmet. Preferably a full face helmet. Screw the state law -- make it YOUR law to wear a good helmet -- and not one of those yarmulkes (I only wanna protect the top of my head) helmets. I will use a simple human body part simulant -- a water melon. Take a small water melon capable of fitting into a helmet and drop it from shoulder height onto the pavement. Splat! It may not be a complete smash up, but the damage is obvious. Now take a similar melon and drop it from the same height from a moving car. I hope you get the idea as you clean up the mess you just made.

I am an ABATE member, but I truly wish they would drop the helmet repeal fight and get to more important tasks, like including motorcycle awareness in driver's ed, requiring more training before the motorcycle endorsement is given, reducing or eliminating toll fares for riders, or adding special parking for bikes in parking lots and cities. I have crashed more than a few times (ouch) in the many years I have been riding. In a lot of those crashes the helmet got used. I may have survived without the helmet (I did survive all my bicycle and skateboard crashes without helmets or safety pads -- but I went home many a time bruised and bloody), but I do not ever want to take that risk! My brain is special just as it is and is somewhat important to me. I do not want to go through life trying to use scrambled eggs for thinking. Early helmets were heavy affairs that handled intrusion and abrasion fine, but did poorly with impact. The modern helmet is lighter by far and way better at its job. The complaints about blocked vision is crap! And yes, they reduce the sound that gets to your ears -- this is a GOOD thing. Wind noise is a danger that can cause deafness. It can be avoided or greatly reduced with a full helmet, even more with ear plugs (custom fitted are best).

Gloves

Gloves should be as obvious as the helmet. Try falling and not using your hands to protect yourself. Your sub-brain engages this reflex action well before you can say “Oh Sh*t!”. Take it from someone who had ripped tendons in my baby finger (not from a bike crash, but my dang dog tripped me -- wish I had my gloves on then) and from someone who has had cheap non-motorcycle gloves shred, -- get good gloves! They serve more functions than just in a crash. A small pebble or a bug hurts like the dickens at 70 mph and may cause your hand to jerk, causing a crash -- not normally a good thing. I have also had a bee fly up my sleeve and sting me -- what a bee-atch that was. So get gloves with the longer gauntlet that cover over your jacket sleeves. Also motorcycle gloves often have the fingers pre-bent for wrapping around the grips. Add in the padding that reduces vibration and they reduce hand fatigue -- you can ride longer with more comfort and safety.



Boots

Tall, sturdy, quality boots designed for motorcycle riding can save your shins (if tall enough), ankles, and toes while still allowing all the movement you need to control the bike. My ankles have been sprained so often that almost any crash causes re-injury for me. Having to strap a cane on the bike is a nuisance I don't want to repeat anymore. My boots have saved my toes from abrasion and burns from the hot parts in a crash. And that doesn't count those dang rocks, those reflective road blips, and pine cones that the boots have tossed aside or at least spread the painful forces along the whole foot, thus reducing the pain in any one spot.



Coats

Riding coats come in varieties: Leather (full leathers custom fitted are best), man-made, and summer breeze-through. Skip cool looking vests with all the buttons as your outwear of choice. You can wear it inside your jacket or outside your safety jacket if it is big enough. Whatever coat you get, make it high quality and with pads preferred. Thick leather protects from some impacts and intrusions, but it really helps with abrasion. Add the padding and it is great! Most of the man-made jackets have pads. Using a cheap non-riding leather jacket doesn't work -- trust me on that one. It lasts a half a second only. The man-made jackets work great. They may need to be replaced after the crash, but so would the leather coats. I am not a fan of the breeze-through coats. Not enough coverage for any of the three threats. There are coats that have inner liners for the winter -- nice.

Pants/chaps

I lost too many pants and too much skin before I started wearing chaps or safety pants. After, all my skin has stayed attached and unharmed. I rode the other day, just a short ride, without my chaps and Bob's Your Uncle (look it up in an Oxford dictionary) I got hit not with just a stone, but two bugs as well. And you CAN tell



the difference! They stung and made me swear to wear the chaps or pants nearly always (I do have almost valid reasons to occasionally ride without the chaps/pants).

Rain Gear

If you have ever been caught riding in the rain, it is not the best to be wearing gear that lets the water in. You can lose feeling in your fingers, your toes. Look up hypothermia and the related symptoms. Light rain is repelled by most gear. Heavy rain requires full on rain gear. I have ridden with both through heavy downpours (“Mommy, look at the idiot on the bike in the rain.” The kid must die...) and riding with squishy feet, water sluicing down your chest and into you crotch, these are not nice feelings. You have enough to concentrate on with the reduced friction and cars that can’t imagine bikes in the rain.

Water/Sport Drinks

Dehydration, especially in the summer, can cause you to make poor decisions or even lose consciousness and crash. Keep the fluids coming in. The more you sweat, the more you need to drink. Wearing no coat will cause more rapid evaporation of your sweat and you may not notice how much you ARE sweating. The dehydration will overtake you sooner.

Crash Bars/Frame Sliders

Crash bars for cruisers can protect your leg when cars change lanes into you and/or when the bike falls with your leg is trapped by hot pipes. My crash bars have saved my leg from injury enough times. They are my friend. And they protected the bike from major damage as well. Imagine a very hot 700 pound dumbbell holding your leg down as you slide along the road. They should be on all cruisers when sold! I was able to ride away from crashes after I stood the bike back up because of the crash bar. I even stayed up once because the crash bar and my shoulder kept my bike off the car as he changed into my lane. <the front foot pegs caused his car some damage, but my bike was fine> Frame sliders for sport bikes do not protect the rider’s legs, but they do protect the bike’s parts better than nothing.

Windshields/lowers

These are add-on for most cruisers. Standard for the high end tour bikes. The best way to say this is the windshield keeps the gorilla off my chest, the lowers keep the tornado from screaming in my ears. Anything that keeps me in the saddle longer and more rested is a major must. Hold your hand out of your car at 70 mph flat against the wind. Your hand is roughly 3 x 6 or 18 square inches. Using 12 x 18 for an average torso, you get 216 square inches. Twelve times the force! Well not really, as the wind does divert around, but you get the idea. Without the lowers, I used to be able to float my hand on the rush of air coming up and around my gas tank. Now I have a somewhat calm pocket of air where I can enjoy the ride.



Riding Fast Vrs Riding Slow



Most of you know that I ride on the fast side. I also drive fast. It is a compulsion with me. I often wish I could run slower as it would reduce the fear of getting a ticket. But I do love the deep focus that is required when riding with spirit in the twisties. This is why I continue to ride -- that and I am addicted to riding. I rate my riding efforts A, B, and C -- with the various plus and minus for fudging. If I am running my C game, I am riding real easy -- well within or at least real near the

speed limits. I can enjoy the scenery as I gently pass it by. My B game is my more common setting. I lean the bike in the turns to just where my boot heel is touching on the rare occasion -- no parts touching. This allows me plenty of room to make adjustments in my line. The scenery is still there -- but in quick flashes -- and still as great. Speed limits are kind slight blurs as I blip by the signs. My A game -- Wow! -- this is a rare treat/feat. I am running with every skill pushing at 85 to 90 percent (must leave safety margins). Pushing hard on the handlebars. Leaning on the inside peg. Rolling my butt from side to side. Dropping my hip to the inside. Looking deep into and out of each turn. Twisting that throttle hard out of the turns. Braking firmly before diving for the apex (I give up the front of the turn to safety -- the back half is MINE). I am touching my boots on many turns -- mostly the left ones. I am touching the foot peg scrapers from time to time. I still have room to lean more if needed. I am not looking at scenery unless it is accidentally in my line of vision.

I am not sensing any thing other than what is needed to keep upright, on my side of my lane (do not lean over the center line), and safe. Traffic cannot be around. If spotted, I back off to mode B. Rarely -- very, very rarely I hit hard parts. When I do, the bike turns evil -- just nasty evil. I have also pushed so hard that the bike's suspension is fully compressed -- again evil. I hit my A game only when there is visibly NO TRAFFIC and plenty of vision. I still leave myself spare room to pull up and rein in the super spark. Knock on wood, I have

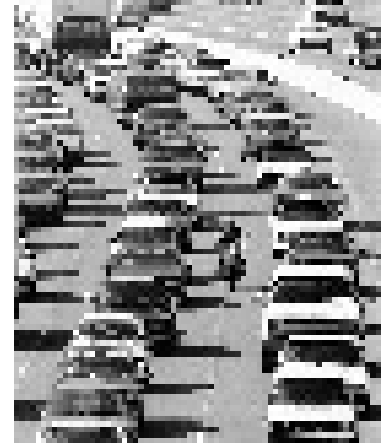


not crashed when riding at level A. My crashes have occurred mostly at level C -- and not all my fault. I keep real close to the speed limit when on city or residential streets. There ware way too many options for surprises to pop out at me. I allow for a bit extra speed when on the freeway or them thar blessed twisties.

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Lane Splitting

This is legal in California and some other states, but not all. It is legally called 'Lane Sharing'. No, it is lane splitting, the dance of the dots, pissing off the stuck cagers, and other cute names. This is extreme tension at slow speeds. Though not specified in the code book, lane splitting when traffic is above 35 mph is normally pushing the window of major stupid. There are times when lane splitting above 35, even at 65 is do-able -- if really done with care -- I gotta get by those moving chicanes. If you do get involved in an accident when lane splitting, it is assumed the bike is at fault. You should not go faster than 5-10 miles above the cars you are splitting through. I usually share speeds with the faster of the two lanes if they are going different speeds. You must know the width of your bike, fore and aft and amidships, and up and down. I tend to push my elbows out a little farther than normal as my sub-brain knows where they are and helps me avoid mirrors. The cars you pass by will rarely see/hear you coming -- even with loud pipes. The loud pipes just startle the cagers, as they only hear them AS you go by. IF the driver does see you splitting, they will (more often than not) try to block your passage or even try to crash into you. Others will dart wildly out of the way -- just smile at their silly and wave. Be prepared for the opening to collapse. Use the brakes. If you come upon another bike lane splitting, hang back far enough to allow them to make any emergency moves needed. Hopefully they will see you were faster and move over for you. Likewise if you have another bike come up from behind, get out of their way. I favor moving to the right into a safe space and using the left hand to wave them through. Look for more bikes lane splitting before you slip back into the dangerous void.



Damn Loud Pipes and Loud Radios

If the chapter title doesn't say enough about my opinion, then here goes. Get rid of loud pipes from your bike, from your truck, from your car, what ever. They just annoy most folks. They are one of the root causes why cagers HATE riders. Riding by and setting off car alarms, rattling the pictures off the walls, etc. They want the obnoxious sound to go away -- they even have tried to make motorcycles illegal via legislation. I hate loud stereos in cars (thump rattle thump) and loud radios on bikes are even more annoying. It is a bit of karmic back lash, as I had a loud stereo in my car as a teenager -- me and my 4-track and a lot of old guitar speakers. OK, every now and then loud pipes are cool. But usually when doing some charity ride with a few hundred of your closest friends. You rev the engines for the folks lining the streets. But I would give that up brief moment of fun to save my right to ride. I would give that up to keep me from getting any more grouchy.



Waving

I enjoy waving at oncoming riders. It is a way to say "Hey! We both enjoy riding. Have a nice day. Be safe." All that in just a wave?! Now how to wave. Ya got the low down wave that sport bikers favor. Ya got the straight out to the side wave. Ya got the up and out wave. Then ya got the Goofy wave. Some folks use that old 'V' peace sign. Others use the thumbs up signal in their wave. I for some reason have my thumb and a couple of fingers extended as I wave. Do not expect every rider to wave back. You may be on the wrong type of bike for them. Or they may be so novice that taking their hand off just scares them into wetting their pants.



