

from the Educator:

In my present medical condition, not being able to be a motorcycle DRIVER, I have had some enlightening experiences in the PASSENGER seat and I thought I would share those with you. During the Co-Rider course I suggest that Drivers should spend an hour on the back seat of a motorcycle so that they would really understand what their co-riders experience and to learn just how much their co-riders trust them to keep them safe. Prior to now I have been a passenger, but not for very long stretches. Recently I have been on the back of two 1800's, a full dress Harley, a Yamaha Venture and a Heritage Classic Harley. The rides have been from 60 to 130 miles. The weather ranged from the high 60's to the mid 90's, with night riding and sunny day rides. So this is what I learned:

Passenger's point of view – In the case of all five bikes I had to figure just how I was to get on and off the bike, making it the least disruptive to the driver and the bike. Each bike presented different seat height and widths, along with the drivers capabilities and my ability to balance due to a weak right arm. I also needed to figure a way to hook-up with only one hand, so instead of using the mid cord separation, I just unplugged it at the helmet, this way I could do the hook-up with my left hand. One bike had a left handed push to talk button, while the others were all right handed, and more difficult for me to operate. The only bike that I could see completely over the drivers head was the older Heritage Classic. In fact the wind protection on my upper body and my seating position were best on that bike. The most room was on the 1800's, though the angle of the backrest was as many have said, angled to far backwards and it pushed my butt forward on the seat, I would opt for the more upright position. The wind, with the windshield at it's lowest position put too much wind into my face, and forced me to lower the shield on my helmet. All this and the weather was in the high 90's. The wind protection on the other bikes was better. One 1800 had the under mirror Baker Built deflectors and that made a big difference.

As a passenger I noticed that I gave up a lot of control and had to put a lot of faith in the drivers for my safety. My comfort level seemed to be directly related to not what I thought each of their driving skills might be but what level of control they executed while we were driving. When you get on a bike I think that most of us would believe that the driver is capable of being safe, but what happens on the ride could change all that.

And yes, at night I wore a light jacket, and the driver wore none, it is cooler on the back. Early on I couldn't wear gloves and my hands were chilled, later I wore perforated gloves, but the driver didn't require them.

Finally, the better you learn how to be a passenger on the bike, with body positioning, head turning, and foot braking, the easier it is for the driver to control the bike. One of my drivers actually thought I was doing more of the driving than he was, but in fact, I was simply doing what I should and this made it so much easier for him to control the bike through the complicated twist and turns we were traveling.

Driver's point of view – It starts with tires and suspension. When you add a passenger and depending on the roads you plan on traveling, you need to adjust your tire pressure and also your suspension pressure. On one of the 1800's we experimented with the suspension levels. We totaled 400 lbs. together and we tried "0", "10", and "15" with the following results. "0" was too soft for around town roads with bumps that are the kind that go across the whole lane and are raised by an inch or so, and the same for the dips in the lane. "15" turned out to be more comfortable than "10" overall, but on something like a railroad track or tall bumps, it was harsher than it was at "10". Over a period of travel time, we preferred the "15" setting for our weight combination. Next you need to understand that while you are driving, **your driving** is what gives your passenger the trust level. When you start, when you stop, how you shift, anything and everything that affects the overall smoothness in operating your motorcycle translates directly to how comfortable your passenger feels on the back of your bike. While you are moving, are you steady in your track or do you move around the lane a bit, to you make quick steering corrections, or change throttle position abruptly? Any of these kinds of things can give your passenger an uneasy feeling. When you take a curve do you do that smoothly or are you making a number of steering corrections. What is minor to you, is not minor to your passenger.

I want to thank all those that allowed me to experience motorcycling recently from the back seat, but I can't wait to be back in the drivers seat again!