

Beginner Motorcycle Guide

# Zero to Sixty



Quickstart  
to  
**CONFIDENCE**

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## Hi, I'm Ben!



You are about to embark on one of the most fun hobbies out there. Motorcycle are exciting, cool, and in some cases even more practical than a car. Riding a motorcycle is no joke though, take it from me, I've been riding for over 10 years and have seen it all.

I've ridden sport bikes, dirt bikes, cruisers, bikes with engines as low as 200cc's, and some with more than 1000cc's. Don't worry if some of the lingo is confusing you already, I'm going to explain what it all means shortly. I've been in 3 motorcycle accidents the most serious of which I shattered my right shoulder blade.

That's because for a long time I didn't even own a car, I ONLY owned a motorcycle. So I was riding every day, rain or shine. In boiling heat and below freezing temperatures. I've ridden in many different states, including California where **lane splitting** is legal.

When it comes to riding in the street, I have TONS of experience.

I've also been running the website [www.BestBeginnerMotorcycles.com](http://www.BestBeginnerMotorcycles.com) since 2008. I think safety is incredibly important, and there are ways to be safe while not looking like a dork. You can enjoy a safe, fun, long and healthy riding career!

Why am I telling you all this? Because that way you know I'm not some guy that has a year of riding under my belt and thinks I know it all. Everything in this book I have either learned the hard way, or researched the heck out of it and now know every angle.

A good part of this book will also be my own personal opinions. As always, your opinions may be different than mine. Where I include them I will try to explain my reasoning if possible. After all, I usually have an opinion because I've tried ten different ways and I've found that one way works better than the rest.



## How to Use This Book

This book is a conglomeration of a few articles from [BestBeginnerMotorcycles](#) (often I will refer to my site as **BBM**), as well as lots of new content that isn't available anywhere else. This book will give you a single source to come to and find out everything you need to know about getting started riding.

If you spot an unfamiliar term with a **yellow highlight**, that means it can be found in the glossary at the end of the book.

I'm outlining this book in a very specific order, it is meant to be readable for anyone, even people who are completely new to motorcycles. That being said, you may already know what Cubic Inches are or what different engine configurations mean. If that's the case, feel free to skip around to the parts that really interest you.

This book is designed to be as helpful and informative as possible. As always I love hearing feedback. You can always e-mail me at [bestbeginnermotorcycles@gmail.com](mailto:bestbeginnermotorcycles@gmail.com) with your comments on what you think.

## What You Need to Think About Before Riding

Riding a motorcycle is both simple, and complex. At first there is a LOT to learn. The various terminology used can be confusing, so although I will explain it all, there is also a glossary in the back of this book.

There are a few subjects that you need to consider before you even swing your leg over a motorcycle. They are as follows:

**What training I will get?**

**What legal requirements are there for me to get my motorcycle permit and license?**

**What safety and protective gear will I wear?**

**What type of motorcycle do I want?**

**What engine size best fits my needs?**

**Whether I will buy a new or used motorcycle?**

That's a lot to cover! You may already have done a little research and know some of the answers, and if so that's great! You are ahead of the game. If you are brand new to motorcycles just take everything one small bite at a time. It's not a race, and you can learn as fast or as slow as you'd like.

# Sticker Shock!

## Motorcycles are expensive

Chances are you might be thinking that you can get away with saving up \$1500 bucks and buying an old used bike and learning to ride on that. I wish that was the case, but that is really a recipe for disaster. While you may be able to technically to buy a old (and most likely unsafe) motorcycle for \$1500, there are a lot of hidden costs to riding.

### Insurance

You may have already thought about this, but if you are a young male your insurance rates are going to be high. That's because you are statistically more likely to be in a serious accident than other demographics.

You can mitigate this slightly based on the bike you choose. A Suzuki GSXR 1000cc motorcycle is going to be MUCH more expensive to insure than a Kawasaki Ninja 300cc motorcycle.



### Helmet

The second thing that you might have to legally buy is a motorcycle helmet. I've seen **half helmets** for as little as \$35, and full face helmets for only \$65. But if you get a helmet that cheap, it's going to suck. There is no way around it, with helmets it's definitely a "you get what you pay for" type of thing.

Probably the cheapest helmet I would recommend to a new rider would be in the \$150-\$250 range. You can get an excellent HJC, AGV, or Bell helmet in that range. One of my favorite helmet brands is Shoei, but most of those start around the \$350 mark.

Helmets are a thing you can upgrade over time. So buying a relatively inexpensive one at \$150 is not a bad thing. This way you will find out what is important to you and what isn't before you drop \$900 on a helmet that looks cool but doesn't fit your needs.

### Taxes and registration

Yes chances are you have to pay a sales tax whether you buy your motorcycle from a private party or from a dealer. This is usually a percentage of the price of the motorcycle. In the state I currently reside (Idaho), the sales tax for vehicles is 6%. So if you bought the cheapest motorcycle possible at \$1500 you are still going to be paying an extra \$90. Plus registration fees which is \$23 in my area. It may be higher or lower where you live.



The motorcycle license and test also require some money. Here it's \$15 for the 'M' motorcycle endorsement, \$10 for the riding skills test, and \$3 for the written test.

Also, think how you are going to get the motorcycle you just bought home. You may be able to convince a friend that has a motorcycle license to ride your bike home for you, or maybe a friend with a pickup can haul it home for you. If you don't have friends who are able to lend a hand, you will need to rent a trailer or truck for an afternoon.

Now, I'm not saying all of this in order to convince you to not ride, it's to make you aware that you really need a buffer of a few hundred dollars above what your motorcycle costs in order to make everything legal and roadworthy. I didn't know this when I first started riding, and it was quite a shock when I had to keep paying for these unexpected expenses just to ride a motorcycle.

What I've listed is also the BARE minimum. There are some things that I really do recommend for a new rider. Things like getting real training from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) training course, or a similar course in your area. That can be as little as \$50 or as much as \$200.

I recommend getting full motorcycle gear. That includes helmet, jacket, pants, gloves, and boots. Assuming you get inexpensive (but not cheap) gear, you should expect to pay around \$500 for everything.

## Financial rule of thumb?

So what's the rule of thumb? In an ideal world, I would say if your ideal bike costs \$3,000, you save up an extra \$800-1000 on top of that just to get things started.

That should help cover the additional costs I've mentioned and let you get riding very quickly.

Keep in mind though that bikes get even more expensive when you start buying them brand new. At that point you have to negotiate price, haggle down all the dealer fees, etc...

# The 5 pieces of motorcycle gear you need

Riding a motorcycle is inherently dangerous. According to NHTSA data, motorcycling is 33 times more dangerous than driving a car. There is a saying in motorcycle culture that there are two types of riders: Those who have crashed, and those who haven't crashed yet.

Don't let that scare you off, with the proper gear you can enjoy how amazing riding is while keeping your skin on your body.

## Must have: #1 Helmet

The very first thing you will need is a helmet. You can see how important it is by looking at the picture at the right. That is my helmet that I was wearing when I crashed my motorcycle once.



Some states don't have any sort of helmet law. You can ride with the wind in your hair and the bugs in your face.

However, there are a lot of advantages of choosing to ride with a helmet rather than without one.

- **Your face stays on your face.** I've been in a couple different motorcycle accidents, and thankfully I've always been wearing full gear when they happen. There was one crash where my face was being dragged on the pavement for 20 feet. I had a full-face helmet though, and it allowed me to keep my nose on my face. Trust me, that's not just hyperbole, people have literally ground off body parts when they are tumbling down a road after a crash. I like my face, and I want to keep it.
- **It protects you from bugs.** There are lots of different helmets out there, and I always ride with a full face helmet. The biggest reason is because I've had one too many bugs hit me in the mouth or the eye. These were times when I just had my visor open while riding! I can't even imagine what it would be like if I had no sort of face protection at all.
- **It looks mysterious.** Batman wears a mask. Zorro wears a mask. Catwoman wears a mask. What do they all have in common? They exude mystery! That's what a helmet does, it just gives other people a small taste of that beautiful face of yours. Girls like mystery. Guys like mystery. Everyone likes it! So add a bit of mystery to your life with a full face helmet.
- **Lets you easily use bluetooth.** Lots of helmets come with bluetooth capability and speakers already installed. You can also buy kits to install on a helmet without those. Bluetooth lets you answer phone calls, listen to music, and even get driving directions while you ride your motorcycle.
- **Your brain stays protected.** You are a human and a brain is really important for you to live a full life. You don't want brain damage. You want to be just as witty 10 years

from now as you are today, and keeping your noggin protected in a helmet is a great way to do that while you ride a motorcycle.

- **It's the law.** In a lot of states, you have to wear a helmet in order to ride a motorcycle. So if you have to wear one anyway, might as well make it something useful like a full face helmet that has so many benefits rather than just a half helmet.

## Must have: #2 Leather Gloves



Short Cuff Gloves



Full Gauntlet Gloves

The second most important piece of equipment for me is riding gloves. Some would assume that a jacket would be higher on this list, but to me the gloves are even more vital. That's because if you are in a motorcycle accident flying through the air, you are most likely going to try and extend your hands in order to protect yourself. If you don't have anything protecting your hands, then you can break bones, lose skin, and even lose fingers.

There is a very popular **motovlogger** named m13 that was in a motorcycle accident. Actually, I believe he was on a scooter at the time, but either way he was on two wheels. The accident he suffered was very serious, he broke both femurs and lost at least one finger. Gloves don't protect you against everything, but they can really help if you end up in an accident.

Beyond protecting you in a crash, motorcycle gloves just look badass. Most of them come with knuckle protectors, are built of leather, and just look awesome. They also protect your hands against the wind if you get weather-proof gloves, or you can find gloves that are more aimed towards keeping you cool in the summer months.

## Must have: #3 Motorcycle Jacket

A motorcycle jacket is one of the most popular pieces of safety gear, mainly because it keeps

you warm in the cool weather, and it keeps you cool looking all the time.

There are a bunch of different materials your motorcycle jacket can be made of. I wouldn't get too caught up in picking the perfect first jacket, because chances are you will end up owning more than one. My first jacket is one that I still have, and it is made of **ballistic mesh** which is great for the summer. I have a perforated leather jacket for the spring and fall, and also I have a full leather jacket for winter riding.

Most jackets protect you against the elements. If you ride a lot you will probably find yourself being more often cold rather than too hot, so a jacket is a welcome piece of equipment. There are times that it will be extremely hot, but it's still important to wear a protective jacket.

Often in the peak of summer it will be 90-100 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius) where I live, much too hot to wear a jacket normally. But before I go out riding without a jacket, I always ask myself, "Would I rather sweat a little, or bleed a lot?"

Although wearing a jacket when it's hot outside might be uncomfortable, if you do end up in a crash you will be thanking yourself since your skin will stay your body. When you slide along the pavement in an accident, it's just like taking your skin to a belt sander. It literally scrapes the skin off your body, exposing muscle, bone, and nerves. NOT FUN. A jacket protects you from that, and keeps your skin where it belongs.

So look cool, and wear a motorcycle jacket :)

## Must have: #4 Over the ankle motorcycle boots

Another part of motorcycle gear that has made it's way into mainstream culture is motorcycle boots. Motorcycle boots look great, but they also provide you with traction and protect the small bones in your feet in the case of a crash.

I've heard horror stories of people wearing tennis shoes while riding a motorcycle and when they crash and their shoes literally fly off their feet. I don't know about you, but I don't want my little toes exposed to pavement while going 60mph!

The main rules when it comes to motorcycle footwear is to make sure they are sturdy, and they have over the ankle protection. That means things like work boots that you might already have are a great choice if you are on a budget. Those high top Reeboks you love so much? Honestly those don't offer much protection.

If you want something more like a shoe, a lot of major manufactures like Icon and Alpinestars make motorcycle specific shoes like the ones you see at the right. Of course the best protection is always something like a full motorcycle boot. Plus, they look great!



Work Boots



Motorcycle Shoes



Motorcycle Boots

## Must have: #5 Motorcycle pants



I hope you aren't the type of person that wants to ride around in shorts. I cringe whenever I see that, mainly because I've had motorcycle pants save my knees on more than one occasion.

Motorcycle pants are usually the piece of gear that the vast majority of riders choose not to wear. That's because for a long time you were forced to either choose leather pants (what a fashion statement!) or a ballistic nylon that would look a little odd. They just didn't look like normal pants.

Most people think jeans are enough protection, but that simply is not true. Jeans will get shredded in just a couple feet of sliding on the pavement and offer no protection at all. Think about it, jeans are cotton, cotton is very weak.

As a kid I would rip a hole in the knee of my jeans just by falling on the grass. Grass is so much softer than asphalt!



Thankfully, many manufacturers are starting to design jeans with Kevlar panels added to key places. Some are even weaving the Kevlar directly into the cotton material, and adding armor to likely impact zones. The Kevlar jeans won't protect you as much as leather pants, but they are MUCH better than regular denim jeans. This means that you don't have to look like you are preparing for deep sea diving just to enjoy a motorcycle ride.

You can ride to your destination and walk around wearing your sweet motorcycle boots, cool jacket, and motorcycle jeans. You look like a badass, instead of an astronaut.

With all that being said, there are some leather and textile motorcycle pants that look pretty awesome. They definitely make you look like more of a professional, not just a weekend warrior. I have a couple pair of leather motorcycle pants, textile pants, and even a pair of motorcycle jeans.

# What NOT to wear on a motorcycle

You just learned about what you SHOULD be wearing while riding a motorcycle. Let's talk a little bit more about what to avoid wearing. I know some of this I already touched on, but I think some specifics would be helpful.

## Fashion Leather (don't wear it!)

Although leather jackets can be very fashionable, most of the ones you see at your local department store or clothing store are not made for riding. Movies and TV shows often depict motorcycle riders as "cool" and one thing that most motorcycle riders wear are leather jackets. They wear the jackets for insulation and to protect against abrasion if they were to crash on the street.

The fashion industry capitalized on this and has been making leather jackets out of cheaper leather for decades. There are all sorts of types of leather. From pigskin, to goat leather, to cow leather in many different qualities and thicknesses. Most fashion leather jackets use thinner leather between .6mm and .8mm thick. That just isn't thick enough to protect you in a crash.



Motorcycle jackets usually advertise being made out of **Full Grain** cowhide leather that is between 1.0-1.4mm thick. I generally make sure my jackets are 1.2mm thick, which is pretty standard in the motorcycle gear industry.

You will instantly be able to tell the difference between a fashion leather jacket, and one made for riding a motorcycle. That's because the real motorcycle jacket will be MUCH heavier. It feels like it would actually protect you in a crash, and it will.

I've crashed in the same leather jacket twice. Although it's a little scuffed up, it has held together and kept my skin on my body. I still wear it on a regular basis when I ride.

### Half helmets (don't wear them!)

Depending on your style, you may be drawn to the half helmet. Lots of cruiser riders want to wear the bare minimum little helmets called skull caps. These types of helmets offer very little protection in a crash. They leave your face, jaw, and all of the bones of your face exposed to impact.



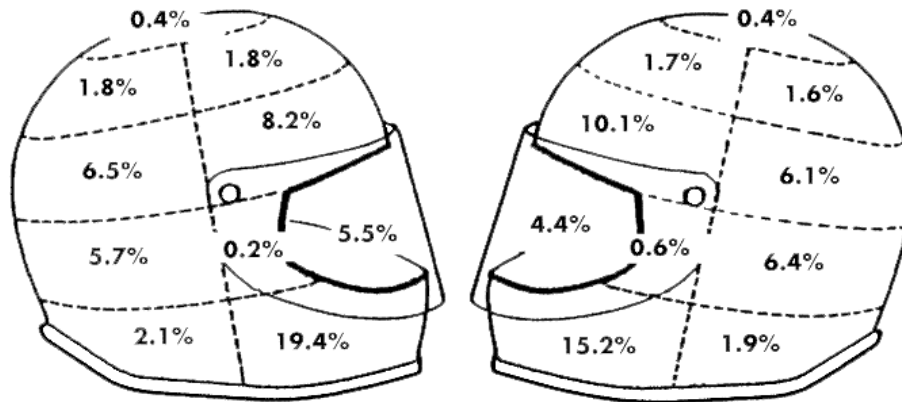
**Skull Cap Helmet**



**Half Helmet**

Another type of helmet really becoming more popular since it looks so vintage is the **cafe** style half helmet. These were much more predominant in the 60's and 70's, and they are making a resurgence right now.

They may be slightly better than a **skull cap helmet**, but not by much. To see why you just have to take a look at where your helmet is most likely going to impact in the event of an accident. The photo below illustrates the areas of a helmet most likely to be damaged in an accident.



Pictured above: Each zones likelihood of impact based on crash data

It's easy to see that the front area of the helmet where your jaw, nose, and mouth are located impact the pavement approximately 44% of the time. That small area accounts for a HUGE probability of damage. You want to protect it as much as you can.

I always recommend you ride with a full face helmet. It's just so much safer, and it lets you keep your teeth (and mouth, and lips, and nose....) if you ever are unlucky enough to crash. Because statistically, if you ride long enough, you will crash at some point.

If you really want some of the convenience of a half helmet with the safety of a full helmet, check out some of the **modular helmets** out there. The whole front mask flips up so you have easy access to your face. Many police departments utilize these that way their officers can stay safe, while still being able to flip up the helmet and easily interact with the public.



**Modular Helmet**

Uncertified helmets (don't wear them!)

There are three major organizations that test and certify helmets as safe. They put them through various impact tests, abrasion tests, and crumple tests to make sure your noggin stays safe. Different countries require different certifications. These are the three main ones you will run into.

- DOT (Department of Transportation)
- Snell (Snell Memorial Foundation)
- ECE 22.05 (Economic Commission for Europe)

You will find some helmets that are only DOT certified, others that are DOT and Snell certified, some that are only ECE 22.05 certified etc... What does it all mean?

To be honest, I don't think it's terribly important. There is a lot of politics over which helmet certification is the best. DOT certification is required in the USA for all helmets sold here, and some of those manufactures also get their helmets Snell certified. Does that mean they are better than those that only get DOT certification? Maybe in some cases, maybe not in others.

When modular helmets first came out Snell wouldn't certify them. That is no longer the case and there are some modular helmets that are certified by Snell, but did it mean those first ones were no good? I don't think so.

Basically what I'm saying is just make sure your helmet is certified by at least one of those major organizations, or the organizations that are required by law in your country.

There are some helmets that have no certifications at all. They were usually the skull cap type novelty helmets. I haven't actually come across any uncertified helmets when I've been looking to buy a new helmet, but I know they are out there, so be careful. If you purchase from any major motorcycle gear retailer, they should say in the product description who they are certified with.



## Regular denim jeans (don't wear them!)

This is a bit of a touchy subject. I know many riders that ride in only regular denim jeans. Not motorcycle jeans with the kevlar, just plain ol' cotton.

**To put it bluntly, that is just not safe.**

There have been tests by motorcycle magazines and websites trying to prove and disprove how much protections jeans offer in a crash. Some say that in low speed "get offs" (slang for crashing) under 35mph that jeans will hold up ok. Other say that they will shred into pieces in a few feet of sliding on the pavement.



Which is true? **Both.**

That's because each crash is completely unpredictable. I've known people who have walked away from a 70mph crash wearing a hoodie and regular jeans and didn't suffer any serious injuries. I would personally say they were VERY lucky!

I also know that I've crashed at around 40mph wearing full gear and left with a shattered shoulder blade.

In the end it's all about risk assessment. Something we will get into more later.

The bottom line is that even though the jury is out on how much protection standard jeans offer, everyone agrees that kevlar reinforced jeans are MUCH better, and they look just as good. Are they a little bit more expensive? Yes. But an extra \$100 spent on jeans will beat a \$1,000 emergency room bill and all of the pain associated with cleaning out **road rash**.

## Mechanix Gloves (don't wear them!)



In the automotive repair world there is a brand of thin gloves made to protect your hands when you are wrenching. The brand name is Mechanix, but I'm really referring to any super thin leather gloves.

Yes, most Mechanix gloves are made of leather, but it is an incredibly THIN leather that will fall apart easily. I should know, I had a former job where I handled a lot of cardboard boxes and I wore a pair of these gloves while working. Most of the time within two weeks they became an fingerless and had holes in the palms.

If a glove can't hold up to cardboard, how do you think it will do against pavement? Make sure you get yourself a motorcycle specific glove that is sturdy enough to protect your digits!

# Where to buy motorcycle gear?

There are a lot of place to pick up moto gear, from local shops to stores online. When I can I do try and buy from my local dealer or at a brick and mortar CycleGear. This helps support my local industry and it allows them to keep in stock many different sizes of items. If no one buys from them, then they have to limit their stock, which makes trying things on in the store not very useful.

I really recommend you try on lots of gear if you can, that way you will figure out what fits for you. The next section will focus more on how to try on gear properly, but for now lets get to the stores I recommend.

## Motorcycle Superstore

If you are shopping online, one of the very first stores I want to recommend is [Motorcycle-Superstore.com](http://Motorcycle-Superstore.com). Full disclosure, I am an affiliate with them so if you end up purchasing gear through the link I provide then I get a small percentage.

That being said, I wouldn't recommend a company I wouldn't use. I first ordered from Motorcycle-Superstore before I was ever an affiliate and I had great service. Their prices are decent, and they have a great selection.

## New Enough AKA MotorcycleGear.com

The second online store I would recommend is [NewEnough.com](http://NewEnough.com). Well, they aren't even called that anymore, they recently bought the domain [www.motorcyclegear.com](http://www.motorcyclegear.com) and have shifted all their branding in that direction. They are a GREAT company and I really love how with most pieces of gear there is a section called "Our Two Cents". It gives you their opinion on that piece of gear in real human language instead of sales-speak. They also have lots of videos on their site as well.

Of course take those two cents with a grain of salt, they are still in the business of selling gear.

If you are like me, then chances are you will end up buying multiple jackets, gloves, helmets, pants, and boots. [MotorcycleGear.com](http://MotorcycleGear.com) has a section called Customer Closet which lets you sell your old gear. You can also buy cheaper gear this way. I know there are some jackets I've only worn once or twice and let sit in my closet for a year. You can find deals on lightly used gear like that in the customer closet.

## Ebay

One of the best places I've gone to get brand new jackets for half off is Ebay. I rarely shop on Ebay, but I found out a few years ago that people will often have brand new motorcycle gear

that is discontinued. Sometimes these are things that didn't sell well, other times they are just last years fashion so they are liquidating them.

I got an amazing full leather Shift Racing motorcycle jacket for about \$150 on ebay. Brand new it would have been more than twice that amount. Buying on Ebay is always a risk though, so make sure you check out the seller reviews and buy from reputable dealers.



## How to choose properly fitting gear

Let's face it, motorcycle gear is EXPENSIVE. Even if you buy cheaper stuff, you can still expect to pay a few hundred bucks to get completely decked out in gear. Since that is the case, you want to make sure you pick something that fits well and will actually protect you in a crash.



Having a properly fitting motorcycle jacket or helmet is a lot more important than having a properly fitting dress shirt. While having a nice well tailored dress shirt can make you look sharp in a social situation, having a well fitting motorcycle jacket can keep your skin on your body in the event of a crash.

Let's get into each piece of gear, and how to get the best fit.

### The best helmet fit

The most important piece of gear is your helmet. If you don't have a face or you don't have a brain, it can make living life a LOT more difficult (that might be a huge understatement). It is also the piece of gear I recommend people spend the most money on.

When it comes to helmets you can really tell the difference in price. Cheaper helmets will be bare bones and basic, as well as a lot heavier than the more expensive helmets. The moderately to upper priced helmets will be able to use lighter materials, having cooler paint schemes, and add features like bluetooth or **internal visor shades**.



Whether you get a cheap helmet, an expensive helmet, or something in between, the fitting is basically the same.

A lot of manufactures will tell you to measure your head with a tape measure, and that might be a good base to start with, but don't count on it for the final decision. Really the only way to tell if a helmet will fit is to actually wear it.

This is why I love brick and mortar stores, you can try out the helmets in the store for 10-20 minutes and see what they feel like. That is what I recommend too, actually wear the helmet for a good 10-20 minutes while you are browsing for other gear. Yes, you might look silly, but every does it.

In that short time you will be looking for a few things:

- Any painful head pressure.
- Red marks on your face and head when you take off the helmet.
- The weight of the helmet.
- Making sure it doesn't wobble around on your head.
- Proper cheek pad placement.

The first time I tried on a helmet at the store I chose one that was too big. Yes, it was comfortable, but after I tightened the strap the whole thing felt loose on my head. When I shook my head back and forth the helmet moved. You don't want that! You want it to be sturdy and basically an extension of your skull.

The second helmet I chose was a bit too small. The reason I could tell this is because after about 10 minutes of wearing it I started to develop a small headache in my temples. I took off the helmet and I had some prominent red marks on my forehead, cheeks, and temples.

I eventually found a helmet that is a perfect fit.

#### **A perfectly fitting helmet should...**

- Be snug, but not overly tight and should not cause red marks or headaches. The inside foam will eventually compress slightly and conform to your head. So being a bit too snug is better than being a bit too loose.
- Fit the shape of your head properly. Different helmet manufactures use different head templates. You may find that Shoei helmets fit you well, while Arai helmets don't. Or maybe Bell helmets will be your cup of tea, but HJC are uncomfortable for you.
- Not wobble when you move your head. It should stay in place and protecting you at all times.

## **The best jacket fit**

The next thing you will probably be checking out is a motorcycle jacket. Now when it comes to getting a properly fitting jacket, there is a lot of leeway.

I tend to lean towards jackets that are much more snug. These jackets are usually made for racers, or people that like the "sport bike" look. There won't be a lot of extra room and it will feel stiff at first because the material needs a little time to break in. This is especially true if you are getting a leather jacket.

You can get a jacket that fits looser, especially if you are choosing a textile or mesh jacket. Those fit like more of your standard regular coat or jacket that you would wear even while not on a motorcycle.

If you get something with a little bit of space, you can also layer up. Riding a motorcycle can be very cold, so it's good to be able to put on more layers to keep insulated. In the summer when you ride all day you might find that you get too hot and taking off a few layers under your jacket can make you more comfortable.

What to consider when deciding between a loose fit and a tighter fitting jacket? If you crash your motorcycle, will your jacket ride up in areas? Wherever it rides up, you are much more likely to get road rash. That is why I stick to tighter feeling jackets.

How snug is too snug?

You will be able to tell pretty quickly if a jacket is too snug. If you have trouble zipping it up, it's too snug. If you can't really move at all after you zip it up, it's too snug.

It should feel a lot like leather armor. I know you probably haven't ever worn leather armor (unless you are a renaissance fair nerd like me?), but you could imagine what it feels like. It's going to feel tough, a little stiff, but not so much that it cuts your range of movement drastically.

You will feel the plastic armor in the shoulder and the elbows and back if it comes with it. That will prevent a little movement, but not too much.

#### **A perfectly fitting jacket should...**

- Feel snug (but not TOO snug).
- Should not ride up in the sleeves or the back easily.
- Should not feel like a loose billowy winter coat.
- You should be able to zip it up easily.
- Should not feel so tight that you can't move around easily.

When I first put on my favorite leather jacket, I thought it might be too tight. My friend who was a more experienced rider told me it wasn't, and that it would break in a bit. He was right. Now it is my FAVORITE jacket, and it fits perfectly.

## The best glove fit



Having gloves that fit well is paramount not only to safety but also to comfort while riding. I've had gloves that were too loose before and the extra material around the fingers made getting to the motorcycle controls a little awkward.

In that same vein, I've also had gloves that were too small/tight before, and gripping anything provided so much resistance I thought I was using one of those squeezing workout devices.

It's important to realize if you get leather gloves then they will tend to loosen up a bit. They aren't going to increase a size or two, maybe half a size AT MOST. So keep that in mind. Some gloves might not expand at all.

### **A perfectly fitting glove should...**

- Feel comfortable with your hand open and your fist closed.
- Not be so small it provides tons of resistance when you close your fist.
- Not be so loose that it would fall off with a tug on the fingers.

- Should not have too much extra fabric at the ends of the fingers (My gloves have a little bit of extra space on the pinky because my pinky finger is smaller than average. That's ok, just make sure they aren't all like that).

## Pants and boot fit

The fit of your pants and boots doesn't really differ much from pants and boots you would normally wear. Just make sure they are comfortable and fit well. If you are used to wearing your pants in a really low gangster style, that's probably not the best way to wear motorcycle pants.

Just make sure they fit well in the hips, are long enough to cover your shins when you are on the bike, and are comfortable.



# Different bikes and what you need to know

There are many different types of motorcycles out there. You may find that one type fits your style and needs better than another. After learning a bit more about specific bikes and what they can do, you may find yourself drawn to a motorcycle you might not have considered before.

## Cruisers



Someone brand new to motorcycles generally breaks them down into two categories. Cruisers and sportbikes.

Cruiser style motorcycles are iconic not only in America, but all over the world. Harley Davidson made them famous, but there were other companies like Indian Motorcycles, BMW, Moto Guzzi, and even Triumph that helped make cruisers incredibly popular.

Most cruiser style motorcycles come with a twin engine of some sort. It might be an **opposed twin**, a **parallel twin**, or most likely a **V-twin engine**. V-twin's make lots of **low end torque**, and have a low rumbling sound that gives many cruisers their unique sound.

This type of engine is great for well... cruising. Whether it be on the freeway, in the twisty country roads, or even down city streets. They do it all very well.

Harley's and other bikes in this class will also often come with optional luggage. This makes taking some of your possessions on long (or short) trips much easier. You can easily pop down to the grocery store down the street and put some food in your saddlebags with a cruiser motorcycle. Sure, you can do the same thing with a sportbike, but many sport bikes don't use luggage as often.

### Top 5 things to know about cruisers

- Often they are heavier, and lower to the ground.
- Sometimes use classic (i.e. older) technology instead of modern innovations.
- Are great for highway trips or any sort of long distance.
- Can come with luggage standard or it's easy to add some.
- Offers lots of ways to customize your ride if you choose.

## Sportbikes

Sportbikes can really be broken into 3 general categories. Sportbikes, SuperSports, and Sport Touring bikes. Generally speaking though, I consider them all to be under the umbrella category of "sportbikes".

What that means is they are designed to be lightweight, go fast, and provide lots of performance. They take a lot of the technology designed for the race track and modify it to use on the streets. Think of them as if Lamborghini decided to design a car for your everyday driver, because that is the type of power they can have.



Sportbikes come in a variety of different engine configurations. Some are twin engines, others are triples, but the vast majority are inline-fours. That means they rev higher, produce a lot of power, and create a unique high pitched engine note. They sound like race bikes, because well, they are.

They often times have **fairings**, or plastic pieces around the bike to help cut down wind resistance. This makes them look cool, and it serves a functional purpose. Now lets break down the three types of sport bikes:

Sportbikes: This is your standard sport bike really designed for the civilian and not the racer. They typically have a more comfortable seat and upright riding position. This means you aren't as crouched over putting pressure on your back and wrists. The engine is sometimes de-tuned to produce more useable power in the lower range, instead of optimizing performance at over 90+ mph.

SuperSport: These are bikes that are designed to be raced. Sometimes they even have different markings like "RR" meaning "Race Ready". They are designed for one thing: to go FAST. That means they might have additional technology the standard sportbike may not. The suspension might be upgraded, the brakes upgraded, and the engine tuned to get the most out of it at high speeds. The riding position is also a little bit more unforgiving, and is designed to have you crouched lower over the handlebars. Great for the race track, not so great for long distance rides.

Sport Touring: So you want to go longer distances, but a cruiser just isn't your style? Consider a sport touring motorcycle. These bikes have all of the amenities of a cruiser like the luggage, create windscreens, powerful engines, while also having a sportier look. They are known to be a bit heavier, and much more comfortable. Sometimes they come with heated grips, locking luggage, radio, GPS, and other things you won't find on a bike solely built for speed.

#### **Top 5 things you should know about sportbikes**

- They are mostly built for performance first, and comfort second.
- They usually use a lot more modern race technology
- They come with plastic fairings to cut wind resistance
- Many of them are built by the Japanese "big four" (Kawasaki, Suzuki, Yamaha, and Honda).
- They come in 3 main categories (sport, supersport, and touring)



## Standard motorcycles



These are classic bikes that you often see in movies and TV shows. They are also becoming even more popular now that many riders are turning them into cafe racers. You can think of a standard motorcycle as a sort of cross between a cruiser and a sportbike.

They often come without any fairings like a cruiser, have a more upright position like a cruiser, but are much more lightweight and often use inline four engines.

A lot of bikes that were sportbikes when they first arrived, are now more considered a standard motorcycle. The iconic Honda CB750 was a very sportbike in its day, but compared to the bikes now it is definitely a standard motorcycle.

Standard bikes do everything well. They are good for cruising on the freeway, going on errands in the city, as well as having fun on twisty roads. They rarely have plastic fairings, and so are sometimes referred to as "**naked**".

There are many great standard style motorcycles that are aimed at new riders. The Suzuki TU250 is a great bike with that standard look.

### **Top 5 things you should know about standard motorcycles**

- No fairings to get damaged in the event of a crash
- More upright seating
- An engine more similar to a sportbike than a cruiser
- Very stylish and can be turned into a **cafe racer**
- Simple technology, not made for racing.

## Supermoto & Dirt Bikes (Enduro)

Perhaps I should call this section “off road” bikes. There are two main types of bikes in this section. The Supermoto, and the dirt bike. Sometimes these are called **Enduro style motorcycles** because of the races they compete in.



A regular style dirt bike sits high, has a fantastic suspension, and knobby tires that grip well into the dirt, sand, and mud. Many people get their start on dirtbikes especially because they come in low cc's. It's common to see 150cc, 200cc, 250cc dirtbikes out there. There are of course more powerful dirtbikes in the 400cc, 450cc, and 650cc classes, but with that added power comes more weight and less maneuverability.

Supermoto is a style of dirt bike that you modify to perform even better on the street. This is usually done with a set of inverted forks, some street tires, and all the bits and bobs that make a bike street legal.

I absolutely LOVE supermoto style motorcycles. I've spent 95% of my riding time at this point on street bikes, but whenever I get on a dirt bike or supermoto I get a grin on my face. The suspension on a supermoto is squishy compared to a street bike, and it just makes you want to be a hooligan.

I spent time up with my dad in northern Idaho and he had a little Yamaha TW200. Not a supermoto, more of a dirt bike since it had knobby tires, but it was a blast to ride around on. Going 30 mph felt exhilarating, and I was constantly looking for excuses to go off road or go up obstacles like sidewalks (yes, bad I know!).

It's such a contrast to a street bike since one of the best ways to have fun on a sportsbike is to go fast. Either fast on a straight line, or fast in the turns, etc... With a supermoto, it's fun all the time!

In my opinion a supermoto is the best of all worlds and is the type of bike that many people would love. If you like adventures and taking the road less travelled, then these enduro style bikes are right up your alley.

### **Top 5 things you should know about supermoto/dirt bikes**

- They are bullet proof tanks. They are made to be dropped, so they are very new rider friendly.
- They are at home on surface streets and fire roads. They can do short freeway jaunts, but it's not ideal.
- They bring out the hooligan in you (great for wheelies).
- Supermos often have street tires and inverted forks like a sports bike.
- You can often convert a dirt bike into a supermoto, and vice versa.
- (Bonus) They often use single cylinder engines.

## **Adventure bikes**

This section could almost be lumped in with supermos and dirt bikes. You can think of adventure bikes as if a dirt bike and a sports bike had a baby. You get all of the freeway stability and capability of a sports bikes, with the added capability to go offroad.

One of the first things you may notice about these bikes is that they just look a bit... odd. Even the higher end KTM and BMW style bikes are a little weird looking. Although they might not be everyone's cup of tea in the looks department, they more than make up for it what they can do.



Like a mentioned before, they are great on the freeway. They often have 2 or 4 cylinder engines that make amazing power when



traveling at high speeds. They have some fairings usually which protects against the wind, and they often have a large windshield too.

They combine all of this with a versatile suspension and combination tires. Adventure style tires have enough grip to make them useful off road, while not vibrating too heavily when traveling on a smooth freeway (which knobby tires tend to do).

Adventure bikes are great for going on motorcycle camping trips. Think of it, just loading up your bike with your tent, food, and supplies and then heading off to a remote area. Plus, you are able to go places that a larger vehicle like a truck or jeep won't be able to access.

If you want to see what adventure bikes can do, you should check out the TV series Long Way Round, as well as the sequel Long Way Down. The show follows actors and friends Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman as they ride all over the world on BMW adventure bikes. It is hilarious, touching, and inspiring. I highly recommend it!

#### **Top 5 things you should know about adventure bikes**

- They combine the best parts of street bikes and dirt bikes.
- They are great for longer freeway rides.
- Adventure tires are sort of like aggressively gripped street tires.
- They can come with hard luggage.
- Great for motorcycle camping trips!

## **Scooters**

Why write a section on scooters? Obviously they aren't motorcycles, but many people get their start on two wheels riding a scooter first. The first motor powered two wheeled vehicle I ever drove was a Honda Elite 80cc scooter.

I tore around on that thing all through my neighborhood. It wouldn't go very fast, but it was still an exhilarating experience riding on two wheels while not having to pedal like I would on a bicycle.

Scooters are great because they usually come with automatic transmissions. They can also be found with smaller engines. They have ample storage room and are ideal for commuting.

Nowadays there are scooters with even larger engines, which makes freeway commutes much easier. The thing to remember is that the pavement doesn't care if you are riding a motorcycle or a scooter, it will still tear you up the same way if you crash. It's important to wear protective gear even if you are riding a scooter.

Because of the automatic transmission, they can be easier to get started on, but 99% of motorcycles use a manual transmission so you won't learn a vital skill you may need if you start on a scooter. All motorcycle riders will be able to ride a scooter, but not all scooter riders have the skills needed to ride a motorcycle.

That being said, learning to ride a scooter first is a great idea, especially if you are really intimidated by motorcycles. You may also find that a scooter fits your needs better than a motorcycle does.

#### **Top 5 things you should know about scooters**

- Usually sport an automatic transmission instead of a manual one.
- They are NOT safer than motorcycles. The pavement doesn't care if you are riding a scooter or a motorcycle. If you crash it will hurt the same.
- They come with underseat storage.
- Can find them as little as 50cc's up to 1000cc's
- A great thing to try if you are intimidated by motorcycles.





# Engine Basics!

There are two main things to consider when picking your first motorcycle. Believe it or not, neither of these is how the bike looks! The two things you want to pay attention to are CCs and engine configuration.

You are about to read a bunch of stuff that may seem technical, but it is relatively easy to understand once you are familiar with a couple terms. More than anything the choice of engine size will be a HUGE factor in determining how easy or difficult your riding career is. The right choice will also make you less likely to crash, become faster in the corners, and be more confident while riding. (HINT: The right choice isn't the biggest engine!)

**Here is a quick breakdown of two key terms:**

- **CCs** - This stands for cubic centimeters, a measurement of volume referring to the size all of the cylinders in the engine. What does that mean exactly? Generally speaking, the bigger the engine, the more CCs it has, the larger the cylinders in the engine. That means that a 600cc Honda F4i is going to have a lot more power than a 250cc Kawasaki Ninja 250.
- **Engine Configuration:** Cubic Centimeters (CCs) aren't the sole determining factor of the power of a motorcycle. The other vital piece is what type of configuration the engine takes, or in other words, how the major components of the engine fit together. Inline-four cylinder engines and Twin cylinder engines are two of the most common configurations.

Now that you know how to judge an engine's size, lets take a look at engine configuration, starting with the most common engine types.

## Single Cylinder Engine

Singles are mostly found in dirtbikes and some smaller cruiser style motorcycles. They consist of one big cylinder to generate all of engines power. This makes them extremely powerful at low speeds and they just ooze torque.

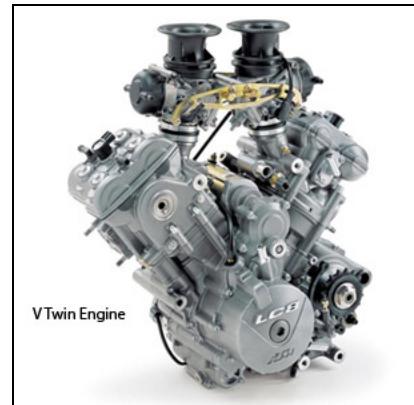
Sometimes these bikes are called "thumpers" by the obvious sound they make. You can hear each time the engine fires and moves the cylinder with the 'thump thump thump' sound.

- **How it looks:** These engines usually look a lot smaller than other motorcycles, and that's because they are much more simple. That simplicity means they are pretty easy to spot as there can be a lot of empty space between the motorcycle frame and the engine. These bikes will also only have one exhaust pipe coming from the engine.
- **The sound:** Thump thump thump thump... like I said, they are called thumpers!
- **Pros:**

- Lots of low end power
- Often found in dirt bikes and inexpensive cruisers
- Simple to work on yourself
- **Cons:**
  - May vibrate a lot if not properly balanced.
  - Not great for higher freeway speeds

## Twin Cylinder Engine

Twin engines only have two cylinders that generate all the power. There are many types of twin engines depending on how the two cylinders are lined up. You might have heard of a V-twin engine. It gets its name from the V-formation created by the cylinders. There are also parallel-twins, opposing-twins, and a few other configurations that are less common.



- **How it looks:** The most important thing to look for is how many exhaust pipes are coming out of the engine. Usually you see two pipes that go from the engine into a single muffler. Sometimes each of the pipes goes to its own muffler.
- **The sound::** The easiest way to tell if a bike has a twin engine is by the sound. Twin engines tend to have a deeper sound with a slower idle than inline-fours, kind of a "blub blub blub" sound. They vibrate more when you ride them, and most twins are much easier to handle since they deliver power in a more predictable way
- **Pros:**
  - They have a very flat power curve.
  - Grumbling sound
  - Easy to manage for a newer rider
  - Lots of usable torque for the street
- **Cons:**
  - Typically not as powerful as an Inline-Four engine.
  - Some twins vibrate a lot

## Triple Cylinder Engine

Triple's as they are called, attempt to bridge the gap between peak performance and low end torque. They are becoming more and more popular in recent years with some of the big Japanese four releasing some triple cylinder engine bikes.

The brand most known for triples is the British motorcycle company Triumph. Many of their bikes such as the Daytona 675 and the Speed Triple have three cylinder engines. They produce a unique sound and really move you.

- **How it looks:** Most of the time you won't be able to tell it's a triple just by the engine unless you really know what you are looking for. The best indicators are the sound of the bike, and how many pipes it has. Many triple motorcycles like to showcase that they have that type of engine so you may see a triple exhaust muffler on the back with 3 pipes on it. MV Agusta does this frequently.
- **How it sounds:** Every bike sounds different, but often times triple engines have a bit of a high pitched whine associated with them. This is because of the engine air intake. It's hard to tell just by the sound, since they could sound very similar to an Inline-four engine.
- **Pros:**
  - Usable low end torque
  - Good peak power higher in the revs
  - A forgiving engine
  - Very unique
- **Cons:**
  - Similar power to the Inline-Four which may be too much for some beginners.
  - Most triples come in larger bikes (600+cc's)

## Inline Four Cylinder Engine (I-4)

This means the bike has four cylinders that all line up with each other. Here are three ways to tell if a bike has an Inline-four Engine:

- **How it looks:** See how many pipes are coming out of the engine. Typically you will see four exhaust pipes near the front of the engine right behind the front wheel. These pipes usually go into one or two exhausts that point to the rear of the bike. See that, and you've just seen an Inline-4 engine!
- **How it sounds:** Inline-four engines have a very specific sound, a little bit higher pitched with a faster idle than a twin engine. If you have ever heard a Japanese sports bike, then chances are you have heard an inline-four engine.
- **Pros:**
  - A very common engine type
  - Lots of fun at higher revs
  - Usually better gas mileage than a twin
- **Cons:**
  - Higher revving
  - Can be very powerful
  - Sometimes have narrow powerbands
  - Peaks and valleys when it comes to the torque, not very linear.



When in doubt, just look up the bike on the internet! There are all types of engines out there, so sometimes the best way to figure out which configuration a bike has is to ask your best friend Google.

## Which engine is right for you?

Only you will be able to decide which engine is best for you. But once you do that will help you narrow down which bikes you will be looking at.

For new riders, I really recommend they pick an engine that has one quality:

### **Less than 500cc**

If it's 500cc's or less than it really doesn't matter which type of engine configuration it has. When you get to larger engines you have to start considering how they are put together and how they deliver their power. If you have to get something larger than 500cc's, I recommend the following:

### **Bigger than 500cc's, then choose 2 cylinder engines or less.**

There are a lot of great beginner motorcycles that fit into that category. The Suzuki SV650 and the Kawasaki Ninja 650 both have 650cc twin engines. Only two cylinders on both those bikes. This means they generate power in a much easier to handle way than something with 3 or 4 cylinders.

# Buying new VS used (from a dealer or private party)

For the sake of this article you can consider buying a used motorcycle from a dealership the same as buying a new motorcycle from a dealership. This is because every dealership I have known personally checks over and certifies every used motorcycle they sell, but don't be afraid to ask them what they have done to ensure the motorcycles reliability.

## Buying from a dealer

There is something amazing about going to a motorcycle dealership and seeing a brand new motorcycle just begging to be ridden. All the lights are hitting it perfectly, the paint is shining, when they start it up it purrs wonderfully.

The fact that no one else has used or abused the motorcycle makes it that much more valuable. You don't have to worry about the previous bone-head owner pulling wheelies on the freeway or revving it past the red line while racing his friends.



If you are going to be buying a new motorcycle you should definitely research it as much as possible that way you are armed with all the information that will keep lots of money in your pocket. Researching what people think about various dealerships will also save a lot of headaches by avoiding the dealerships that have poor customer service.

If you are lucky enough to have some friends that have bought motorcycles from various places then that's great, otherwise researching them on Internet forums or search engines will work well. Once you have chosen a dealership you should then choose the right motorcycle. You should realize that if you choose a motorcycle in high demand the salesman will be much



less likely to negotiate on price, and you may even end up paying quite a bit more than Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP). You will save money by choosing a motorcycle that is last years model, and maybe even a less popular color.

Another way to save money is by knowing exactly how much the dealer paid for the motorcycle, that way you will know how much room you have to work with when pounding out a dealer. A great site to get the dealer invoice is [www.cyclebuy.com](http://www.cyclebuy.com).

Once you know the invoice price, add on 10-15% and you will have the dealers "ready to sell" price. Once you know the price they are willing to sell at you should tack on an additional 5-15% for all the other dealer fees that they will add on to the final sale price, they include things such as: Set up fees, taxes, assembly fees etc...

When it comes to the actual payment cash is king. You will find that dealers will be able to work out quite a deal if you bring a blank cashiers check. If you need to finance though I would recommend going through your own bank or a separate credit union instead of using the dealer financing. That way you will know what you have to work with before you even step foot in the showroom.

## Buying used from a private party

I have personally purchased every motorcycle I have owned used. In my opinion the thousands of dollars that you will spend by buying a new motorcycle are not worth it, even though you do get the peace of mind of knowing that no one has mistreated the motorcycle. The first place to start is on the internet.

Assuming you have already done the research on picking what motorcycle you want, the next part should be fairly simple. I highly recommend [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com) especially if you live in the California Bay Area, or some other large city. You can find great deals especially from motivated sellers that just need to get rid of the motorcycle as fast as possible. This usually leads them to lower the price hundreds, if not thousands of dollars!

The key to getting a great deal though is being patient and buying during the winter. Here are a list of things that you should look out for when buying a motorcycle used:

### Things to avoid

- Salvage title: Normally motorcycles have these when the cost to repair them is more than the bike is worth. I've bought a salvage title bike once and it worked, but it wasn't great. In my experience you should stay away from these.
- Stunted/Great wheelie machine!: Stunting is a no no, it trashes your engine, transmission, and your suspension. If a motorcycle has been stunted STAY AWAY, unless you plan on doing some stunting of your own.
- Bent frame: Don't buy a motorcycle with a bent or dented frame! It's just plain unsafe!

### **Things you want**

- Clean title with pink slip in hand!: That means the title is not a salvage title, and it is in their name. Some people try to sell with just a bill of sale which is legal, but can be sketchy sometimes. You always want to buy a motorcycle with a clean title.
- Low Miles: Motorcycles are not like cars, 50k miles on a car may be nothing, but for a motorcycle that's A LOT!. I try and buy bikes that are below 20k, ideally they would have around 7,000 miles or less.
- "I need to sell by Sunday because I'm moving!": A story like that indicates a motivated seller, so if they are selling your dream bike, you can probably get it for a lot cheaper than you thought. Careful, some people use this as a scam. If they say this and list the bike in a price that may be too good to be true, be very very cautious!

Once you e-mail a seller and negotiate price either over the phone or through the internet, the next step is meeting them to finalize the sale. I prefer to meet in a public place because there have been some robberies and muggings by people claiming to sell things on the internet .

You should try and bring a friend and a truck with you that way you can get used to your new motorcycle at your own pace and not be forced to ride on unfamiliar roads and freeways. If you don't own a truck then try and ask someone else from the motorcycle community like [www.bayarearidersforum.com](http://www.bayarearidersforum.com) or maybe even rent a U-Haul. It is definitely a lot less stressful learning how to operate a motorcycle in an empty parking lot then in 3 lanes of traffic at 65mph!

Once you arrive at the meeting point look over the bike. Make sure it starts up without any problems since the engine should already be warm from the seller riding it to the mutual public place. Hopefully your "friend with a truck" is also somewhat knowledgeable about motorcycle mechanics, even the basics would be helpful. That way they can look over the motorcycle with you and make sure that the seller is telling the truth about any damage the bike may have.

Once you are both satisfied, pull out the paperwork and start filling it out! You should be filling out 2 bills of sale (one for you, one for the seller), and the title. Double check that the seller has signed all the places that he needs to sign, it sucks going to the DMV only to realize the seller missed one signature so you can't register your bike for a few more days or weeks. That's basically the nuts and bolts of buying a motorcycle. I hope it has been helpful!

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## The Best Beginner Cruiser Motorcycles

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# Honda Shadow VLX



The Honda Shadow is a motorcycle that has been around for decades. Between 1988 and 2008 Honda produced the VLX version of the Shadow (also known as the VT600c). It is a great introductory cruiser with enough power to make highway riding comfortable and easy. After all, that's what cruisers do best and this Shadow is at home on the open road!

## Engine and transmission

The VLX is powered by a 583cc V-twin engine. This is the sweet spot in engine size that allows you to easily learn how to ride without doing wheelies or burnouts on accident. This bike was also heavily inspired by Harley Davidson engines, right down to the semi single pin crank. That means around town you will have a great sounding motorcycle that puts out an aggressive exhaust note without being overly loud. Even stock this bike sounds great.

The one interesting thing about this bike is it comes with a 4 speed transmission. Most bikes these days have 5 or 6 gears, but not this shadow. That means that it will be working a little harder if you are going 65mph or higher, but that's nothing that this bike can't handle. Still, it leave you wishing you sometimes had a higher gear when you are riding for more than a few hours at a stretch.

## Oldy but a goody

The VLX version of this bike was discontinued after 2008 so you should be able to pick up one of these motorcycle extremely cheap. It was replaced by a larger engined Shadow RS which comes in at 750cc's. The brand new Shadow RS would still make a decent beginner

motorcycle, but you would have to be careful with the extra power. Plus, why buy something brand new when you can get an even better starter bike for a lot less dough?

The Shadow VLX would make an ideal bike for someone who thinks a Honda Rebel 250cc bike might be a bit too small for them, but they don't want a bike that is over 650cc's. It's also a great bike if you want something inexpensive that will last you a while. Sure you can always sell your first bike a year after you get it, but this Shadow would easily last many years into your riding career if you so desired.

## Great for short riders

The bike comes in at 439 lbs which isn't the lightest bike out there, but sometimes that weight will help with stability when you are on the freeway. The seat height on this little monster is also quite short. 27.2 inches which is awesome for shorter riders.

That short seat will also help you flat foot the bike if you are average height to help manage the weight. If you are shorter than 5'6" it can make riding a sportbike a little awkward without modifications, but you would feel right at home on this Honda Shadow.

## Conclusion:

This is an absolutely badass motorcycle that you will love if you are a fan of cruisers. Really the only thing that makes it less than ideal is that 4 speed transmission. If it had one more gear it would make riding on the freeway a bit easier.

Even with that limited transmission, this thing will cruise all day at high speeds. Look on your local craigslist or cycletrader and see if you can pick up one of these bikes for cheap. You won't regret it!

### Pros:

- Perfect V-twin engine size at nearly 600cc's
- Inexpensive since it's discontinued
- Low seat height
- Amazing sound

### Cons:

- Could use one more gear in the transmission
- Maybe a little heavy for smaller riders



# Harley Davidson Sportster 883 Review



When it comes to great starter motorcycles, Harley Davidson isn't known for them. Harleys are loud, heavy, powerful bikes that have a very unique culture surrounding them. One that embraces the veteran rider for the most part.

To most non motorcycle riders you have only two types of bikes: Crotch rockets and Harleys. Although the Iron 883 might not be the most ideal beginner bike, it is one of the best to choose if you are a Harley fan.

## Style

One thing that Harley's have in spades is style. They are a unique looking, and unique sounding motorcycle. The Iron 883 is one of the best looking Harley's in my opinion. It has a beastly look that is classic at the same time as it is modern. If you want an aggressive looking motorcycle, look no further than this bike.

The engine of this monster is 883cc's. Hence the name. Normally I really try and stay away from recommending anything higher than 650cc's for a starter motorcycle, but I know there are some people out there that want a Harley and nothing else will suffice. For those people the Iron 883 offers a good option.

That 883cc powerplant is air cooled and **fuel injected**. That means you don't have to mess around with carburetors like you would on an older cruiser motorcycle. The blacked out and powder coated engine also looks amazing. It's definitely a motorcycle with not very many

chrome bits which really adds to that aggressive attitude emanating from this bike. It's relatively inexpensive for a Harley coming in at \$8,399. It's one of the least expensive harleys out there and is based on the sportster platform which has a proven track record.

## Heavy metal

There is a very low seat height on this motorcycle which makes it easy to flat foot and give you more of a sense of security when you are stopped or going slowly. You will need that because this bike is MASSIVE. It tips the scales at 562 lbs. To put that in contrast, a [Ninja 300](#) weighs 362 lbs and an [SV650](#) weighs 437 lbs. That added weight really makes low speed maneuvers on the 883 harder than they have to be.

Is that a deal breaker for this motorcycle? I don't think so. Lots of bikes are heavy, and that heaviness actually means you are a bit more stable when traveling on the freeway. If you have a longer commute or you plan on taking road trips then this would be a good thing.

## A culture of safety?

One of the things I like about Harley is they offer a beginner riders training course called Rider's Edge. It's very similar to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) course, and in some areas it's actually taught by the same people. The main difference is that Rider's edge is a quite a bit more expensive (around \$300) and the class sizes are smaller so you get more individual attention.

If you end up picking up an Iron 883 it would be worth it to inquire about their Rider's Edge course. You may even be able to roll that into the price of the motorcycle if you are good at negotiations.

## Conclusion

To put it bluntly, the Harley 883 isn't an ideal beginner motorcycle, but it would work in a pinch if you are dead set on having a Harley. It would be great for touring longer distances or any time you need a bit more power than what a Ninja 300 might offer.

### Pros

- Fuel injected
- Low seat height
- Aggressive styling

### Cons

- Heavy at 562 lbs!
- More expensive than smaller displacement motorcycles

# Kawasaki Vulcan S



The Kawasaki Vulcan has been a mainstay of Japanese cruisers for decades. It combines the precise engineering Kawasaki is known for with a modern style that can't be beat. Perhaps one of the best beginner cruisers available right now is the Vulcan type S. Imagine the looks of the Harley V-rod at less than half the price. Now that is bound to get some attention!

## Beauty contest

Out of all of the cruisers available right now I absolutely love the look of the Vulcan S the most. It is modern looking while also having a very rugged appearance. It's angular lines and smooth edges remind me a lot of the Harley V-rod. This bike is even better though because it is a fraction of the cost coupled with the reliability Kawasaki is known for.

The engine of the Vulcan S is a 649cc parallel-twin based on the same engine from the Ninja 650. That means a new rider will be able to control this bike fairly easily, but it will still bring a smile to an experienced rider's face. If you feel like upgrading in the future the Vulcan lineup has many different engines and configurations to choose from. From the Vulcan 900 classic to the mammoth 1700cc Vulcan Voyager.

## Beginner friendly

The Vulcan S may be the best beginner cruiser motorcycle. It has the option of being loaded with Anti-lock Brakes (ABS) which can really help with keeping you safe, especially as a new rider. ABS can prevent you from locking up the wheels and crashing when the pavement surface is less than ideal. I recommend it for both new and experienced riders!

The 649cc engine is smooth, and it's transmission has 6 speeds to make freeway riding easier. There is plenty of power when you need it for passing at high speeds. This bike is at home around town, on the freeway, and in the twisties.

## A fit for everyone

The thing that sets this bike apart more than any other is the Ergo-fit customizations that are available. It changes the position of the bars, the seat height, and the peg locations. Most of them have 3 different adjustments that you can do. This essentially means that very short riders and extremely tall riders will be able to customize the bike to fit their body type.

Kawasaki also offers three types of seat options:

- The **standard seat** for people 5'7" to 6 foot
- The "**Extended Reach**" seat which lets you slide back in the saddle a bit more and raise you up,
- The **shorter** seat which is about 2 inches shorter than standard in the tapered section.

That is pretty amazing. A bike that will fit just about any motorcycle rider.

## Conclusion

If I were going to buy a brand new cruiser tomorrow, I would make it this Vulcan S. I think that is one of the highest recommendations I can make. It has a lot of features that make it very beginner friendly and at the same time it's style is something that can't be ignored.

If you get a chance to test ride this bike you may not want anything else.

### Pros:

- Sexy and modern looking cruiser
- 27.8 Inch seat height (great for short riders!)
- Ergo-fit customizations allow for riders of all sizes (over 6'1" and 5'6" and under)

### Cons:

- Has a parallel twin instead of a v-twin engine (some hardcore cruiser enthusiasts might not like that)

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## The Best Beginner Standard Motorcycles

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## Honda Rebel 250



The Honda Rebel 250 is one of the first motorcycles I ever got a chance to ride. This is because they are often times the bike you get to learn on while taking the MSF course. This isn't just a motorcycle to learn on though, it's a great bike that can keep you happy for a very long time.

For a long time there were only a few 250cc bikes to choose from if you were buying a bike in that class. If you wanted more of a sportsbike you would choose the Kawasaki Ninja 250. If you wanted more of a cruiser style bike then the Honda Rebel was your best option. Even though it was one of the only options for a long time, it's still one of the best to this day.

### Engine and weight

The Rebel is powered by an air-cooled 234cc V-twin engine that has proven itself for decades. The engineers at Honda have perfected this little powerplant and I would venture to say it's practically bullet proof at this point. The engine looks a little small in the frame of the bike, especially when compared to a larger cruiser. That small engine really helps to keep the weight of this motorcycle extremely low. Filled up with oil and gasoline this bike only weighs around 329 lbs.

The weight is just one of the reasons that makes the Rebel a powerhouse in the 250 class. It's also quick off the line while still having the power to cruise at 60-70 mph. If you are going

to be traveling up some steep hills in your journey though, you may notice that you have to downshift to keep the bike happy and cruising along at a respectable speed.

## Tall riders?

The one caveat to this bike is it's not ideal for taller motorcycle riders. If you are 6'0 or taller you may find yourself a bit cramped on this machine. Although it will still have the power to pull you around, you may find the controls and seating position less than ideal.

What that really means is this bike is amazing for short riders. When you combine it's low seat height of 27 inches with it's low weight of 329 pounds, you get a motorcycle that is easy to move around at low speeds. That is the time when most new riders tend to drop their bikes. Many people will be able to flat-foot while sitting on this bike, which really helps with balance when you are parking or backing up.

## Conclusion

All in all I think this motorcycle is really nice, it is one of the bikes I learned on while taking my Motorcycle Safety Foundation course. In fact it was frequently one of the most sought after bikes for its ease of use and wide power band. Its very maneuverable when negotiating low speed turns, and is great when cruising down the highway leaning into big sweepers.

When all is said and done I think this motorcycle is one of the best you can get if you are looking for a cruiser style, reliable, fuel efficient beginner motorcycle.

### Pros:

- Great for low speed turns
- Light weight
- Engine is bulletproof

### Cons:

- Looks a little dated
- Taller riders may find it too small
- Suspension is a little soft

# Suzuki TU250x Review



There aren't that many single cylinder motorcycles out there when compared to twins and inline-fours. This little Suzuki proves you can have big fun with a smaller motorcycle. With its classic lines and thumping engine, this is an ideal bike for a smaller rider or someone who wants something to commute around town.

## Single Cylinder FUN

The TU250x is powered by a 249cc single cylinder air cooled engine. This bike is even fuel injected with an electric start. That is a pleasant surprise for just a classic looking motorcycle. No having to mess with **kickstarters** and **chokes**!

One thing that single's have in their favor is a decent amount of torque for their size. This bike puts out 14hp at around and the torque peaks at 11.3 ft/lbs. That number might not mean a lot to you, but what's important to know is it makes the TU250x a VERY beginner friendly motorcycle.

## Ride it like you stole it

You may find this little TU250x to be slightly underpowered, especially when you start tackling hills and higher speeds. The key to unlocking this bike is to not be afraid of revving it up and being aggressive with the gear shifter. In fact a lot of smaller bikes like the Ninja 250 are also required to be ridden like this.

When I ride a smaller bike I regularly wait a long time until I shift gears which makes the engine work harder and you get more power out of it. Then again, I like to ride motorcycles like I stole them, haha! This style of riding is actually good for the engine (Google an **Italian tune-up**)

By keeping the rev's high you will be able to maximize every hoof of that horsepower and have a lot of fun. That also means you will be shifting a lot more than a larger bike, but in my mind that is what makes small bikes such a blast to ride. You actually feel like you are doing something rather than just twisting the throttle.

## Scrambled eggs

This bike just SCREAMS to be turned into a **scrambler**. A scrambler is a street bike that has been modified to make it more capable off road. A very popular style right now!

If you replaced the street tires with some semi-knobby ones that would work on the dirt and then tweaked the suspension, you would have a very capable dual sport! Since the bike is already so lightweight you wouldn't have too much trouble throwing it around on fire roads and some more aggressive terrain.

If you choose to keep this bike stock then you would have a great around town transportation. Although it's capable of jaunts on the freeway, it's most at home downtown and on college campuses. In fact this bike is ideal for a college student. At just a little of \$4,000 brand new, you can have a lot of fun for not a lot of money.

## Conclusion

One of the best buys out there in the 250 class. If you want something more classic looking than the Ninja 250 or 300, you should check out this bike.

### Pros

- Single cylinder engine that is fuel injected
- Light weight and lots of fun
- Inexpensive
- Potential to mod it to a scrambler
- Classic looks

### Cons

- A little underpowered
- Not great for the freeways

## Yamaha SR400



You may not have ever heard of the Yamaha SR400, if not then that's a shame. Yamaha has a strong history of 400cc motorcycles and this SR400 is like a trip back in time. That can be a good thing, or a bad thing depending on how you look at it. Read on to find out whether or not you want to hop on this time machine!

### Kick like Bruce Lee

Most motorcycles these days come with an electric start. Not this bike. The SR400 is a classic kickstarting single cylinder bike. Now that's rare for a modern bike!

If you've had experience with older kick starting bikes you know that it can require a lot of muscle to kick over. This Yamaha has a few technological upgrades that make this process MUCH easier. Really, once you know the process, it's just as easy as starting any other motorcycle.

It can be tiring though if you are running lots of errands and have to keep turning the bike off and on. It would have been awesome if Yamaha would have included an electric start in addition to the kickstarter. That being said, the kickstarter is a polarizing feature that people will either love or hate.



## Project bobber, cafe, or scrambler

This bike is really aimed at those that love projects. Right now cafe racers and bobber style bikes are incredibly popular. Even in my town I've seen a few Honda CB750's from the 1970's that have been upgraded and modded for that cafe style look.

If you want to tinker with a bike but you don't want to deal with the rust, corrosion, and electrical problems of a four decade old motorcycle, then this SR400 is right up your alley. It is a solid base that you can use to create a custom motorcycle unique to you.

## Engine

The SR400 is powered by a 399cc air-cooled single cylinder engine. It's a versatile motor that can handle just about anything. From surface streets to higher speed highways, the SR400 is a capable machine. It has the power you need without having so much that the bike is hard to handle for a new rider.

It's also a fairly light motorcycle at 384 lbs, with a seat height of 31 inches. The fit and finish on this bike are also pretty good. There are a few parts that are definitely vintage style, but it has been updated enough to satisfy most modern riders.

## Conclusion

Generally speaking the SR400 is a great machine. The only thing that might cause some hesitation is it's relatively high price tag for the amount of bike you are getting. Brand new it retails at nearly \$6,000. For \$1,500 more you could pick up an Suzuki SVF650.

But then again, you don't buy a bike like this because it's the most logical choice. You get it because it speaks to you, because you love the style, and you want something different.

### Pros

- Kickstarter, very unique in today's bikes!
- Powerful engine that is also beginner friendly
- Ability to modify the look

### Cons

- Relatively high priced for what you get
- The Kickstarter could get annoying to some riders

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## The Best Beginner Sportbike Motorcycles

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# Suzuki SV650

The Suzuki SV650 is a motorcycle that is hard to pin down. Most motorcycles that are great for the experienced rider are much too powerful for someone new to the hobby of motorcycling. On the other hand, most beginner motorcycles don't have the power of 600cc's or liter bikes, and that can leave veteran riders are wanting more.

This has led to new riders [buying 600cc+ motorcycles](#) in an effort to "plan ahead" for when they are experienced. Unfortunately, these type of motorcycles were designed for racing and therefore are not very newbie friendly. So does the SV650 exist in that goldilocks zone? Does it have enough power for the veterans but not too much power for the newbies? I think so!

## V-twin Power for the Streets

The 90-degree liquid cooled V-twin, 645cc, fuel injected engine delivers power in a very manageable way and is great for both a new and experienced rider. Most sport bikes are equipped with an inline-4 engine which is the equivalent to a jet turbine in terms of power output. They can go quite fast once you rev them up to speed, but most of them are left lacking when it comes to mid-range torque.

The SV has mid-range power in spades, and is the type you need when riding on the street. That is also the primary reason why the SV makes such a great beginner motorcycle. It allows the newer rider to get used to the sensitivity of the throttle without having to worry too much about the motorcycle taking off without them.



If you pick up an older SV650 (pre-2003) you will find that the frame is more rounded compared to the new versions, this allows the frame to be 100% cast aluminum alloy. The older tube frames were partially cast and the rest was welded together. Both frames are well designed and very stiff which really adds to the already impressive handling of this bike. Couple that with the stock Metzler Mez 4 tires and you have a bike that can keep up with other more race oriented bikes in the twisties.



Pictured above: A comparison of the older tube frame and the modern angular frame

## The Suspension and Ride

One gripe that most SV owners have is the suspension. A lot of riders think it's much too soft which leads some people to replace their front forks with those of a Suzuki GSXR, but I think that the suspension works well enough on the street. If you were going to be doing some heavy riding either on the track or maybe some aggressive twisties then it may be worth it to change out the forks, other than that I wouldn't bother.

One more thing that some owners complain about is the hard seat that comes stock on the SV. During the times where I have ridden an SV, I wouldn't say that the saddle is absolutely horrible, but it could use a bit more cushioning if you plan on riding for hours and hours. If you are going to be going on some long trips you may want to switch the seat out for an **aftermarket** seat (maybe a corbin).

When all things are considered the SV650 is not only a great looking bike, but also a really fun one to ride. This bike offers a great alternative for those that are too self conscious to start on a 250cc or 500cc motorcycle or those that simply have had lots of 2 wheeled dirt experience and want to move on to the street.

## Three Levels of Fairings

Fairings are the plastic parts of a motorcycle that can impact how it rides and how it looks. A fully faired bike has plastics covering most of the front, engine, and bottom of the bike as well as a windscreen. This is so the bike can be as aerodynamic as possible, and it also looks great.

There are some bikes that come either naked, or partially faired. A naked motorcycle has no fairings, which means all of the wind that you experience will be hitting your face and chest. This makes riding a more visceral experience, and a fun one in my opinion!



[www.BestEnglishMotorcycles.com](http://www.BestEnglishMotorcycles.com)

The SV650 comes in multiple levels of fairings. There is the naked level, the partially faired, and the fully faired version that you can create with aftermarket parts. This lets you really customize the look of the bike so it fits you and your personality.

## The Best Beginner Motorcycle?

The SV650 is arguably the best motorcycle for many people. If you are nervous about 'outgrowing' your bike too fast, then the SV650 is a great choice. If you are a heavier guy or girl and are worried a 250cc motorcycle like the [Kawasaki Ninja 250](#) won't have the grunt to move you around, then the SV650 is a good option. If you want a beginner bike that will allow you to go on longer multi-day rides, then the SV650 is tough to beat.

No matter how you slice it, the SV650 is one of the best beginner motorcycles out there. And now that it is no longer being actively manufactured, you can get them at a great price on the used market.

### Pros

- Half fairing means less plastic to break in case of a drop.
- 70 hp is enough for the experienced, but not too much for the new rider.
- Cheaper than a 600cc 'crotch rocket'.

### Cons

- Suspension is too soft
- Might be too much power for someone not comfortable on 2 wheels (either a bicycle or dirt bike).



## Honda CBR 500R



Many people looking to get into the hobby of motorcycling often smirk when it is suggested that they look into a fantastic bike like the CBR 250, [Ninja 250](#), or the Ninja 300. This is most often the case when the soon-to-be motorcycle rider weighs over 200 lbs... “How will the bike carry me? It’s so small!” they often lament.

If you wanted something manageable for a beginner, but also more “motorcycle” for the money than the 250cc offerings out there, check out the Honda CBR 500R. Right now Honda is the only sports bike manufacturer offering a 500cc class bike brand new. Suzuki no longer offers the wonderful GS500F (I myself started on a [GS500](#)!) and Kawasaki stopped making the [Ninja 500R](#) in 2009. Those two bikes can still be acquired in the used market, and I actually recommend that you look at something used if you are buying a motorcycle for the first time. If, however, you are dead-set on getting something off the showroom floor in 500cc’s, Honda is your only option.

### Love at first sight?

Lets talk about first things first, initial impressions of the CBR 500R. It simply looks like a much larger bike compared to some of the other offerings in the beginner motorcycle class. The tires are much wider than they would be on something like the Ninja 300



which gives it a "full size" feel. It also sports more legroom than most bikes in the sub 600cc class because of lower footpegs. If you are at all concerned about being too big/tall to fit on a Ninja 300, definitely go to a dealership and sit on the CBR 500R.

You will find that the leg room, seat height, and riding position make the bike much more comfortable for someone of larger stature. When riding the CBR you will find that it has a very flat torque curve that redlines at around 8500 RPM's (revolutions per minute of the engine). What that means is you have access to lots of power no matter how fast you are going. The bike will have the same power starting off the line as it will once it gets up to freeway speeds. Bikes like the Ninja 300 need to get the RPM's up quite high before you start to feel a surge of power.

## A stable ride

Speaking of the freeway, if you plan on doing freeway riding, that is where the CBR really seems to shine. It has a softer suspension than either the Ninja 300 or CBR 250. That makes it great for cruising at higher speeds or navigating back roads. The bike is heavier than most 250's or 300cc motorcycles which means an easier ride and being pushed around less by the wind when you are at freeway speeds.



The Honda's seat is also padded more than other bikes which really helps when you are on the bike for more than a few hours.. It gets 50+ miles per gallon and can comfortably go over 200 miles before you have to put more gasoline in it. That makes this bike an option for those that really want to save money on gas by riding a motorcycle.

In the looks department there is no denying that the CBR appears much less aggressive than the Ninja 300. Yes, the CBR has a full fairing, but the angles are soft and the seating position is upright. I love the double headlights though, and the windscreen does provide protection from the cold when you need it to.

## The Technical Bits

No motorcycle article would be complete without a spec rundown. The Honda comes with liquid-cooled 471cc dual overhead cam parallel-twin engine. Its gearbox is 6-speed and feels absolutely amazing while shifting. Honda definitely spent time on the transmission of this bike, and it shows.

You can pick up this bike for around \$6,000 from a local dealership. That's over a grand more than the Ninja 300, but you get quite a bit for your money. Is the extra leg room, more power, Honda reliability, and softer looks worth that extra dough? Only you can decide.

I imagine you could ride this thing for years just doing the regular maintenance and you wouldn't have any problems. Most people don't own their first bike forever though, so if it comes time to sell this beast you will be pleasantly surprised to find that it has held its value well. Of course as soon as you leave the dealer floor the bike will depreciate instantly, but beyond that initial hit most 250cc/300cc/500cc bikes don't lose much money over time. They are also easier to sell through a private party because a person need only come up with \$4,000 or \$5,000 instead of \$9,000 or \$10,000 like you might need for a modern 600cc/1000cc supersport.

## Conclusion

All things considered, you can't go wrong buying the CBR 500R, and for a lot of people this bike makes more sense than the very popular Ninja 300 or the CBR 250. Because of the increased power of this bike, it should help eliminate any fears a new rider might have of "outgrowing" the motorcycle in a couple months. The CBR500R could be your only motorcycle for years and I think you would be very happy. It does a lot of things really well and it will help you become a great rider.

### Pros

- Lots of legroom
- Smooth and powerful engine with superb gearbox
- Heavier bike for more freeway stability
- Torque everywhere you need it
- Honda reliability

### Cons

- Less aggressive looks than other bikes
- Softer suspension not as good for tight canyon racing
- Horn button is awkwardly placed

## Kawasaki Ninja 300



For decades Kawasaki has been one of the steadfast manufacturers that build smaller motorcycles aimed at new riders. The Ninja 250 is an iconic bike that got a serious facelift in 2008. A few years later, Kawasaki released the next evolution of that bike: The Ninja 300. It's an improvement on the Ninja 250 in every way, in fact it just might be the best beginner motorcycle.

She's got the look!

One of the things that really stands out about the Ninja 300 is the fact that it doesn't LOOK like a beginner bike. All of the styling is taken directly from it's older sibling the Kawasaki Ninja ZX-6R, a 600cc supersport machine. Take a look at this comparison photo, these two bikes could be twins!



**600cc Bad  
first motorcycle**



**300cc Good  
first motorcycle**

There is no mention of 300 anywhere on the Ninja 300, so if you are worried that people will think you have a 'starter bike', only an expert would really be able to tell. But that leads me to my next point: The Ninja 300 is not just a great beginner motorcycle, it's a great motorcycle period!

If you get the chance to ride a 600cc, 750cc, or even 1000+cc motorcycles you will quickly discover that your bike can go MUCH faster than any posted speed limit in America. If you are in Germany on the autobahn, that's a different story. Around town you will usually only use first and second gear. With the Ninja 300 you get a chance to shift through ALL the gears. It makes riding a much more fun and engaging experience.

## Video: Experienced rider on a Ninja 300

Here is a unique video I found on youtube of a rider who used to own a Triumph Street Triple (a 675cc British motorcycle) that traded it in for a Ninja 300 and couldn't be happier. Check it out:

[http://youtu.be/W6f\\_VHe1wKw](http://youtu.be/W6f_VHe1wKw)

## Easy shifting

Most cars are automatic these days, so sometimes a new rider's first experience with a clutch will be while they are learning to ride a motorcycle. This is a LOT to take in at first, but the Ninja 300 makes it easier with their Assist and Slipper Clutch. Here is how it works according to Kawasaki:

"The assist uses rotational forces of the clutch hub and pressure plate to force the clutch together during acceleration so that fewer and lighter clutch springs





can be used for a lighter feel at the lever. During sudden deceleration, the slipper function allows some clutch slippage to help prevent engine lock-up, stalling and rear-wheel hop so you can ride more confidently"

What does that really mean? It means shifting is easier and the bike is more forgiving. You won't be stalling as often and you won't be jerked around as much when you downshift. The clutch is a GP inspired clutch that lets you pull in the shift lever with very little pressure. Two fingers are really all you need to begin to shift gears. Shifting up through the gears on the Ninja 300 is really a breeze, they have dialed in everything so much that it's almost as if the bike has a quick shifter. Every part of the transmission on this bike gets an A+ from me.

## Save cash

Now that you know that this bike isn't just limited to beginners and even experienced riders will love it, know that this bike will also save you cash. Brand new the MSRP on the 2015 model is \$5,299 with ABS, and \$4,999 without ABS (do yourself a favor, spend the extra dough for the better brakes).

You can get a used Ninja 300 for even less money. That's a motorcycle that you can ride in the streets, up in the hills, on the freeway, on long trips, or in the twisties for 5 grand. For the ZX-6R you would be paying over double that at \$12,699.

Also, this bike gets fantastic gas mileage. The original Ninja 250 already sipped very little fuel, and this next evolution has kept that genetic trait. It's common to see real world gas mileage of between 50-60mpg with spirited riding on the Ninja 300. If you were fuel conscious and avoided redlining, you could easily stretch that out to the mid 70's mpg or even higher.

## The bottom line

At the end of the day, is this the best beginner bike for you? It really depends. It's a bike that is easy to ride, fun on the road, and has more than a few features that make things easier (and keep you safe!).

Really the only thing that makes it less than ideal is the fact that it comes fully faired. That means there are all sorts of plastic bits that can get cracked or crushed if you drop the bike.



I mention that because most new riders drop their first bike. Heck, even experienced riders sometimes drop their motorcycle if something unexpected happens like putting their foot down in a patch of slick oil/mud!

The fact that the Ninja 300 is a pretty light weight bike will help with that, and I know that the plastics do make the bike look downright sexy.

**Pros**

- Fantastic looking bike
- Great engine that is capable of highway speeds
- Amazing transmission
- Great gas mileage
- Fun for new and experienced riders
- Lightweight

**Cons**

- Full fairings means you can crack plastics in a drop

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## The Best Dirt/Motocross/Adventure Beginner Motorcycles

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# Yamaha TW200



There are few bikes with as much personality as the TW200. I normally ride street bikes, and the TW200 is actually the first dirt bike I ever had the chance to ride. It's fun, bouncy (compared to a street bike), and a blast to ride on the street or the dirt. I got the chance to take this bike out for a few days and really run it through it's paces. If you are nervous about dropping your first bike, or you want a motorcycle that is extremely beginner friendly, then check out the TW200.

## Fun on a budget

Brand new the TW200 comes in about \$500 cheaper than most other bikes in it's class at around \$4,600. I wouldn't buy this bike brand new though, you can find SCREAMING deals on it in the used market. You could easily find a newer TW200 in the \$2,500 range. That's a whole motorcycle for what would be the down payment on any other bike.

Let's get the obvious out of the way first. This bike is underpowered. It's engine is a 196cc single cylinder thumper. No matter how you slice it, nearly under 200cc's is going to have trouble at high speed. But that's not where this bike shines anyway. This bike is a dirt dragon, at home in the mud and sand!



## Fatties and springs

The stock tires are FAT. It is one of the most noticeable thing about this motorcycle. Those wide rear tires will give you grip when other tires might fail. It's these grippy shoes that make up for it's lack of engine when you are on the trails.

When you combine a small engine, lightweight motorcycle, with big grippy tires... You get a lot of fun. You can do stuff with this bike that you would only be able to do on a BMX bicycle. The bike get wedged between some logs? With a little muscle you can lift it out yourself. With a larger bike you would need a friend to dislodge you from a similar situation.

The suspension is good enough for a stock motorcycle. It's not amazing, but it also doesn't hold you back too much. It's more than good enough for a new rider, and even most experienced riders.

## Not perfect

The place where this bike lacks is the obvious. It struggles making it to 55mph, so if you have some freeways in your daily commute then you might want to avoid the TW200. It also has no 6th gear so even if you could get it up to 65mph it's really not going to be a smooth ride.

The other negative about this bike is the small gas tank. Yes, that small gas tank really does help limit weight, but at 1.8 and gallons it really does seem small. To be fair, this engine sips gasolines so you should be able to wring out around 150 miles from a full tank.

## Conclusion



Most new riders drop their first motorcycle at least once. This can be painful if you get something with beautiful plastic fairings like the Kawasaki Ninja 300. A drop with that bike could result in hundreds of dollars worth of damage.

Dropping the TW200 is simply par for the course. Not only is it a dirt bike that is made to absorb falls, it is so lightweight you can easily pick it up again. That reduced weight also helps with maneuvering the bike at low speeds. In fact, this might be the IDEAL bike to take the motorcycle license test with.

**Pros**

- Lightweight
- Nimble bike with wide tires
- Great for a beginner
- Amazing for an experienced rider (you can whip it around!)

**Cons**

- Underpowered
- No 6th gear
- Small gas tank

# Suzuki DRZ 400



The Suzuki DRZ 400 SM is a great performing motorcycle with enough power to be fun on the freeways or in the city. It is geared more towards the street compared to its brother the Suzuki DRZ 400S which comes with knobbier tires and a little more torque. Read on for the full review!

## The Engine

A Lightweight 398cc, liquid-cooled, dry-sump engine powers the DRZ 400SM and it is ideal at delivering strong, low end torque. This makes low speed maneuvers in tightly packed traffic a relative breeze compared to most top-end focused street bikes. This is the completely opposite of the Kawasaki Ninja 250 which really requires you to wind up each and every gear if you want some decent performance.

The DRZ comes with a 5-speed gearbox which will let you keep up with the cars on the freeway too, this really opens up the options for this bike and makes it all the more versatile. Some of the 200cc dual sports like the Suzuki DR200SE will have trouble keeping up with other cars at high speeds, but you will feel perfectly fine cruising at 50-70mph on this bike.

## Made for the street

Although you can take the DRZ 400SM off-road the bike handles much better on the pavement than in the mud. In fact this bike handles as well as most street bike in the twisties! Because the bike is a dual sport you will have much more confidence in your turns since you will have more ground clearance and the suspension can handle all sorts of cracks and potholes that you might want to avoid on a super sport motorcycles.

Even though I wouldn't do hardcore off-roading with this bike, light trails and dirt roads are no problem even with the street oriented tires.

## Modifications

It seems like most dual sports come really limited right out of the box because of all the emission standards they have to meet, and this moto is no exception. If you are handy with a wrench then you will be pleasantly surprised at how much power you can squeeze out of the 398cc engine.

Most people say putting an aftermarket pipe on is a must (I recommend Muzzy!), especially when combined with a modded airbox and jet kit. This will provide a noticeable increase in both low end torque and top-end power that makes riding this motorcycle oh so much fun!

Don't bust out the toolbox just yet! Depending on the state you live in these aftermarket modifications might be illegal. That means a cop can pull you over even if you aren't speeding or riding recklessly!

When it comes to the police I try to follow the advice a friend gave me once:

**"Try and only break 1 law at a time."**



If you are going to mod out your bike, then stick to the speed limit! If you are going to run your bike stock, feel free to be a little more liberal with the throttle :) So far that advice has kept me ticket free my whole life.

## Conclusion

This is a really solid dual-sport and if I lived in San Francisco or some other big city I would probably get one of these instead of a street bike. I really like how you aren't limited to below 50mph like some of the smaller bikes, plus the stock suspension and stock tires are pretty darn good right out of the box. This would be the ultimate post-apocalyptic hooligan bike, or just your everyday commuter as well.

## Pros

- Bigger engine lets you go higher speeds than smaller dual sports
- Naked and therefore won't get damaged much in the case of a drop
- Low end torque is much more usable compared to top end

**Cons**

- The bike is as heavy as some other 650cc dual sports out there
- Requires mods to really bring out the power (but that is good for a beginner!)

## Suzuki V-strom 650



Probably one of the most forgettable motorcycles you have ever seen. Chances are you might not have even heard of this bike, much less considered it for purchase. If you haven't though, you could be missing out on one of the best and more practical street bikes out there. This is a friendly bike that a confident beginner could start on, and ride for many years.

### Ugly duckling

There is no way to slice it, to most people the V-strom series looks horrendously ugly. Adventure bikes generally are pretty odd looking, and the V-strom 650 is no exception. It's not so ugly you are going to stop in your tracks and stare, but it's so unexciting you may not even notice it.

That ability to go unnoticed is actually one of the best features of the V-strom. Yes, it has an amazing engine, brakes, and handling, we will get to that. But this motorcycle might as well be wrapped in the same stealth material as the SR-71 blackbird. It seems equally invisible to women, men, and cops.

Find yourself going a bit faster than the speed limit on accident and most cops won't even give this bike a second glance. That's because the person that buys a bike like this isn't your typical squiddy kid who wants to race on the streets and do burnouts in the Walmart parking lot.



This is the type of bike that gets ridden 300 days out of 365. Ridden in rain, ridden in the 100 degrees summer, and ridden when the icy environment scares other fair-weather motorcycles into their garages. This is a riders' motorcycle.

## Performance and comfort

Powered by a tuned version of the engine found in the SV50 and SFV650, that makes this V-strom a great beginner motorcycle for a rider that doesn't want to start on a smaller bike. It has great torque and power that is 100% aimed at real world street riding.

The newer version of this motorcycle also come with anti-lock brakes (ABS). The brakes on this motorcycle are simply amazing. It stops the bike quickly and efficiently.

Comfort is also something that the V-strom 650 does exceptionally well. The wide bars, upright seating position, and comfortable saddle make commuting on this bike a joy. It's just as capable headed down to the grocery store as it is riding for hours on a motocamping adventure.

## Luggage

That is what the V-strom does really well: touring. It has the option of coming with hard luggage so you can take all of your gear if you feel like riding to a forest to do some camping. While not as capable as a straight up dirt bike for off road use, this V-strom is right at home on fire roads all day.

The luggage also makes day to day errands much easier. You can store your motorcycle gear in it, or pick up some bread and milk for your house without having to wear a backpack.

## Conclusion

Let me keep it real with you, this bike is amazing and a great performer. The only thing is it's not very exciting. It's not exciting to look at, it's not exciting to ride, its just very.... practical.

That practicality really does serve a special niche though. There are many riders that have no desire to be crouched over on a sportbike or leaned way back on a cruiser. They want something they can ride on a daily basis. Something they can learn on and ride for years after that. If that's you, then you might just find yourself falling in love with this ugly duckling.

### Pros

- Doesn't draw unwanted attention
- Great engine for street riding
- Amazing brakes with ABS
- Optional hard luggage

### Cons

- Boringly reliable

- Not very sexy
- Not as narrow as many V-twin engined bikes

# The CHEAPEST and BEST motorcycle to buy right now

I've never had tons of money to spend on motorcycles. I always try and get a deal when I can, and a lot of my time is spent saving up for the bike I currently want.

I don't think I'm alone in this. Through tons of research I have figured out **what is the BEST bike to buy right now**. The one that is mechanically sound, easy for a beginner to learn on, yet powerful enough so you don't get bored right away.

I found that bike:



**The 2005-2009 Kawasaki Ninja 500**

The Ninja 500 has remained pretty much unchanged since its last major update in 1994. It was produced all the way up till 2009. As I write this it's 2015.

When it comes to buying used motorcycles, I try and buy ones that are no older than 10 years. Any older than that and you have to deal with a lot of rust issues, clogged carburetors, deteriorating cables and rubber gaskets etc... You can avoid most of that by purchasing a bike made in the last decade.

That means right now you could pick up any Ninja 500 made from 2005-2009. These bikes are also SUPER inexpensive! On craigslist I've seen Ninja 500's go for as little as \$1,200 to as much as \$2,500, with most of them sitting in that sweet spot at around \$1,900.

Why is it so inexpensive? First of all the bike looks dated. Like I mentioned, the last major update was in 1994, and the style of this bike is definitely not in fashion anymore. It's not ugly per say, but it's not very modern looking.

It's also 500cc motorcycle. Most people start off on either a 250-300cc bike, or something like a 600-650cc. That 500 class isn't particularly popular.

### Why it makes an AMAZING first bike?

- **Perfect amount of power.** It is easy enough for most beginners to learn on, while powerful enough to handle anything you can throw at it. You can ride on freeways, longer distances, as well as ride in the twisty roads.
- **Cheap to buy!** I don't mean cheap in a bad way, this bike is just plain inexpensive. A bike that will do it all for less than \$2,000? Yes, please!
- **Rock solid.** Because this bike has been around for so long Kawasaki has had the time to get all the kinks out. This is a stable platform that will last for years with basic maintenance.
- **Cheap maintenance!** Because this bike has been around there is also a loyal following online. Any mechanical question you may have is a simple google search away. That way you don't have to spend money taking this to a mechanic.

If you are dying to ride on two wheels and you don't have much money, consider the Ninja 500. If you can get over the looks, then you have a very capable bike that will last you as long as you want.

# The Deal-Magnet Method: How to pay hundreds of dollars less for motorcycle.

There is a method to buying a great bike for a lot less than it's actually worth. I'm going to tell you how I've managed to buy and sell bikes for a profit. I have never done this as a business, I just like getting a really good deal when I purchase a bike.

I'm not a cutthroat negotiator, in fact, I'm kind of a pushover. The great thing about this method is you don't have to have gone to Harvard's business school of negotiation in order to buy a bike for much cheaper than you think you can.

First, let me tell you the story of my first bike.

## My first motorcycle

Originally I wanted to get a Honda CBR1000 as a first bike (NOT a great idea). Once I realized what a death trap that would be for a new rider, I began looking at bikes that were more reasonable.

I eventually settled on a few different bikes. Either a Kawasaki Ninja 500, a Suzuki SV650 or a Suzuki GS500. After doing a lot of research I found that each one of those bikes would fit my needs perfectly. They had enough power to go on the California freeway, yet were also friendly enough for a new rider that I could learn to ride on them easily.



Over the next couple months I started saving up money. While I was doing this I kept an eye on craigslist and local websites to see what those three bikes would often sell for.

When I had enough money, I found a 2002 Suzuki GS500 about 45 minutes away from me. I convinced a super nice guy on a motorcycle forum who owned a truck to transport the bike for me. We drove up one night and I bought the bike.



The bike was listed for around \$2500 at the time. I honestly didn't have that much money, so I offered him \$1800. He just didn't want the bike anymore so he accepted my deal. We loaded up the bike and my new friend and I delivered it to my place.

Fast forward about 6 months later, and outside circumstances forced me to sell that first bike. I listed it for \$2800, and sold it for \$2500. All things considered, by owning that bike for 6 months I gained \$700 dollars.

I've used this same process to buy other bikes for similar profit margins. I once bought an ancient Kawasaki GPZ 1000 for \$300, and sold it a month later for \$800. This is just a process, and it's easy to do. It requires very little bargaining, **no hardcore negotiation**, and everyone leaves **happy**.

## The 5 step deal-magnet method

There is a 5 step process to do this. The thing that makes it work is time, patience, and persistence.

1. Find 2-5 bikes you would be happy with.
2. Find the general prices of the motorcycles you want.
3. Withdraw cash.
4. Waiting, watching, and calling.
5. Closing the deal.

I'll expand on those 5 steps.

### Step 1: Finding 2-5 bikes you would be happy with

Part of what makes this method so powerful is because you are flexible. If you absolutely have to have a very specific bike, in a very specific year, you are going to pay for that premium. If you are more flexible though, then you can easily find tons of deals.

In my first motorcycle story I told you that I picked out 3 different bikes that I would have been really happy with. They are all different, but all great bikes. That is what I recommend that you do. Research, read reviews, watch youtube videos, and find 2-5 different motorcycles that you would be happy owning.

Take into account the year they are made too. Suzuki SV650's in the first generation made from 1999-2002 sometimes have problems. However, everything 2003 and later is fantastic.

For example, one of the bikes you consider might be a 2003 or newer Suzuki SV650. The way you find out what years are great is through researching forums, reading reviews, and asking people who have owned those bikes.

This research phase is not only one of the more valuable parts of this process, but also one of the most fun. You can really begin to imagine what it would be like on each bike. You can weigh the pro's and the con's and figure out how the bike would fit in your life.

Plus this is a great time to be saving up money. This research phase can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few years. It all depends on how fast you can save up money.

## Step 2: Find out the general prices of the motorcycles you want

While you're doing that research, I would also be checking out CycleTrader and Craigslist to see what price those bikes are going for in your area. You can either keep a written list of the prices you find, or just keep track of them in your head.

In the past Kelley Blue Book ([www.kbb.com](http://www.kbb.com)) used to be a good source for motorcycle prices. I find though that these prices are often much higher than what bikes are actually going for. It does depend on your area though. That's why I like doing the actual price research myself on Craigslist.

Once you do that, you will probably find that your list of three bikes looks something like this:

- 2003 or newer Suzuki SV650 goes for between \$2,500 and \$4,500.
- 2008 or newer Kawasaki Ninja 250 goes for between \$1,500 and \$2,300
- 2007 or newer Suzuki DR-Z400sm goes for between \$3,500 and \$4,800

Now you know what bikes you are looking for, and you can tell if they are listed for a good price or not. That knowledge is your unfair advantage. Many people don't do that research, so by doing it you will have an edge in negotiations.

## Step 3: Withdraw cash

This is probably the most important step when getting a great deal on a motorcycle. Withdraw all of the money you think you will need. Keep it in a safe place. Cash talks, especially when a person sees it in real life.

If you don't feel comfortable with this you can do a cashier's check, but that takes time, and you are going to want to jump on a deal when you see it. I always try and bring a friend with me when buying a motorcycle. I also avoid buying bikes that look sketchy, or if the owner is acting weird on the phone. I don't want to get mugged for my motorcycle money!

## Step 4: Waiting, watching, and calling.

This next part is the boring part. What you do is simply watch craigslist or some other local site for deals.

You keep searching for those 2-5 bikes that you would be happy with owning. Eventually what will happen is someone will list one of the bikes you want for a screaming deal. This is usually because they need the money for something else, or they are motivated in some other way.

WARNING: Avoid deals that seem too good to be true! They could be scam artists or criminals.

I like to find bikes that are priced a few hundred less than what they would usually go for. Say a 2007 Suzuki SV650 usually is priced around \$3,800. Look for bikes that are around \$3,400 with some note from the seller that they are motivated.

**Some key phrase to look for:**

*"I just bought another bike so this one has to go."*

*"I have bills coming up and so I gotta sell the bike."*

*"I'm moving to another state for work and I'm not taking the bike with me."*

*"My spouse wants me to stop riding."*

Once you find a bike that looks great at a decent price, give the seller a phone call. Yes, you can just do an e-mail, but psychologically speaking a phone call puts more pressure on them. Just talking to another human being on a phone makes both parties more agreeable.

## Step 5: Closing the deal

When you call the seller on the phone, you want to say **two things**:

1. That you want to buy the bike for X price (where X is \$200-500 cheaper than what they are listing it for)
2. That you have cash in hand and you want to pick it up as soon as possible.

That second part is one of the most important. You will find out when selling vehicles on craigslist that many people are flakes, or that they only have half the money, or they can't get to their bank etc... Cash is king. That is what closes the deal. This works especially well if a bike has been listed for a while and a seller is tired of dealing with flakes. If he sees that you are serious about buying and you have cash in hand, he will be laying out the red carpet for your arrival!

Some people might think that offering a lower price on a bike that is already priced low is jerky and "lowballing". I disagree. Lowballing (which I have admittedly done on some bikes), is offering ½ of what the bike is listed for. It is kind of jerky, and some people get offended at it.

Offering to buy the bike for a price that is only a few hundred less is just good negotiation. If a seller says the price is firm, then sometimes I will concede without any trouble. After all, the bike is listed below market value. More often than not though, if you say you have the cash on you and can pick it up as soon as possible, they will agree to your price.

**This is the absolutely no-stress negotiation method I use, and it works.** It won't work every time, but that's why it's key to have patience and time on your side. If a deal doesn't look right, just walk away. Because you have multiple bikes you would be happy with, you have the best chance to get a great deal.

## Personal risk assessment

The level of risk that you are willing to take is a personal choice, one that everyone makes. The way to make that choice is to be properly informed of the consequences of actions you take.

I will be very blunt with you: **Motorcycle riding is EXTREMELY dangerous.**

We can do a lot to mitigate that danger, but in the end just riding a motorcycle makes you much more likely to be killed or seriously injured. That is because unlike a car a motorcycle is not surrounded by comfortable airbags and specially designed crumple zones.

Many people choose not to ride because they have a spouse, kids, or other people that depend on them.

This is not just something that happens to other people. If you are involved in the motorcycle community you will find that people you know will suffer broken bones, amputations, and even death or paralysis. I have personally experienced a shattered shoulder blade, and I know a friend who was riding with a group and a friend of his had a crash. My friend literally held his friend in his arms when he died.

That is why I take safety SOOOOO seriously. That is why I started BBM, and why I continue to try and help people ride safe. If you have the right training, the right gear, and the right attitude, then motorcycle can be a much safer and enjoyable hobby that you can enjoy for years.

Let's talk about some things you should think about when considering your own personal risk assessment.

### Should you even ride a motorcycle?

That is the very first question you should ask yourself. The rest of this book is dedicated to how awesome and amazing riding it. Some of my happiest and most significant memories have been on a motorcycle. Even though that is the case for me, you might have too many people relying on you in order to take up such a risky hobby.

You might find the idea of potentially ending up in the hospital some day with road rash or a broken arm to be a risk you aren't willing to take.





Maybe you want the lesson to your kids to be, "Examine the risks, and don't do things that are too risky." You give them that lesson by choosing to not ride a motorcycle.

Or the lesson might be, "Examine the risks, and do everything you can to minimize risk while still enjoying life." Both are perfectly valid lessons for a child, you will know what is right for you.

## Insurance

If you do decide to ride, you really need to plan for the worst and hope for the best. Insurance is one way to hedge your bets.

Do you have health insurance? If not, then you definitely should. A simple trip to the emergency room in the United States will cost you thousands of dollars. If you have to stay overnight at a hospital then the bills increase exponentially. You could quite literally go bankrupt if you don't have insurance and you get in a serious accident.

What about life insurance? It's not something that is pleasant to think about, but there is a possibility of dying on a motorcycle. If you do die, who is there to take care of your loved ones? Who will pay for your funeral? I signed up for life insurance when I was 22 years old. I'm in my 30's now and still a lot of my friends don't have life insurance. It's important to me to be able to take care of those I love when I leave this mortal coil.

This isn't thinking morbidly, it's simply being prepared for all possible outcomes.

## How big should your first motorcycle be?

The size of the engine of your first motorcycle will be one of the biggest factors in determining how easy it is for you to learn. Controlling a throttle while operating a clutch can be complicated if you aren't used to it, especially when that throttle is attached to the handlebars you steer with.

I am a big proponent of starting off on a small bike. I've already showed you the Deal-Magnet method of buying motorcycles so you can get a first bike inexpensively. Your first bike will most likely not be your last bike, so get a smaller one at first that is easier to learn on.

That all being said, you need to assess your own risk. Maybe you think that the increased risk of starting on a 600cc inline-four motorcycle is acceptable to you. Maybe you think starting off on a 1000cc motorcycle is fine with you. That you can "handle it".

I can always offer advice, but in the end you need to judge how much risk you are willing to take.

## What gear should you be wearing?

Some people are huge proponents of ATGATT, or All The Gear All The Time. If they are riding 5 minutes to the grocery store they will put on a leather jacket, leather pants, full face helmet, leather gloves, and racing boots. Honestly, this is the smart thing to do because you are statistically much more likely to get in an accident closer to home.

I also know people who ride in T-shirt and shorts. I admit that it makes me cringe inside when I see this, but I don't berate them for their choices. It is their own risk they are taking. They are risking their body, not mine.

What about people that wear a motorcycle jacket, gloves, helmet, boots, but only wear normal denim jeans? There is lots of data out there to show that denim jeans do next to nothing in a motorcycle crash to protect you.

Are you willing to take that risk? For some of you that might be yes, for others it might be no.

You need to consider all of these questions and many more. Make sure that you are examining your choices, and the potential consequences of those choices. That way you won't have any regrets no matter what happens.

# How to avoid dropping your motorcycle

Dropping your motorcycle. Whenever it happens it feels like time is going in slow motion and your adrenaline shoots up to protect your 'baby'. Sometimes this adrenalin endowed super human strength really does help you keep the bike balanced and prevent a drop, even if it leaves you with a few pulled muscles for the next week.

Dropping a bike happens to the vast majority of people. New riders are particularly apt to drop their bike since they aren't used to balancing hundreds of pounds of steel on two narrow pieces of rubber. I have dropped motorcycles about a half dozen times in my 10+ year riding career. Most of those drops happened the first 2 years of riding.

That is one reason that I recommend against getting a brand new bike when you first start out. If you just spent nearly \$20,000 on a brand new Ducati or Harley Davidson, you are going to cry if you drop it and crush something expensive.

Used motorcycles are the way to go. They are inexpensive to buy, and they may already have a scratch or two from previous owners. These add to the "character" of the bike and also means you will be less stressed if you ever happen to drop it.

The best way to stop yourself from dropping a motorcycle is to prevent it before it even occurs. You can do this a variety of ways.

## Buy a lightweight motorcycle

Smaller displacement bikes in the 150cc-500cc range are significantly lighter than larger bikes. A GSXR 600 weighs about 440 lbs while a Ninja 300 only weighs 385 lbs. That amount of weight might not seem like a big difference, after all you probably can't lift either of those bikes into the air. But you aren't going to be deadlifting these motorcycles, instead the majority of the weight will be supported by the tires, you will just be balancing it.



It's much easier to balance a bike that weighs nearly 55 lbs less than a heavier one.

## Good footwear

Previously in this book I talked about motorcycle boots and how important they are to protect you in face of a crash. They also serve another vital purpose: **stability**. You want a boot with some good traction so it won't slip or slide when you put your foot down at a red light.

The road can be covered in oil, gravel, or other objects that can cause you to slip. If you are wearing a boot or shoe with no traction, then it will be much easier to slide and lose your balance. Before you know it, you will be on the ground laying next to your precious motorcycle. You will be alright, but chances are your bike will have just suffered a few hundred dollars worth of cosmetic damage.

One more thing about footwear. Motorcycle racing boots often have straps and clips rather than laces. There is a good reason for this. If you can, try and get boots without laces, or somehow tuck them out of the way.

Now onto the habits you can do to prevent a drop!

## Three Habits That Will Prevent You From Dropping Your Motorcycle

### **#1: Put your foot down 3-5 seconds before you actually stop.**

This is a habit I created after I dropped a motorcycle at a stop light once. What's worse is I wasn't even on my own motorcycle at the time, it was a friend's bike that he had loaned me for the day. Thankfully he had frame sliders so there was no damage, and I decided to leave this detail out when I returned the bike. (If you are reading this Will, I'm sorry!)

I was pulling up to a stop light that had turned from yellow to red. I had plenty of time to stop and gently slowed my motorcycle right before the crosswalk. As I stopped and leaned the bike slightly to the right and put my foot down, I found that I couldn't move my foot. It was caught on something!

I frantically started tugging on my foot as the bike kept leaning farther and farther to the right. I hit the tipping point before I could free my foot and I fell flat on my side with the motorcycle pinning my right leg. Thankfully I was able to extricate myself and pick the bike up, but there were more than a few cars behind me. I turned 30 different shades of red from embarrassment!

It turns out that the shoe lace on my boot had caught on the foot brake lever. When I tried to put my foot down I couldn't because it was anchored to that part of the bike.



Ever since then I have made it a habit to make sure my foot is free as I pull up to a stop. I skate my foot across the ground that way I know for sure there is nothing preventing me from setting down my foot.

## **#2: Put both feet down when you are stopped.**

This tip is mainly for new riders, but it is still something you may find to be useful when you are more experienced too. The tip is to put both of your feet down after you stop your motorcycle. Sometimes I stop initially and only put one leg down, but after a few seconds I will straighten the bike a bit and put down my other foot. I don't always do this now, **but it's a vital thing to do as a new rider.**

When you are a new rider and getting used to the clutch and friction point, you won't always have the smoothest accelerations from a stop. Sometimes they will be jerky, and other times the bike will just jump forward a foot or two and stall the engine.

If you have both legs down when this happens you are much more likely to keep the bike balanced and upright. This can prevent you from dropping the bike unexpectedly when you have cars behind you at a stop light that want to go.

## **#3: Keep a plank of wood where you normally park.**

If you've read enough motorcycle forums and have friends that ride, occasionally you will come across an instant where a person comes back to their motorcycle and they find it on it's side. This is one of the worst cases because often it means someone pushed your bike over for some reason.

There are instances where no one pushed the bike over, but it fell anyway. Was it ghosts? Vengeful motorcycle gods? Neither, often times it's just the weather.

When it gets very hot in the summer the pavement actually loses some of its structural stability. It becomes less like a rock and more like mud. This difference isn't enough for a human to notice, but when a motorcycle is placing a lot of its weight on a small area like the kickstand, it can cause the kickstand to sink into the pavement.



It won't sink in all the way usually, just a an inch or two, but that is enough for the bike to pass that tipping point and fall over. That is why I recommend keeping a small plank of wood maybe 6 inches by 6 inches where you normally park your bike. This will spread out the surface area of the kickstand and prevent it from sinking in.

This also works if you happen to park it on earth, grass, or sand. If you do this on a regular basis it might be worth it to get an aftermarket kickstand with a wider foot or to keep a small piece of wood or steel with you when you ride. Even a 3x3 inch piece could easily be stored under the seat of most bikes, and it could prevent a drop.

You don't have to do this every time you park, just when the weather extremely hot or you are parking on a less stable surface.



# The ONE thing to tell a passenger to prevent them from causing you to crash

I've ridden with my fair share of passengers. In my early 20's I lived in California and didn't have a car, only a motorcycle. It made dating an exercise in transportation logistics. Sometimes we would both ride in the girls' car, other times I would have her as a passenger with me on my bike.

Let's cover some basics:

- **A passenger should be wearing as much safety gear as you.** That includes helmet, gloves, jackets, boots, and sturdy pants. The pavement doesn't care that they aren't the ones operating the bike, it will scar them up just the same if they aren't wearing the right protective gear.
- **Make sure they dress for the weather.** If you haven't been on a bike before you will be unaccustomed to how much you are affected by the weather. You don't want to arrive at your destination with a frozen or boiling passenger.
- **Make sure the passenger footpegs are down before they get on the bike.** Nothing is as annoying as trying to find the footpegs that are flipped up when you are sitting on the motorcycle. Make it easy for everyone and flip them down. It's just common courtesy.
- **You get on the motorcycle first, they get on it second.** This is so you can stabilize the bike and prevent it from tipping over.

## The ONE thing to tell passengers:

**“Look over the my shoulder and through the turn. If the motorcycle is turning right, look over my right shoulder; if it is turning left, look over my left shoulder.”**

That one piece of advice will ensure that the passenger is always in the right position to help you turn. When you are taking corners at a higher speed you lean the motorcycle a lot, some passengers that aren't ready for this will want to shift their weight to keep the motorcycle upright. This can cause you to not be able to lean over far enough and overshoot the turn, and maybe even crash.

Generally speaking, carrying a passenger is an advanced technique. You need to make sure that you are **very** comfortable with riding before you ever consider carrying anyone else with you.

You are responsible not only for your own life, but also for theirs. Your motorcycle will behave very differently with that much added weight. It will start slower, wheelie easier, and brake slower.

## 4 Physical exercises that make you a better rider

You may not realize it but riding a motorcycle can be a very physically demanding hobby. This is more so the case when riding a dirt bike, but even street bikes require a certain amount of muscle in order to keep a proper riding position. If you have a weak core, back, and legs then you may find yourself riding with an improper posture. Putting too much weight on your wrists and hands can make steering feel sluggish and imprecise.

The proper riding position for riding a motorcycle is to be light on your hands with your elbows slightly bent while you squeeze the gas tank with your knees. I had a riding mentor tell me that if I can wiggle my elbows like a chicken then my arms are loose enough. If not, then I need to relax my upper body more.

To do that the weight of your upper body needs to switch its support system. If you were supporting it with your wrists, arms, and shoulders, you need to switch to supporting it with your stomach muscles, back muscles, and legs.

If you have a weak core and lower body you will find that riding with a proper posture can be tiring **very** quickly. One thing you can do to prepare yourself is to strengthen those key muscles. It will pay off when you are riding.

Not only will it make long trips more enjoyable, but it will actually keep you safer since you are using the right body position to control the motorcycle. Plus, you will look great naked!

### Supermans

I first found out about this exercise in my Krav Maga class. The teacher explained how to do it and the next minute was quite a bit of torture. You see, my lower back used to be quite weak. After doing this exercise consistently I noticed not only a stronger core and back, but it also helped my riding position quite a bit. I no longer became quite as exhausted while riding longer distances.

To do the superman, lie flat on the floor on your stomach with your arms extended above you. That is your starting position.

Simultaneously raise your arms, legs, and chest off of the floor and hold this contraction for 2 seconds. Making a U shape with your body. Tip: Squeeze your lower back and butt to get the best results from this exercise. Remember to exhale during this movement.

Note: When holding the contracted position, you should look like superman when he is flying. This works your lower back muscles, glutes, and core.

You can also practice holding this superman position for as long as you can. Both ways will really work your lower back and glutes.

[Click here to see a video of this exercise](#)

## Crunches

These are something that most people know how to do. Think of them as sit ups where we cut out all the unnecessary movement. A strong core will really help you to keep your upper body supported for long periods of time.

[Click here to see a video of this exercise](#)

## Planks / Scissor leg planks

Planks are an exercise that really works your core, legs, and lots of smaller muscles you use to support yourself. You can do a variation of this called the **Scissor Leg Plank** which targets the inner thigh squeezing muscles at the same time. Those are the muscles you need to properly grip the tank of the motorcycle.

It should be noted that when you start riding on a more advanced level you will be shifting in the seat more and changing body position. You won't always be directly squeezing the tank with both of your knees. However, 90% of the time when you are on the street riding you should make squeezing the tank with your knees the foundation of your riding position.

[Click here to see a video of this exercise](#)

[Click here to see the scissor leg plank](#)

## Lunges

Squats and lunges are pretty in vogue now. Everyone wants a full and round booty (yes, girls also like it when guys have a nice butt too). Lunges are something that works most of your major leg muscles which are key to a solid riding posture.

[Click here to see a video of this exercise](#)

### To do a lunge:

1. Keep your upper body straight, with your shoulders back and relaxed and chin up (pick a point to stare at in front of you so you don't keep looking down). Always engage your core.
2. Step forward with one leg, lowering your hips until both knees are bent at about a 90-degree angle.
3. Stand back up keeping the upper body straight the whole time.
4. Do this with both legs.



## The best training course to take

I hope you are learning a lot from this book, I've spent many hours putting together all of this information to help jump start your riding career.

As great as I think this book is, it's no substitute for in person training. The training you will gain over a weekend of classroom teaching and riding will pay dividends throughout your life. Some of the lessons I learned in my first MSF course have literally saved my life on more than one occasion.

There is another reason to take a motorcycle training course. In many parts of the United States, by passing an approved training course it allows you to waive the riding portion of the motorcycle license test. Not only do you get awesome training, it makes getting your license much easier!

There are a few national organizations that offer courses:

### Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF)



The Motorcycle Safety Foundation is a national non-profit company dedicated to motorcycle safety. This is the standard by which most riding courses are judged. The initial training I got was from the MSF.

Typically speaking, the prices for a weekend training courses varies depending on your location and age. Yes, age sometimes plays a factor. I know that if you are under 21 years old you can sometimes get a discount from the MSF. You can expect to pay anywhere from \$75-200 dollars for a training course.

A training weekend is broken up into two parts. A classroom section, and a riding section. The classroom portion goes over all of the important safety information, a lot of it has been

covered in this book you are reading right now. It will also talk about any local laws and regulations that are applicable to you.

The riding portion is where the fun begins! Most courses have bikes that are available for everyone to use. They are usually between 150-300cc's. In my MSF course they had Honda Rebel 250's and Nighthawk 250s. Both were a ton of fun to ride!

There is a test at the end of the course, and it's not easy. In my class of about 20 riders there were 2 or 3 that didn't pass. The best way to 'study' for this class is to do the practice skills on a bicycle I talk about in other parts of this book.

## Harley Davidson Rider's Edge Course



Harley Davidson also offers a riders course for those new to two wheels. The main difference between Harley's course and the MSF is the price. The Rider's Edge course is significantly more expensive. Often times \$300+ dollars.

That increase in cost keeps the class sizes smaller with more individualized attention. In some areas the same people that teach the MSF course will also teach the Rider's Edge courses, so there isn't much difference in curriculum.

## State courses

Most states in the USA have some form of motorcycle safety course. In California they have the California Motorcycle Safety Program (CMSP), in Idaho they have the STAR course.

Sometimes this is because there are no official MSF courses offered, other times it's just another option you can take instead of the MSF course. In my experience these courses are taught by experienced riders that are really concerned with motorcycle safety. What they say should line up with most of the things you've read in this book.

The best way to find a local course is to simply type your city and state into google followed by the term "Motorcycle Safety Course". You will find something that meets your needs!



# What to expect your first month of riding?

You've done it, you have decided you want to ride a motorcycle. Congratulations, you are in for quite the ride (haha! I love my bad puns). This article is to prepare you for your first month of riding. I remember during my first month there were many scares, many stupid mistakes, and even once where I dropped the motorcycle. This article will hopefully prepare you and let you avoid some of the errors I made.

## Bike maintenance

Chances are if you are a new rider your first bike may be a [used motorcycle](#). This is because used motorcycles are MUCH cheaper than brand new bikes. This benefit of being inexpensive comes with a few quirks. It's best to give your new-to-you bike a once-over to make sure everything is mechanically sound. It's even better if you can have a friend who is a veteran rider to go over it with you. Maybe have them test ride it to make sure nothing is broken or mechanically dangerous.

Some typical things you should look out for that could affect your riding experience:

- **Properly inflated tires:** Since you are now on two wheels instead of four, it's important that both wheels are at the proper air pressures. You can find what pressure to inflate the tires either in your owner manual, looking your bike up online, or by looking on the side the tire for the proper pressures. Proper inflation is crucial to riding because it allows you to maneuver the motorcycle properly, otherwise it may feel sluggish when turning.
- **Tire tread:** Make sure that the bike has enough tire tread to keep it safe. There are wear bars on all tires that will tell you when they need to be replaced. You should also look for cracked rubber if your motorcycle tires are old. Old tires don't stick to the road as well and are more likely to get damaged and lose air.
- **Oil:** Make sure the motorcycle has enough oil, and ideally change it right when you first get it. You don't know when the last time it was changed unless you have documentation from the previous owner. Even then, it's still a good idea to change it.
- **Lights:** Make sure all of the lights work. Turn signals, headlights, and brake lights!
- **Cables:** It's important to check that the cables on the throttle and brake levers are in working order. You don't want either of these getting stuck. That could result in braking you don't want, or an unexpected jolt in speed!

## Proper training

There are many different ways to learn to ride a motorcycle. You can have a friend teach you, you can take the DMV test and learn from the book, or you can take a motorcycle training course from a safety organization. Statistically, you are much more likely to be in a serious motorcycle accident if your only training has come from a friend or family member. You are much safer and better equipped if you take a training course from a safety school like the [Motorcycle Safety Foundation](#), or MSF.

In some areas the MSF may not exist. For example, in Idaho there is another safety organization called [STARZ](#) that provides the same type of training that MSF offers. Another added benefit that most states in the USA allow is that if you take a motorcycle safety course through MSF or STARZ then you are able to waive the riding portion of the DMV test. Then all you have to take is the written part, which makes things much easier.

## Gear up

It's vital to wear the proper motorcycle gear when riding a bike. Think about the clothes you are wearing right now. Would you be comfortable running as fast as you can and then jumping headfirst onto the pavement? If not, then you probably aren't wearing enough gear to ride a motorcycle because on a bike you will be riding MUCH faster than you can run.

I typically recommend everyone wear a [full face helmet](#), a motorcycle jacket, [riding gloves](#), and sturdy boots that cover the ankles. That is the bare minimum to keep you safe! I also recommend checking out different riding pants. There are over-pants that you can easily slip on over your normal clothes and there are also jeans that come with kevlar sewn into the impact zones. I've had a couple crashes at low to mid speed and I have thankfully been fully geared up every time. If I hadn't been, I would be missing parts of my face and parts of my hands and knees!

Gearing up doesn't have to be expensive, either. You can buy a jacket, gloves, and helmet for around \$300 total. They won't be the top of the line, but they will keep you safe and save you a lot of money in hospital bills if you ever get into an accident. That is very important because most riders get into an accident at some point during their riding career.

## Surface streets & freeways

When you first start riding it's probably best to start off in a parking lot or the surface streets in your neighborhood. Most city streets are relatively low speed and they are a good place to practice the skills you learned in your MSF or STARZ riding course. As your skills and confidence grow, you can begin to



expand your riding territory and start going down unknown roads.

Eventually, you will need to get on a freeway or highway. These are high speed and can be quite nerve wracking the first time you go on one. Riding 65mph on a motorcycle is MUCH different than riding in a car at that speed. You will notice the wind, the road noise, the bumps, and how unprotected you feel being out in the open.

Although these things are scary at first, they soon become natural and you begin to enjoy them. Soon enough that feeling of vulnerability you experience from being "out in the open" will change into an enjoyable feeling of freedom!

## Common mistakes

Releasing clutch too fast and killing the motorcycle. We've all done this, especially as new riders. The key to remember is not to panic, to calmly restart the bike, and then to try again calmly. It's embarrassing, but an experience you will laugh about later.

- **Shoe laces catching on motorcycle pegs.** I learned this one from experience, but worst of all I learned it while riding a friend's bike. I pulled up to a red light and when I slowed down and tried to put my foot down, my shoelace was caught and so the bike and I tipped over. That is why I now recommend wearing motorcycle specific boots that don't have laces. If you do have laces on your boots, make sure they are tucked in so they won't catch on a peg and prevent you from putting your foot down.
- **Shifting into neutral instead of 2nd gear.** You will discover this happens when your engine begins to rev really high for no reason and you aren't going any faster. Just another simple click up on the shifter will firmly place you in 2nd gear.
- **Running out of gas while riding.** Newer bikes will have a low-fuel indicator light. On older bikes, there may be no such light. Instead they will have a reserve fuel tank. The way you will know to switch to the reserve tank is when your bike starts losing power and starts to die. If you are quick, you can reach down to the [fuel petcock](#) and switch it to reserve before it complete dies. Then you have about 20-30 miles before your reserve tank runs out.

I've never had my reserve tank run out completely, so I'm not quite sure how long it will last on your average motorcycle. The best thing to do is to reset your odometer when you have to switch to the reserve tank, then have a friend follow you in their car with a gallon of gas and ride until the bike dies. You will then know exactly how long you have when you switch to reserve. To be on the safe side, I always head to a gas station right when I switch from my main tank!

## At the end of your first month:

Congratulations! If you survive the first month with both your body and motorcycle intact, then you are ahead of the game. There are many riders that crash in their first month by riding above their skill level, getting a bike that is too powerful for them to handle, or by not having the proper training.

Motorcycles can be a fantastic way to enjoy your weekends and a great way to meet new people. Keep riding safe, and keep the rubber side down.

# Bicycle practice - Ace your riding test BEFORE you even buy a motorcycle

Most people aren't able to go buy a motorcycle the instant they feel the urge to do so. Either they don't have the savings to do so, the credit to do so, or they want to mull over the decision a bit before making such a big purchase. The great news is you probably have everything you need in order to practice your test: A bicycle!

Yes, a bicycle is definitely not a motorcycle, but learning to ride a bike properly can go a LONG way to help you ace your motorcycle license test on the first try. Or it will help prepare you to take the MSF course and pass with flying colors.

## Skill #1: Countersteering

There are few crucial skills you can practice on a bicycle that translate really well to a much heavier motorcycle. The first is countersteering. The simplest way to explain it is this:

### To make a right turn:

- Look right
- Press forward on the right handlebar
- Lean right

### To make a left turn

- Look left
- Press forward on the left handlebar
- Lean left



It seems easy as you read it in this book, but it's something more difficult in real life. That is because countersteering takes place when you are riding at higher speeds. At lower speeds you do the opposite.

To turn left at a low speed you will actually steer by turning the handlebars left, to do this you press the right handle forward. The whole handlebar assembly then turns left. That is why it is called countersteering, you are doing the opposite of what you would do at low speeds.

Believe it or not you don't have to be riding at 60mph to experience countersteering. You just have to get up to about 10-20mph on a bicycle, which is simply pedalling fast for a little bit.

## EXERCISE

Practice regular steering:

To do this just ride your bicycle at a slow but steady pace. About the speed the average person walks. Practice steering by turning the handlebars in the direction you want to go. You will note that bicycle stays upright for the most part.

Practice countersteering:

Find an empty street or parking lot where you can make some wide turns. A cul de sac is great for this. Pedal up to a high rate of speed and then stop pedaling. For a left turn, look to the left where you want to go. Press your left handlebar forward, this will cause the bicycle to begin to lean left. Continue leaning and looking where you want to go until you complete the turn. Straighten the handlebars.

Do the same thing but for a right turn as well. Look to the right where you want to go, press the right handlebar forward which causes the bicycle to lean right. You will notice the more you press, the more the bike wants to lean and the faster you will turn. Once you complete the turn, straighten the handlebars and the bicycle upright.

## Skill #2: Invisibility

This one requires you to gather an eye of newt and toad skin to make a cloak of invisibility! Haha, not really, just getting on a motorcycle will pretty much make you invisible to other drivers.

New riders find out very quickly that people in cars just don't pay attention. This is because compared to riding a motorcycle, a car is incredibly easy to operate. It's so easy in fact that most people become complacent and forget they are driving a 3,000 lb cage of steel that can kill other people instantly.

Cars will merge into your lane, they will turn into you, and they will forget to give you the right of way. This is often times because you don't register in the driver's consciousness, you are quite literally invisible to them.

It doesn't matter if you make eye contact or not either. I've made eye contact with multiple drivers to have them still fail to 'see' me and to turn into me. It's not until I blast my horn that it shakes them out of their reverie.





You need to get used to being invisible. The best way to practice this is on a bicycle, because bicyclists are just as invisible (maybe even more so) than motorcycle riders.

## EXERCISE



### Practice riding in your neighborhood

It's best to start out just simply riding your bike in a low stress area like your neighborhood. Ride in places you are familiar with, obey all the laws for bicycles (note: they may be different than cars. In my state bicycles can legally run red lights as long as they yield).

Notice how cars react to you. Become comfortable riding in a street and feeling unprotected by a cage of steel like you would be in a car.

### Practice riding downtown

Once you are feeling more comfortable, try riding in a busier downtown area. Depending on the size of your area, the downtown might be more congested with slower traffic. This may give you the opportunity to let you keep up and maybe even go faster than traffic.

### Bonus: Left turn

In the area I live, bicycles can legally ride in a car lane just like any other vehicles as long as they are not impeding traffic. If it's slow and safe enough for you to do so, practice riding in the lane for a bit and then getting in the left turn lane. This works best at a stop light.

I admit, it's a bit nerve wracking being so exposed in the middle of a street like this, but if you can do it on a bicycle, you will have no problems on a larger motorcycle.

### Skill #3 Avoiding Target fixation

One of the primary causes of many motorcycle accidents it's target fixation. This is something to especially be aware of when riding on twisty mountain roads. Target fixation has almost killed me on many different occasions if it wasn't for the training I have in negating it.

What is target fixation? It's when you see something in your vision that is interesting, dangerous, or somehow gets your attention. Because your eyes are fixated on this object, you will automatically begin to steer the motorcycle in that direction. That's because motorcycles go where you look!

This is really scary when the object that your eyes are fixated on is something dangerous that you are trying to avoid such as an obstacle in the road, the edge of the road you are approaching too quickly, or another downed rider. It's a terrifying experience seeing something are trying to avoid and you find your body automatically steering towards it!

To counteract target fixation you have to remember to look where you want to go. **This means actively taking your eyes OFF the object that has your attention**, and focusing on the road where there is a path to safety. This is one of the single most important skills for you to learn to operate a motorcycle successfully.

Let me tell you of a couple real world examples where this has happened to me:

The first occurred when I was still a relatively new rider. I only had my license for a year or two and I was riding in the twisty mountain roads more often. On one such occasion I was with my friend Ray and I took a right hand corner too fast. I found my motorcycle making it's way towards the yellow line, on the trajectory to cross over the lane. As my luck would have it there was a pickup truck headed the opposite way at that very moment. If I continued on my current trajectory I would have a head on collision with this truck!

All of my attention was drawn to the truck and my **impending doom**. It took a monumental amount of effort, but my training kicked in and I forcefully tore my eyes off the truck and put them back on the road to where I needed to go. I trusted in my tires and leaned the motorcycle more than I had ever done at that point (still a LONG ways from scraping pegs). I passed by the truck and felt the wind and we crossed paths. I was able to stay in my lane the entire time thanks to my training on avoiding target fixation.

Another less harrowing time occurred when I was on a relaxed ride in the hills. This time the thing that drew my attention was just an interesting boulder on the side of the road. I'm not quite sure what it was about that rock, but once again I found myself target fixated and starting to steer towards it. Once I realized this was happening I directed my eyes to where I wanted my motorcycle to go and avoided any potentially dangerous situation.

So you see, being able to avoid target fixation is important in stressful situations and even boring situations with interesting rocks.

## EXERCISE

### Practice looking:

Target fixation mainly happens when speeds are higher and you have little time to react. It's harder to replicate at slow speeds. What you can practice though is looking where you want to go when you are riding your bicycle.

Most people only look directly ahead of them when riding, but it's important to look as far ahead as possible and to leave the close stuff to your peripheral vision. This method of looking ahead is a little disconcerting at first but it really helps in the long run. Practice looking really far ahead in turns, and to **actively turn your whole head**, not just your eyes. Ride around town on your bicycle practicing this method of looking through the turn.

## Skill #4: Panic braking

Learning to properly brake is a vital skill that can save your life. Motorcycles actually stop slower than cars because they only have two wheels to use in order to slow down instead of four. Not only that, if you lock up the front or rear wheel on a motorcycle that can lead to a lowside or highside crash.

The rules for **panic braking** are as follows:

**Either brake and then swerve, or swerve and then brake.**

This is all dependent on the situation and which is more appropriate. If you buy a modern motorcycle you may be equipped with an Antilock Braking System (ABS) which really helps a lot. But don't use technology as an excuse to not practice panic braking.

The trick to braking quickly and safely is to trust in the front brake and use little rear brake. About 70% of your braking power comes from your front brake, and only about 30% from your rear. Plus because braking hard pushes the momentum of your motorcycle forward, it lightens the rear wheel which reduces traction and makes it much more likely to lock up.

## EXERCISE

### Practice panic braking

This is REALLY fun to practice on a bicycle. Find an empty parking lot or a street where there won't be much traffic. Set out a marker of some sort. It could be a cone, a rock, or a line you make with chalk.

Ride your bicycle down the street from your marker and pick a spot far enough away where you can get up to a quick speed by the time you cross that marker. The goal is to pedal really fast until you reach that marker and as soon as you do you try and brake as quickly and safely as possible. Try and keep BOTH wheels on the ground, and not lock up the front or the rear.

Practice this 20-30 times. This should give you a great workout and by the end of it you will have a good idea of your braking limits on that vehicle. This exercise is something you should replicate on your motorcycle when you purchase it.

### BONUS:

A fun and helpful thing to do is practice getting in bad situations. Do the exercise above, but this time actively **try and lock up the rear wheel**. When you do, practice keeping the bicycle upright and under control. Be careful if you try and actively lock up the front, even though this is just practice that is a very dangerous thing to do that may cause you to crash. Of course always make sure you are wearing as much safety gear as you can. Helmet, gloves, maybe even knee or elbow pads.

## Skill #5: Riding slow

Around 2010 I was working at Google as a contractor. I was part of a team that helped manage the thousands of free bicycles available to employees to get from building to building on campus. During my training a bicycle officer from the San Francisco Police Department came down to teach us advanced bicycle techniques.



The one skill that really stuck with me is how to ride slow. This is helpful to bicycle cops since they oftentimes have to ride through crowds or other times where riding fast just isn't an option. Being able to ride slow on a bicycle will also help you pass your motorcycle license test!

If you are taking the MSF motorcycle training course they also have a section called, "The Box of Death" or something similar. It is a very small box that you are required to make a complete circle in. You have to practically lock the handlebars all the way to one side to be able to navigate this small box. It is the one part of the test that many new riders have trouble with. Being able to ride slow will help you succeed in this box of death!

**To ride slowly on a bicycle you need to do two things:**

1. Keep pedalling slowly the entire time.
2. Apply rear brake to adjust your speed.

By doing these two things you can easily keep your speed at that sweet spot where you aren't going so slow you lose balance, and you aren't going too fast for the situation. You can do this same thing with a motorcycle by using the throttle, clutch, and the rear brake.

### **EXERCISE**

Set up an obstacle course. It could be a series of cones that you slalom through or even a replication of the 'Box of Death'. Practice riding as slow as you can by constantly pedalling very slowly and using the rear brake. You will find that looking where you want to go is also a vital skill in this!

### **BONUS:**

Make EXTREMELY tight turns. Look as far as you can through the turn, and apply the skills of slow braking to keep your balance.

## Thanks for reading!

I hope you've enjoyed this book. It has been a labor of love and I've done my best to include all of the things I can to help a new rider get a basic foundation of knowledge. This isn't a substitute for good in person training, but you will be a much safer and knowledgeable rider for having read this guide. I would love to hear any stories you have about your riding career, and even get pictures of you and your first motorcycle.

If you have the time, I want to ask one more thing of you that would really help me out. **Can you give me your feedback?**

What did you love about this book? What did you not like about it? What did you wish was included? Was there too much information? Not enough information? Was there an area I didn't cover thoroughly enough? I'm always looking to improve so I can help as many people as possible safely enjoy motorcycles.

You can e-mail me at [bestbeginnermotorcycles@gmail.com](mailto:bestbeginnermotorcycles@gmail.com) with your feedback. I read every single e-mail, and I reply to as many as I can.

Ride safe and keep the rubber side down!

Ben



## More resources

There are lots of resources out there for new riders. On this page I'm going to list things I've used a lot in my motorcycle journey. Some of them will be places to buy gear, instagram accounts I follow, some of the best products I really like, and even cool motorcycles I enjoy. If something is listed on this page then I have either used them myself, heard great things about them, or somehow have had a positive interaction with them. There are some links on here that are affiliate links that I've added to help support BBM, but whenever I do that I will always note it beside the URL.

### Places to buy motorcycle gear

- [Motorcycle-Superstore.com](https://www.motorcycle-superstore.com) - This is a great place to buy gear. They have a decent selection and good prices. Please note that I am an affiliate with them, so if you feel like supporting BBM and you need some gear, buy from motorcycle superstore.
- [MotorcycleGear.com](https://www.motorcyclegear.com) - Another awesome site to buy gear. They often times have videos of each piece of gear, and they give their 'two cents' by telling you if that gear is good or not. You can also buy and sell used gear on this site. They used to be known as NewEnough for that reason, but have now changed their name to MotorcycleGear.com
- [eBay](https://www.ebay.com) - I've bought brand new motorcycle jackets on ebay for 1/2 the original price. I do this by searching for jacket models that are last years model, or products that have been discontinued. A great source if you haven't thought of them yet.
- [CycleGear.com](https://www.cyclegear.com) - I've been to a few CycleGear stores in person, in fact they are where I bought my very first motorcycle jacket. They are a great company with many local stores around so you can actually try on the gear you are buying.

### Places to buy motorcycle parts

- [Ronayers.com](https://www.ronayers.com) - This is where I usually buy parts if I need them. When I need to replace my sprocket and chain, I go to Ronayers. They have good prices, and an excellent blueprint microfiche so you can make sure you are getting the right part.
- [RonAyers Microche](https://www.ronayers.com/microche) - This is the link for the Microfiche section on Ronayers. You can look up a bike and find the part you need easily.
- [Motorcycle Superstore Parts Center](https://www.motorcycle-superstore.com/parts-center) - They ship out parts pretty quickly, and they have a lot to offer. Like I mentioned before, I am an affiliate for them, but I also order from them personally too.

### Places to buy a motorcycle

- [Craigslist.org](https://www.craigslist.org) - I've bought every motorcycle I've owned off of craigslist. That site is pretty big in the California Bay Area where I used to live, but it has grown to other parts of the country. I highly recommend checking it out if you are going to buy from a private party.

- [Cycletrader.com](https://www.cycletrader.com) - I've not used cycle trader myself, but it may be a good option for a lot of people.
- [eBay Motorcycles](https://www.ebay.com/motorcycles) - eBay also has a motorcycle section. While I don't think I'd recommend it for most people, if you are looking for a specific "unicorn" type motorcycle, then you may be able to find it here.

## Things I love

- [Shoei Helmets](#) - I absolutely love Shoei's. I have a Shoei shaped head and so they are super comfortable for me. They are a bit more on the expensive side. But I really love them. I've reviewed the [Shoei X-Eleven](#), the [RF-1000](#), and the [TR-Z](#).
- [Bell Helmets](#) - I haven't owned any Bell's yet, but they seem to be relatively inexpensive and have great quality.
- [Shorai Motorcycle Batteries](#) - These batteries are the best. They crank like crazy and last a long time. I highly recommend.
- [Ducati Sport Classic](#) - This is an absolutely gorgeous motorcycle, and one of my dream bikes!
- [Dainese](#) - They make awesome looking jackets, pants, and suits. They look great and they are high quality.
- [Alpinestars](#) - I had some alpinestar motorcycle boots that were really durable. Lots of people also love their gloves, jackets, and pants.
- [Icon Motorsports](#) - This is one of the most fashion forward companies out there. They are always pushing the edge and coming up with things that look great, and also provide a lot of protection. Based on my own experience, their leather jackets have some of the thickest leather I've seen.
- [Kawasaki](#) - I will always have a soft spot for Kawis. Their lovely green color and awesome engines make me smile!
- [Continental Tires](#) - I absolutely love these tires. I had some Continental Road Attack tires on my 2001 ZX-6R and they were awesome. They felt very different compared to other tires in their class. They were sticky, and lasted a long time. I highly recommend them.
- [Held Motorcycle Gloves](#) - I eventually want to get a pair of these gloves. They are comfortable, long lasting, and very protective of your hands. Everyone I know that has bought them really loves them.

## Organizations

- [Motorcycle Safety Foundation](#) - Also known as the MSF. They run safety courses all over. They are where I got my basic training I needed to get my motorcycle license.
- [Bay Area Riders Forum](#) - A great forum that I used to be a member at when I lived in California.

## Motovloggers & Youtube channels

- [ChaseOnTwoWheels](#) - I follow chase quite a bit. He talks a lot, but he is pretty entertaining. Plus, he regularly releases content. If you want a new motorcycle video, chances are Chase has one.
- [RoyalJordanian](#) - This guy barely talks at all, but he has some gorgeous sounding motorcycles. His videos follow his London commute and the funny things he sees during it.
- [RnickeyMouse](#) - This guy films at a particular corner in California that is known to be amazing to ride on a motorcycle. Unfortunately, it also has the reputation of causing many motorcycles to crash as well. If you want to see some people dragging knee and some people crashing, check out his channel.

## Instagram

- [mrs\\_cbr](#) - This is the instagram page of Alex Schlosser who lives down in San Diego. She posts cool pictures, and I love the paintjob she has on her bike.
- [deshmoto](#) - My brother's instagram channel with his Triumph Speed Triple. You will see pictures of his rides, as well as occasionally pictures of me.
- [motolady](#) - Alicia who runs themotolady.com has a great instagram channel. Lots of women who REALLY ride, not just those that pose next to bikes.

## Facebook

- [BBM on Facebook](#) - The official Facebook page of Best Beginner Motorcycles.

## Other websites:

- [Motorcycle News](#) - Good reviews and articles.
- [RideApart](#) - Another site with bike reviews and articles.

# Glossary

**Aftermarket** - The term for items that are produced as modifications after the motorcycle has already been released. Things such as new exhausts and mufflers.

**Ballistic mesh** - A mesh material used in motorcycle protective gear that is abrasion resistant.

**BBM** - Acronym for Best Beginner Motorcycles, or [www.BestBeginnerMotorcycles.com](http://www.BestBeginnerMotorcycles.com)

**Cafe racer** - A style of motorcycle made popular in the 1960's by British riders. The goal of a cafe racer was to remove as many unessential items from the motorcycle in order to reduce weight. It also included adding aftermarket modifications in order to increase performance.

**Cafe** - A shorthand term for 'cafe racer'

**Choke** - A manual adjustment on a carbureted engine that helps adjust the air/fuel mixture temporarily in order to help the bike start and warm up.

**DOT** - Department of Transportation, the regulating agency in the USA.

**ECE 22.05** - Economic Commission for Europe, the regulating arm of motorcycle helmets in Europe.

**Enduro style motorcycles** - A type of motorcycle racing in Europe popularized by a specific kind of modified dirt bike.

**Fairings** - The plastic panels on a motorcycle that increase aerodynamic efficiency.

**Fuel injected** - When a motorcycle uses an electronic fuel injection rather than a carburetor to control the air to fuel mixture. Generally speaking, fuel injection is better.

**Full grain** - Full-grain leather refers to hides that have not been sanded, buffed, or snuffed (as opposed to top-grain or corrected leather) to remove imperfections (or natural marks) on the surface of the hide. The grain remains allowing the fiber strength and durability.

**Get off** - Slang for a motorcycle crash.

**Half helmet** - A motorcycle helmet that does not include any facial protection.

**High side** - A motorcycle crash that involves the rider being thrown over the handlebars and past the front of the motorcycle. This is the opposite of a 'low side' crash.

**Internal visor shades** - An internal visor that can flip down in a full face helmet. The equivalent of sunglasses for a motorcycle helmet.

**Italian tune-up** - A tongue in cheek term used to describe the act of revving a motorcycle to the redline in order to blow carbon build up from the engine and help it run better.

**Japanese 'big four'** - The four major motorcycle makers in Japan. Consisting of Kawasaki, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Honda.

**Kickstarters** - Instead of an electric start, a kickstarter is when you manually turn the engine with a lever that is typically pressed (or kicked) with the foot.

**Lane splitting** - The act of riding a motorcycle between slow moving cars, in essence 'splitting' the lane. This is also known as lane sharing or filtering.

**Low end torque** - When an engine produces more power (torque) lower in the RPM range. Meaning that you feel more power when you are going slower.

**Low side** - A motorcycle crash where the motorcycle turns at such an angle that it begins sliding on its side and throwing off the rider. The opposite of a 'high side' crash.

**Naked** - Not having any sort of plastic fairings.

**Modular helmets** - Full face helmets that can flip up to expose the face like a half helmet.

**Moto** - A shorthand term for 'motorcycle'

**Motovlogger** - A motorcycle rider that records videos of themselves, often from the first person perspective. Very popular on YouTube.

**Opposed twin** - A type of motorcycle engine where the cylinders are lined up opposed to each other. They often stick out the sides of a motorcycle. BMW famously uses these types of engines on many bikes.

**Panic braking** - Applying brakes on a motorcycle in an emergency. Improper panic braking can lead to a crash.

**Parallel twin** - A type of motorcycle engine where the cylinders are lined up parallel to each other. Often times used in starter motorcycles like the Ninja 500.

**Road rash** - Skin abrasions. When you crash and your skin is peeled or sanded off by the pavement. Like a rug burn, but with asphalt.

**Scrambler** - A type of standard motorcycle where the street oriented tires are replaced with knobby dirt tires and the suspension is upgraded. This allows the bike to travel on paved roads and unpaved roads more easily.

**Skull cap helmet** - A type of minimal helmet that only covers the very top of the head. Named because of the similar look it has to military soldier helmets.

**Snell** - Snell Memorial Foundation, a non profit organization dedicated to the testing of motorcycle safety gear.

**V-twin engine** - A type of motorcycle engine with the cylinders lined up in a V formation. Harley Davidson is famous for using this type of engine configuration, but so do many other manufacturers.