

## WHAT IS HYDROPLANING AND HOW TO AVOID IT

One of the worst scenarios for a motorcyclist is getting caught up in a rainstorm. Not only does it make your ride slower, but it makes it tougher to confidently handle and steer your bike. Add in the fact that the rain may be hitting you in the face and/or the face of your helmet, making it harder to see clearly, and you've got yourself one tough afternoon of riding ahead of you.

The best solution in this situation is to pull over and let the weather pass. If this is not a viable option, here are some tips and preventative measures you'll need to take care of to safely continue your ride.

First, recognize the gravity of riding in the rain. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) reports that about 13% of all fatal accidents and 25% of all accidents occur on wet pavements (these statistics combine all types of motor vehicles on the road).

Furthermore, the number one cause of wet pavement accidents is hydroplaning, which occurs when water causes your tires to lose contact with the pavement and instead you are riding on a layer of water between the tires and the road, which means you lose control. According to the NTSB and the National Highway Traffic Safety Advisory (NHTSA), hydroplaning is a result of riding too fast on a wet road.

The only way to avoid this is to slow down in wet weather. Riding at speeds of less than 35 mph allows your tires to siphon off and channel the water away from your tire's tread and allows them to make proper contact with the road. The faster you drive, the harder it is for your tires to dissipate the volume of water.

An important factor is also making sure you have the proper tires, especially if you live in a rainy zone. Tires are specifically designed for certain road conditions. Some are designed for high speeds on dry roads while others are built with all-weather conditions in mind. A good wet-weather tire will have deeper sipes or grooves that channels the water away from the center of the tread towards the outside to avoid hydroplaning. According to the NTSB, tread grooves should be at least 1/16 of an inch deep in order to be considered safe for wet weather traveling. Make sure to check your bike's tread depth often.

Keep in mind that, if the depth of the water on the road is deeper than the depth of the treads, hydroplaning can still occur. This is a common problem on some roads that build up pools of water or puddles that may be hard to see. A good rule of thumb to remember when riding on wet roads is to ride as close as possible to the center of the road. Roads are built with a higher center to aid in water drainage, making it safer than riding near the edge of the road. When riding in groups always allow at least double spacing between bikes or more if conditions warrant.

Note also that, while hydroplaning is more likely to occur with half an inch or more of water on the road, it can still happen just from the moisture from dew or fog on the road, even on a smooth surface. Also be cognizant of drizzling rain conditions that can raise oil spills on the road. This can cause a slick surface yielding a somewhat similar condition as hydroplaning.

The most common reactions for a rider on a motorcycle that's hydroplaning is to hit the brakes. But this is the wrong reaction, and will only make matters worse.

Instead, remain as calm as possible and slowly let off the throttle. Following this procedure will more often than not increase your tire-to-road contact while decreasing the chances of an accident. But like driving a car, if your bike begins to skid or turn while hydroplaning, you need to remember to counter-steer your bike in the same direction as the skid.

All of these simple yet evasive maneuvers can keep you on the alert and avoid the nightmare of getting into a hydroplaning situation. If proper procedures are learned and steps taken to avoid these scenarios, you and your Harley will be better off. Always be aware of the conditions and look ahead. It may just allow you the time to react to an upcoming situation in a controlled manner. Be safe and be prepared.