

Motorcyclist Speaks from Experience: Tips to Help Prevent a Crash with a Deer and How to Better Protect Yourself in the Event of a Crash

My name is Jim Moore. I live in Knoxville, Tennessee, and I ride mainly in the mountains of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, which includes the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Dragon's Tail (U.S. 129), the Cherohala Skyway, and other scenic routes.

Just after dawn on March 29, 2014, my buddy and I were riding the Foothills Parkway (part of the National Park) from U.S. 321 to U.S. 129. It was about 40 degrees. We had encountered scattered light rain and the road was wet, but it was a beautiful day and we had good visibility, a great view of the mountains, and the road to ourselves. Almost no one else was out and about.

We were doing the speed limit of 45 mph. I was coming out of a sweeping right curve just prior to mile marker No. 5 when a deer came running up the hill to my left and ran into the left side of my front wheel. Because of the topography and the curvature of the road, my buddy saw the deer running out of the woods toward the road, but I did not. I heard him say the word "deer" over our Bluetooth Communicators and I had started to look for the deer, but only saw it immediately prior to it running into my front wheel. There was only a second or two between the warning and the impact.

I had my front brake covered, and if I hadn't first looked for the deer but had instead immediately braked upon hearing the word "deer," it might have missed me. It all happened fast and I had closed my eyes for the impact, but I'm pretty sure that the engine guard/ highway bars are what the deer hit, causing me to go over the handlebars. After rolling and sliding, I was on the asphalt on the left side of the road.

When I crashed, we were about eight miles from the closest cell-phone signal (not far for where I usually ride). We had not seen a vehicle since we turned onto the Foothills Parkway, about 13 miles earlier. My riding buddy didn't want to leave me lying beside the road, and we were both worried about internal injuries. Since I could stand, we were in the process of my getting on the back of his bike in order to ride to the hospital when a family in a minivan came along and gave me a ride.

Once we got to a cell-phone-signal area, we called 9-1-1. I waited in a car for the EMTs to arrive and was talking on my cell phone. My left shoulder was hurting, but I had no external injuries other than a bit of road rash on my left hand, which had stopped bleeding by the time I met up with the ambulance. I appeared to be fine and got out of the car by myself.

The EMTs asked me where I wanted to go. I did not expect such a question. I thought they had to take me to the nearest ER, but they said they would take me to any local hospital. At that time I was 10 miles from the nearest hospital; 20 miles from the University of Tennessee (UT) Medical Center, which is a Level I Trauma Center; and 30 miles from a large hospital close to my home. I chose the hospital close to my home.

It was a long, slow, no-emergency ride that was, in a way, reassuring to me and the family members I was calling. I went into my local hospital's emergency room, where they helped me

out of my gear and put me in a bed. An hour or so later, I was sent for a CAT scan. Sometime after that, the doctor came in and announced that I had six broken ribs, a bruised lung, a broken collarbone, and a broken hand. He went on to state that the hospital didn't handle my level of trauma and I would have to be moved to the UT Medical Center after all, about 15 miles away from my current location, which meant another ambulance ride as well as bills for both ambulance rides and ERs, not to mention the delay of several hours to receive treatment.

All in all, I spent one night in ICU, three nights in the hospital, had collarbone surgery, spent weeks on painkillers, and underwent months of ongoing physical therapy for my shoulder and collarbone. Seven weeks after the wreck, I started riding a Spyder. After 12 weeks of healing and rehab, I'm still waiting for my shoulder strength to return to the point that I'm confident it won't affect my ability to handle two wheels; however, I'm a full-face helmet, ATGATT guy, and I am anticipating a full recovery. But I learned some things from this experience and as a result have implemented a couple additional safety measures:

- 1) I will never again ride without **CE armor in pants and jacket**, which is my usual practice; however, because of the weather, I was wearing a heated jacket under heavy leather, covered by a rain suit. Shoulder armor would have lessened the impact and probably my injury. I was wearing armored pants (**Sliders**) and had only one two-inch-diameter bruise on my left hip. I now ride wearing the latest **Hit-Air inflating jacket**.
- 2) The heated gloves I was wearing provided minimal protection. The left one came off, which resulted in a bit of road rash on the back of my hand. The right glove stayed on, but was torn apart. The heated gloves had no hard-knuckle protection, and I broke two bones in my right hand. I think **hard-knuckle protection**, which all my nonheated gloves have, would have saved me a broken hand. I'm going to put heated grips on my bikes in order to reduce my use of heated gloves.
- 3) I'm installing a **Hornet deer whistle** on my motorcycles. I'm not sure if it really works, but I'll feel better.
- 4) I now carry an **inReach SE**, which provides emergency service and two-way satellite text communication.
- 5) I've modified my **visual scan** while riding in deer areas. I now spend more time scanning the trees along the roadside. In order to do this safely, I've slowed down.
- 6) If my riding partners have Bluetooth Communicators, I will **plan ahead** with them to use the word "deer" to indicate seeing a deer likely to run into our path and that upon hearing the word, we would immediately brake (rather than just look for deer, as I did).
- 7) I don't think I've ever seen an article about dealing with EMTs and ambulances after a wreck, or even about what factors to consider in making the decision to call an ambulance or have a buddy ride you to the ER. On the Dragon it's an hour ride to a hospital. Waiting for an ambulance adds another hour. At what point is it better to get into a car or the back of a pickup and just ride to the hospital? The lesson for me was that if the crash was such that an ambulance is called it's an emergency. The EMTs have no idea what's going on internally. Tell them to turn on the lights and sirens and **go to the nearest Level I Trauma Center**, which is a hospital that can provide the highest level of trauma care available.