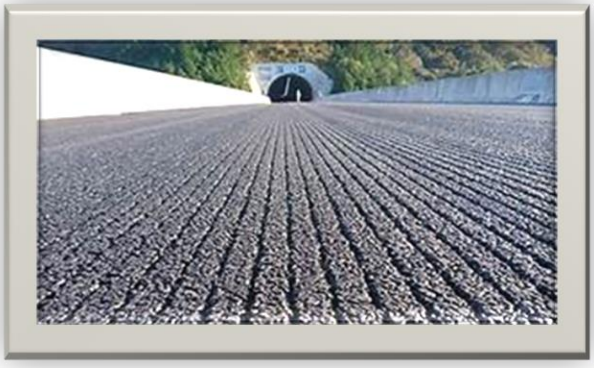
How to “Read” the Pavement

By Traveler

In our motorcycling community we quickly learn how to read. We learn how to read gages, warning lights, the GPS, tire pressure, etc.

However, one of the most critical things to learn to read is the road surface. The type of pavement significantly affects a motorcycle's handling, comfort, and safety. Because a motorcycle has only two wheels and a smaller tire contact patch than a car, riders are more vulnerable to changes in road surface texture, traction, and condition.

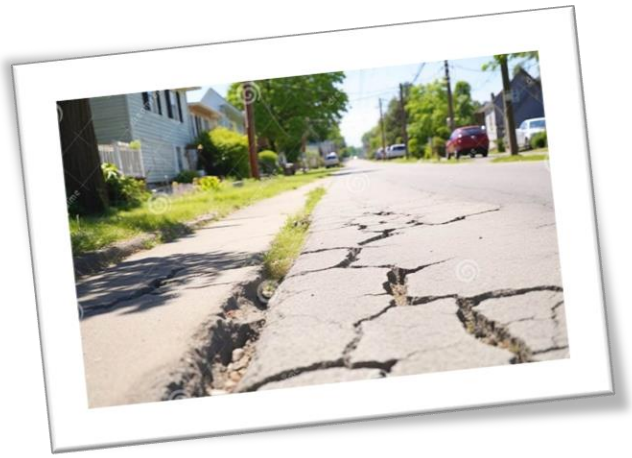
Road surfaces have many different characteristics each of which require different riding techniques and precautions.



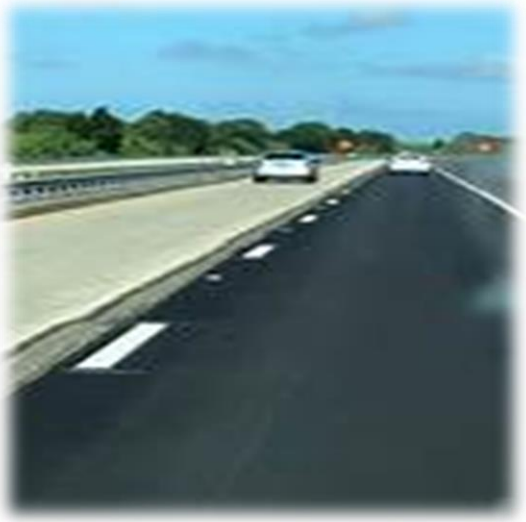
Grooved pavement: Found most often on concrete surfaces, these parallel grooves are cut into the road to prevent hydroplaning. When a motorcycle rides on these grooves, it creates a "wandering" or "snaking" sensation. **To handle this, riders should relax their grip on the handlebars and maintain a steady speed and body position, allowing the bike to correct itself.**

Asphalt vs. concrete:

Asphalt: Newer asphalt is rough and often provides more grip than older, smoother pavement. However, fresh asphalt can have excess oil on the surface, making it slick, especially when wet. Very hot asphalt can also become soft enough for a kickstand to sink into it. **Ride new asphalt like you would wet pavement, slow and easy.**



Concrete: Concrete surfaces can sometimes offer less traction than asphalt and can be rougher or have more expansion joints, cracks and holes from broken concrete. **Look far ahead to give yourself enough time to swerve, slow**

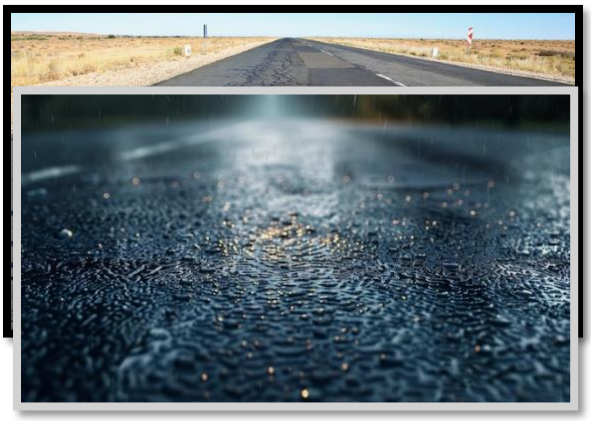


down and safely encounter damaged concrete.

Rough or uneven pavement: Potholes, cracks, and bumps can cause a motorcycle to lose traction and stability**. It's best to slow down and, if possible, approach these hazards at a 90-degree angle to minimize impact**.

"Tar snakes nor Road Gators": These are the black tar or sealant patches used to repair cracks in asphalt. When the road is hot, these patches can soften and become very slippery, posing a risk to a motorcycle's traction, especially when cornering. **Try to choose your line through a curve to avoid Road Gators. Typically, however, hitting a Road Gator only causes minor loss of traction and disruption to the stability of the bike.**

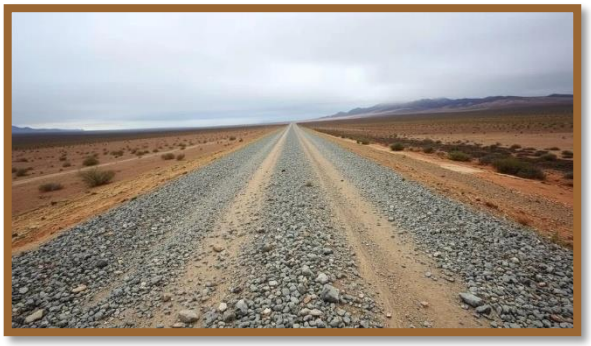
Slippery surfaces: This category includes



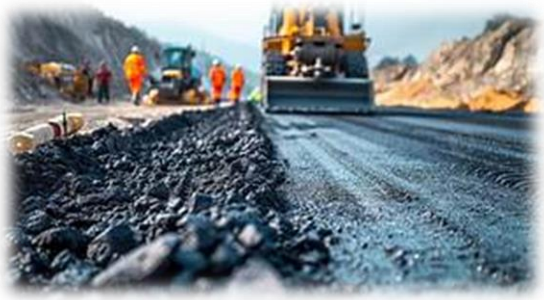
a variety of road conditions that reduce traction:

Wet pavement: Rain, especially at the start of a shower, mixes with oil and road grime to create a very slippery film. **Slow down, increase your following distance or pull off until the rain cleans the surface.**

Loose gravel or sand: Found most often on road shoulders, construction zones, or unpaved driveways, loose gravel drastically reduces tire grip and can cause the wheels to slide out, particularly when turning. **Look far ahead to be able to slow down and adjust your cornering approach before you hit the**



sand . gravel.



Road construction: Milled surfaces, where old pavement has been ground down, create uneven and unpredictably deep grooves that can severely impact handling. Riders should reduce speed

and stay alert in these areas. **As with any raised surface, avoid it if possible. Approach it at 90 degrees if not.**

Metal surfaces: Manhole covers, steel bridge gratings, and railroad tracks become extremely slippery when wet. **Approach them as close to a 90 degree angle as possible and do not brake or accelerate on them.**

Tips for riding on different pavements

Stay relaxed: A tense grip on the handlebars makes it harder for the bike to naturally absorb and correct for surface imperfections. A relaxed grip allows the bike to move freely.

Maintain a steady pace: Sudden braking or accelerating can cause the tires to lose traction on less-than-ideal surfaces. Smooth, gradual inputs are safer.

Look ahead: Continuously scanning the road for surface changes allows you to read the surface, anticipate hazards and adjust your speed and path proactively.

Adjust tire choice: Typically, the original tires on cruisers are made with a universal traction compound. Choose your replacement tires based on your most common style of riding. A good rule to follow is that softer tire compound gives you better traction but less tire life. Harder compound gives you more tire mileage yet slightly less traction. The rule of thumb is that cruisers, under normal riding conditions, will get about 20,000 miles out of a front tire and 10,000 miles from a rear tire. Today's tire manufacturers offer many different tire compounds from extremely soft "Sticky" tires to multi compound hard in the center to soft on the sides. The key is knowing what your riding style is.

One final recommendation on reading…..Read every safety article and Kaution Korner you can find before each riding season. Not only will it make you safer but it will also make the riders around you safer.