

Spotlight on Safety - November 2107

By Bill Hamilton

This month's column is being written immediately after a ride in which there were two crashes within a 15-minute period that sent one rider to the hospital with five broken bones, and left another rider badly shaken, scraped up and unable to complete the ride. I am irate about what happened because it was 100% avoidable.

Both these crashes involved riders contacting other riders in the group, but the root cause of both these crashes is one other rider continually riding at the front of the group near the left side of the lane (center of the road) blocking automobile traffic, ignoring cars following the group waiting for this rider to clear the road, repeatedly ignoring calls of "car back" and attempts on my part to encourage this rider to pay attention to what is happening around him. Historically his unsafe practices have caused injury only to himself, but today it caused injury to two other riders. This behavior cannot continue.

Much like dropping a rock in a pond, the initial impact of the rock with the water may not cause any immediate effect, but as the waves radiate out from the initial impact site, they contact other objects and that has secondary effects tied directly to the initial act of dropping the stone in the water.

In aviation accidents there is a concept called cascade effects where one bad decision on a pilot's part leads to a string of other bad decisions resulting, many times, in the loss of the aircraft and the death of the pilot.

Another version of this theory is known as the 'Butterfly Effect' where "a butterfly flapping its wings in South America can affect the weather in Central Park". This is a complex theory that originated in weather forecasting models. Here is a good link to an article about it. <http://www.stsci.edu/~lbradley/seminar/butterfly.html>

The point of these three concepts is the same, the effects of one act have consequences that can be far out of proportion to the original input. In today's crashes, I attribute both accidents to the original rider's repeated unsafe behavior disturbing the focus and concentration of the group riding together even though he wasn't directly involved in either of the crashes. If he hadn't continually ignored safe riding rules, I wouldn't have ridden to the front of the pack to correct his behavior. If I hadn't ridden to the front of the group, I wouldn't have displaced another rider who was riding a different course and turned where the remainder of the group was going straight. If that rider hadn't turned right, the rider behind him wouldn't have hit his rear wheel and gone down, fracturing his collar bone. If that crash hadn't occurred, the remaining group would not have been

distracted and shaken up by what just happened, and the second rider who crashed might have seen the piece of steel in the roadway that caused his crash and been able to avoid it. If this rider had avoided the piece of steel, he would not have lost control of his bike and crashed. I think you can get the picture.

At this point, I think it's time for the club to start serious discussions with the few riders who are known repeat unsafe riders. It is common knowledge who these riders are. As club riders, it is our responsibility to insure safety on our rides, and if that means calling out a friend who is endangering the club, then that's what needs to be done. If the behavior continues, maybe we need to invite those riders to not ride with the club any longer. It is unfair to all the other riders in the club who may become victims of one rider's careless, irresponsible, and unsafe riding practices. We CANNOT afford another day like today.

"Let's be safe out there"