

## INTERVIEW

### Pat Fictitious, The Ideal RiderCoach

**SC:** Thank you, Pat, for agreeing to take time from your busy schedule to talk with us about yourself and your approach to teaching the MSF's new Basic RiderCourse®.

**Pat:** You're quite welcome. This is a great opportunity for me to share a few of the things I think. But, as they say, sometimes you don't know exactly what you think until you say it.

**SC:** Let's start by discovering why you wanted to be a RiderCoach<sup>SM</sup>.

**Pat:** Well, I was out for a weekend ride and happened across a course being taught near where I live. It looked fascinating so I decided to observe for a while. During one of the breaks I had a chance to talk to one of the RiderCoaches. After hearing an overall tone of satisfaction, and after seeing the novices develop into motorcyclists, I decided to look into MSF certification.

**SC:** What were the main reasons you found yourself wanting to teach others how to ride?

**Pat:** I consider myself a motorcycle enthusiast – not the kind who reads all the publications or has to know the internal workings of a motorcycle, but I get a real sense of satisfaction from the freedom and enjoyment motorcycling brings into my life. It's something I think others would enjoy too. Also, I like to help people. My friends tell me I am patient with others and can relate well to someone trying to learn. I think I'm that way because I like learning myself; I'm curious about things that interest me, including motorcycles and people!

**SC:** What do you think it takes to be a safe motorcyclist?

**Pat:** I'm not sure I'd have had a good answer for that



Photo: William Romais

before I completed my certification; at least I wouldn't have known the right words to use. But as a RiderCoach, I believe there are several characteristics of a good motorcyclist. I think I've always been one, and now I can help others develop into being the best they can be.

Exactly what is that? Well, I have a fundamental knowledge about motorcycles; that is, I know something about how they handle, what maintenance is necessary, what the latest technology is, and I like to find out about new models as they are introduced. Also, I keep my skills sharp. I took the MSF Experienced RiderCourse® many years ago, and practice the skills I learned in a parking area when I haven't ridden for a while. I remember a friend of mine saying that a superior motorcyclist is one who uses superior riding strategies in such a way to not ever have to use superior skills. I always liked that. I guess I characterize myself as a "thinking motorcyclist," not

### Characteristics of an Ideal RiderCoach

- Loves people
- Patient
- Articulate
- Professional
- "Walks the Talk"
- "Practices What They Preach"
- Good role model
- Competent rider
- Constant Learner
- Remembers being a beginner
- Empathetic
- Willing to admit they're wrong
- Warm
- Smiling
- Sincere
- Knowledgeable
- Engenders enthusiasm
- Modest

intellectual, but always thinking about what is going on around me. Now that I'm a safety professional, at least part-time anyway, I can appreciate what it means to have a safety-minded attitude. I suppose I've always been safety-minded, more so than most of my riding friends. So over the three years I've been riding, I've developed some good safety habits, and being a RiderCoach has really improved my overall riding ability and attitude.

**SC: What is your approach in teaching safe motorcycling to others?**

**Pat:** Well, I've got a good curriculum to work with! But I've had to bring it to life. I like the fact that I can provide new riders with a perspective about risk. Much of life entails risk, and motorcycling is no different. I think it's good to provide the foundation for good risk-taking to new riders, and to create an understanding and awareness of the responsibilities of being a safe, responsible motorcyclist. About the only time I see anything about motorcycles in the media is when there's a crash. I'm not too happy about that, but I know I'm doing all I can on the prevention side of the equation. I like for my students to graduate knowing they have the choice to be safe; safety is in their own hands. I like to make the learning fun in the BRC. The riding exercises are the most fun, for the students and for me. But it's also important to lay the groundwork for becoming a safe motorcyclist in the classroom. I stay away from war-stories and games; I simply get directly to the information that's important for them to know on the range and on the street. They are there to ride – after all, it's a *RiderCourse* not a *ListenerCourse*.

**SC: So it sounds like you have your act together when it comes to personal motorcycling and safety in general, but what makes you such a good RiderCoach beyond that?**

**Pat:** I truly like people. I like to see them have fun and I don't like to see them get hurt. Also, I don't like to hear people blame others for things that happen to them. That must come across in the way I teach – I don't lecture, I

turn the responsibility for learning during the course and riding safely after the course over to the students. My friends always thought I'd be a good teacher, but I think it's more about being a good communicator. I had a few crummy teachers, and I still see some as I continue to enroll in professional development opportunities. I think my constant-learning attitude makes me open to better understand how others learn and what they go through in learning a new skill such as motorcycling.



Photo: Miriam Romas

**SC: If someone were to observe one of your classes, what would they see?**

**Pat:** Well they'd probably be pretty bored. I'm not a performer, and I'm not all that exciting in the classroom. I know it's not about me, but rather about what's going on in the heads and hearts of the students. I like the small group activity of the BRC as it works well for me. It keeps the students busy learning on their own and from each other, and I can help out, you know, coach, as necessary when there's any stumbling blocks. I like to ask lots of questions to find out where they are in the material or to discover if they really understand the important knowledge to get started into motorcycling. I pretty much follow the curriculum. I hope any observers would not watch me, but rather the participants. That's what I did when I watched the class before becoming a RiderCoach. I saw the new riders develop the skills in a progressive, enjoyable fashion, and I wanted to be part of that. I would hope if someone like me were to watch, they'd want to become a RiderCoach too.

**SC: What the most difficult part about being a RiderCoach?**

**Pat:** That's hard to say.

## Characteristics (continued)

- Humble
- Adaptable
- Enjoys learning
- Confident
- Sense of humor
- Coaches effectively
- Enthusiastic
- Encouraging
- Seeks and willingly
- Controls emotions
- Caring
- participates in professional
- Discrete
- Strives to be the best
- development activities
- Never has to apologize
- they can be
- to a student



Photos: Miriam Romais

I like everything about the course, and I sure like teaching it better than I do preparing to teach it. The students rate me pretty well though and I think that's because I'm prepared, so the payoff is there. Probably what I am most uncomfortable with is having students that depend on me for their learning. It doesn't happen all that often, but there are times I have to teach more than facilitate. I prefer to manage the whole process as opposed to controlling every step. There's a lot more opportunity in the classroom to do that because the range exercises just flow right along. Another difficult aspect for me is to have an unsuccessful student. I do all I can to

develop new riders to the best of their abilities, but sometimes not everyone progresses at an ideal rate. I haven't had to counsel anyone out of a course yet, but there have been some that needed a lot more remedial attention and coaching than others.

**SC: What do your students like about you the most?**

**Pat:** They think I'm knowledgeable about motorcycling and have good riding skills, but what they comment about the most is how I care about their learning and



their safety. They like that I'm sensitive to their needs and their struggles in learning about motorcycle safety. They like that I focus on their needs and adjust the pace of the course to help them to be successful. I don't bore them, and most of the students like taking responsibility for their own learning. I think they like that I can laugh at myself too; I don't tell

jokes, rather, I stay lighthearted about things that come up in the discussions. For me it's "serious fun."

**SC: How do you continue to improve as a RiderCoach?**

**Pat:** I try to set a good example whenever I ride and I never stop learning. Because each class is different, I like to think about the class when it's over, wondering if I could have done anything differently that would have helped the students more. If I see something in the newspaper or on the news, or in a magazine that talks about motorcycles or about learning, I pay attention. I try to see how I could improve what I do as a RiderCoach. Of course, I try to ride as much as possible. I've got to have a base of experience from which to establish credibility.

**SC: What advice would you give to a motorcyclist who is thinking about becoming a RiderCoach?**

**Pat:** I'd recommend that they ask themselves a lot of questions about what their motivations are. If they really care about people and about motorcycling in general, they should consider taking the certification course. I'd want them to ask themselves if they take safety seriously, if they practice what safety professionals "preach." After all, they may soon be a safety professional. Are they a safe, responsible motorcyclist? Do they like to help others learn? Do they communicate well? I'd recommend they first enroll in a Basic *RiderCourse* to improve their fundamental skills and to get the flavor of the course. And if they can get excited about the possibilities, becoming a RiderCoach could be just the thing for them.

**SC: Thanks, Pat, for your time. It sounds like your making a positive difference in the lives of new motorcyclists, and that you are leaving a legacy to be proud of. Keep up the good work, and maybe we can visit again soon.**

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