



Street Strategies

A Survival Guide For Motorcyclists

Tar Snakes

That Crack Sealant Snaking All Over the Road is Slicker Than You Think

By David L. Hough

You're headed for the big motorcycle rally I several states away. You rarely have time off to do much traveling by motorcycle, so on this trip you've been exploring the state highways and scenic roads as much as possible. Today, the weather is warm and dry. Traffic is sparse on the old highway you're following, and the curves are predictable, allowing you to enjoy an aggressive pace. You're curious but not concerned when you come upon a section of road covered in strange squiggles and lines. The lines appear to be some sort of sealant recently slathered over surface cracks in the asphalt.

Suddenly, as you're leaning into a sweeping right-hander, your rear tire steps sideways. Before you can do anything, the bike slams on its side, and instantly you're bouncing and sliding straight ahead, across the centerline. Fortunately, a car coming the other way sees your crash, and is able to stop without hitting you.

A lot of motorcyclists don't realize that some crack sealants are much more slippery than the surrounding asphalt, especially when fresh. If possible you should avoid running over such "tar snakes," especially when leaning into a turn. In this situation, the slippery tar was applied in wide strips all over the surface, which makes it impractical for you to avoid crossing them. When you observe such shiny-looking tar snakes ahead of you, reduce your speed to reduce your traction demands, the same as you would on a rain-slick road or for loose gravel.