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The Hardest-Working Paper in America

Illinois condemns motorcyclists to death by leaving helmets off safety tip page



Gov. Bruce Rauner arrives at the Illinois State Fair during Republican Day, in August 2014 in Springfield. | Jessica Koscielniak / Chicago Sun-Times

[Columnists](#)

May 20, 2018, 12:33 PM

What is it with rich guys and motorcycles? Sam Zell was always blasting around Majorca, Spain, on his Ducati. Maybe he liked it. Maybe it made him feel alive. Maybe he imagined the romance of the bike made him seem less vile.

Bruce Rauner is the same — his motorcycle, like that Carhartt jacket, no doubt intended to foster the impression that he's a rough-and-tumble man of the people, and not a flint-hearted, out-of-touch millionaire with nine homes who spent the past three years trying to grease the seized-up gears of the state with the fat squeezed from the lives of the poor and the disabled.

While my general attitude toward Rauner is to ignore him and patiently await the hook that will yank him offstage and into history, my attention was caught by a photo Rauner tweeted Thursday, showing himself with one crisp-jeaned leg draped over a Harley, and a little public service announcement:

“Did you know that May is Motorcycle Awareness Month? As an avid rider, Gov. Rauner wants to make sure all Illinoisans are staying safe on the road. [Click here](#) for more info and safety tips:”

OPINION

I assume that was written by an underling and doesn't mean Rauner is now referring to himself in the third person — entering his royal phase, perhaps.

Intrigued, I clicked the link and was brought to the Illinois Department of Transportation's “safety tips for motorcyclists” page.



Bruce Rauner ✓
@BruceRauner



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10:08 PM - May 17, 2018

♡ 6 👤 See Bruce Rauner's other Tweets

What are those tips? Just four: Be Visible (“Wear high-vis clothing to make yourself obvious!”); Intersections (not a tip, per se, but a place to be cautious. “Make sure you are free from other car’s blind spots.”) Passing (“Do not change lanes quickly...”) and Following Distance (“All motorists should allow a minimum 3 second ‘space cushion’”).

Sensible enough. But anything missing? Besides an editor, I mean. An important aspect of safety is glaringly left out:

Helmets.

Helmets reduce the risk of death by 37 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They reduce the risk of injury by 69 percent. In 2016, 800 motorcyclists died who might have lived had they worn helmets.

I don't have a dog in this race — I've never ridden a motorcycle and don't plan to. I'm just drawing attention to the craven way that the state of Illinois caves in to the anti-helmet crowd. As it is, Illinois is one of just three states with no helmet laws whatsoever. And God knows I'm not advocating for a helmet law — I don't want the American Motorcyclist Association flying up my backside like a swarm of wasps, as is their practice. The AMA is the NRA for motorcyclists. But even *their* website can't resist plugging helmets:

“The American Motorcyclist Association ... strongly encourages the use of personal protective equipment, including gloves, sturdy footwear and a properly fitted motorcycle helmet.”

I placed a few calls to the AMA and the Department of Transportation and got nothing. But the American College of Emergency Physicians called back.

Is it important for motorcyclists to wear helmets?

“Yes, always,” said Dr. Sudip Bose, an ACEP fellow and Iraqi war vet. “It's the single most helpful thing you can do.”

Why is that?

“Even the most responsible riders, you're at the whim of things out of your control, other people not following the rules,” he said. “You can be right, but you're the one who loses.”

Bose said he respects the opinion of those who scorn helmets. But they're gambling with their lives.

“Everyone values their freedom,” he said. “That's why you wear a helmet. They don't think it's going to happen to them and are pissed off about the freedom thing. [They think] someone is taking away their freedom ... We're not having our freedom taken away by wearing helmets. We're having more freedom later by not being permanently disabled or stuck in an ICU.”

It's a shame that the state of Illinois can't find a way to say that on its official motorcycle safety site. I know that Bruce Rauner is hot to bring back the death penalty. But I thought it was just for cop killers. By indulging the fantasies of irresponsible motorcycle riders, the state of Illinois condemns an unknowable number to death and injury. The state can't do much, not under the non-leadership of Road Warrior Rauner. But we can do better than this.

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