

## Bikers need protection too

By [Sylvia Booth Hubbard](#) • Bankrate.com



Choosing the right motorcycle insurance policy is a lot like picking the right bike, says Sharon Roberts, an agent with Quintal Insurance Agency. You want a policy that fits your needs but is also affordable.

There are basically three types of policies available to cycle owners:

**Liability insurance.** Liability insurance covers property damage and bodily injury to the other person when you're at fault in an accident. Although it does not cover either you or your cycle, it is the one part of your coverage you shouldn't skimp on, says Mary S. Butler, a senior editor at Cars.com. "The more assets you have, the more you have to lose if you are sued," says Butler, who recommends that drivers carry liability that at least equals their net worth. Older drivers, whose net worth is often much more than most policy's standard liability limits, are especially at risk of being underinsured. A high judgment in a lawsuit could wipe out all the assets you've worked a lifetime to accumulate. "An umbrella (liability) policy tied to your homeowners policy would only increase your premiums by \$100 to \$150 a year and cover potential liability," she says.

**Economy coverage.** Economy coverage usually includes both liability and comprehensive theft insurance. "These policies can be customized to suit the individual," says Roberts. "Guest passenger liability coverage is optional. You don't have to have it, but you may want it added to your

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policy so you would be protected in case someone was injured while riding your cycle." In fact, every motorcycle owner should have guest passenger liability, says Bill Wilson, spokesperson for the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America. "If you do not have it, you're taking an awful risk, especially if you are insuring a teen." Other options include uninsured motorist coverage, which covers damages to you if an uninsured driver hits you. It may also cover damage to your bike.

**Complete package.** Complete insurance packages include liability and comprehensive as well as theft, and also collision, which covers damages to your motorcycle if you have an accident. Like automobiles, only the book value of the cycle is covered minus the deductible, Roberts says.

Here are more tips on insuring your motorcycle:

- Think before you buy. There is a great variety of cycles, including touring, classic, scooters, street cruisers and mopeds, and just like automobiles, some models cost much more to insure than others. In general, the higher the value of the cycle and the more powerful the engine, the more you will pay, says Wilson.
- Cover the extras. Regular policies only cover factory standard parts. If you have added a fancy paint job, chrome accessories, a sidecar, or made other additions to your cycle, you need to check into getting additional coverage to a complete package. "It's the same as having an expensive diamond ring," Roberts says. "It's not covered in your standard home insurance policy, but you can buy additional coverage."
- Double up with your agent. Check first with the company that insures your house or auto, or both, for the best possible deal, Wilson says. But if your company considers motorcycles high risk and refuses to write policies to cover them, you will have to look elsewhere.
- See a specialist. Check out companies that specialize in insuring motorcycles, such as Geico's Cycle-GARD policy and American

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Modern Insurance Group. Ask motorcycle dealers in your area for their recommendations, since they often know which companies in your area give the best service.

- Join the club. Ask about motorcycle organization discounts. "Many companies offer discounts if you are a member of motorcycle groups such as HOG -- Harley Owner's Group," says Roberts. Other associations include American Motorcycle Association, BMW Motorcycle Owners of America, Gold Wing Road Riders Association, and Gold Wing Touring Association. Ask about discounts for completing programs such as the Motorcycle Safety Foundation or Military Safe Course.
- Classic lines. If you own a classic cycle, ask about discounts. "Classic cycles are those 25 years or older," Roberts says. "The rates are lower because the guys who own them are real fanatics and really take good care of their bikes."
- Credit for snow days. If you live in a northern state, you may get a discount by choosing the 'lay-up' option. "You have the option of a three-month lay-a-way, such as December, January, and February," Roberts says. "Riders do not want to be on the road in those months due to the salt and sand all over the roads getting on their bikes."
- Shop 'til you drop. There is a big variation in price between companies that can amount to as much as 50 percent or more, says Roberts.

Other factors that can affect your rate include:

- Your driving record. Having a great driving record will reduce your premium, says Wilson.
- Where you keep your cycle. "A cycle kept in a garage will cost less to insure than one kept in the driveway," says Roberts. "It is very easy to steal a motorcycle out of a driveway and load it into a pickup truck."
- Your credit record. Insurance companies regard your credit record

as an indication of your maturity and reliability, says Wilson. (See [related story](#) for full details on how credit scores can affect you

- Marriage. Regardless of age, married drivers pay less than single drivers.
- How many years you have been driving a motorcycle. "It's not just how many years you've been driving, but how many years you've been driving a motorcycle," Roberts says.
- Your age. If you are 55 or older, you will probably be eligible for a discount. But if you are young, you are going to pay more. "The serious injury and fatality rate is so much higher with motorcycles than with automobiles that agents look very closely at the age of the driver," says Wilson.
- Home ownership. Homeowners are considered more responsible and may get discounts.
- Previous policies. If you have had motorcycle insurance in the past, you may get a discount.
- Anti-theft devices. "Motorcycles are easy to steal," Roberts says. "Anti-theft devices, such as an audible alarm, can help you save on premiums."

*Sylvia Booth Hubbard is a freelance writer based in Mississippi.*

-- Posted: Sept. 23, 2003



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