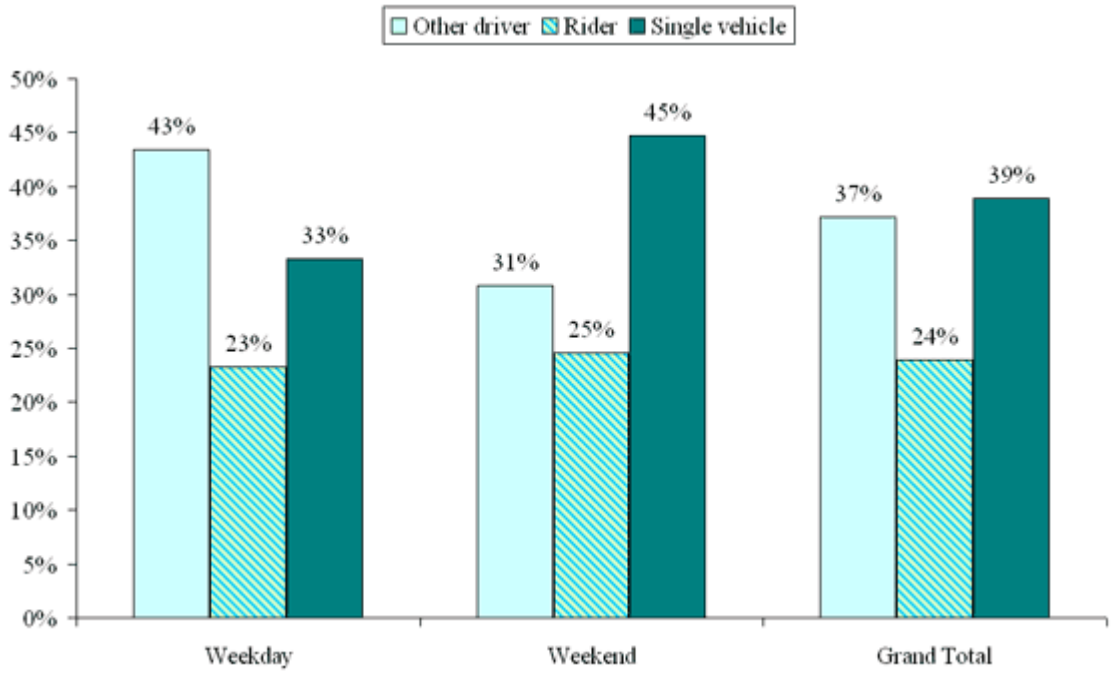
Driving a motorcycle when you are fatigued

Motorcyclists are more likely to be involved in a crash on a weekend than on a weekday. Between 2000-04, 49% of all motorcycle crashes and 55% of all fatal crashes occurred on a weekend. One third of the fatal weekend crashes were single vehicle crashes.

The following graph compares the pattern of crashes on weekends and weekdays. The majority of single vehicle crashes occur on weekends, where as collisions with other vehicles are more likely to occur during the week and be due to the other driver.



Rider survey data shows that large numbers of motorcycles are on the road across the weekend and that distances covered are often large. The concentration of single vehicle crashes on weekends (39%) may indicate fatigue as a factor in those crashes.

Definition of fatigue

Fatigue is considered to have been involved as a contributing factor to a road traffic accident if that accident involved at least one fatigued motor vehicle controller.

A motor vehicle controller is assessed as having been fatigued if the conditions described under (a) or (b) are satisfied together or separately.

(a) The vehicle's controller was described by police as being asleep, drowsy or fatigued.

(b) The vehicle performed a maneuver, which suggested loss of concentration of the controller due to fatigue, that is:

- the vehicle traveled onto the incorrect side of a straight road and was involved in a head-on collision (and was not overtaking another vehicle and no other relevant factor was identified); or
- the vehicle ran off a straight road or off the road to the outside of a curve and the vehicle was not directly identified as travelling at excessive speed and there was no other relevant factor identified for the maneuver.

Whereas a fatigued driver may drift across the road in a micro-sleep, a fatigued rider may be quite alert but crash on a curve or while overtaking due to an error of judgment. It may be that some motorcycle crashes that are assumed to be due to excessive speed, may in fact be the result of poor judgment and loss of attention due to fatigue.

Driver fatigue is a general term commonly used to describe the experience of being "sleepy", "tired" or "exhausted". Fatigue is both a physiological and a psychological experience. Driver fatigue can severely impair judgment and is particularly dangerous because one of the symptoms is decreased ability to judge our own level of tiredness. A range of typical symptoms are described by the RTA [RTA, Fatigue: Fatigue Problem Definition and Countermeasures Summary, 2001].

Riding a motorcycle is far more physically and mentally demanding than driving a car. Rider fatigue is more likely to be a response to physical exhaustion than to monotony. Other factors include dehydration and exposure to the weather (heat, cold, wind noise and buffeting etc). The symptoms of rider fatigue include:

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- Loss of concentration, Drowsiness, yawning, Slow reactions, Sore or tired eyes
- Boredom, Feeling irritable and restless, Making fewer and larger steering corrections
- Having difficulty in staying in the lane, Having micro-sleeps, Joint and muscle stiffness
- Pain or weakness in hands and feet, Slow or impaired judgment and reactions.

There is an urgent need to research the causes and symptoms of motorcyclist fatigue and develop new criteria to be applied by police when reporting motorcycle crashes. This may clarify the relevance of fatigue as a factor in crashes and encourage the development of appropriate rider fatigue countermeasures.

Phi's Top Ten plus Five Tips to Avoid Fatigue

1. Get plenty of rest the day or night before the ride.
2. Make sure that you have ridden your bike for a few days before the long ride to get your muscles use to the bike.
3. Make regular stops to walk around and stretch. This should be at least every hour and a half.
4. Dress properly for the ride. Less exposure to the elements on the skin, the better.
5. The quieter for your ears, the less fatigue. Wear ear plugs to protect against wind and pipe noise.
6. Make sure your vision is not distorted in any way. Visors and Windsheilds.
7. Set realistic targets for trips. Work out the distance and your estimated speed and then double the time required to allow for rest breaks and to take the pressure off.
8. Drink lots of water. Dehydration is a serious problem for riders because you are so exposed to sun and wind.
9. Avoid coffee and soft drinks, they provide only a short term lift and then leave you more fatigued.
10. Avoid alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and even small amounts can increase the risk of a fatigue crash.
11. Eat light snacks frequently, rather than heavy meals. Digestion takes energy, which is why one feels sleepy after a heavy meal.
12. Put your weight on the foot pegs or foot boards and lift your body off the seat.
13. Sing and talk to yourself, while wiggling your toes!!
14. Shrug and rotate your shoulders.
15. Exercise on a regular basis to help maintain circulation and keep you alert.