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never would have guessed, but even at .04, I was narrow, you know? Tight. I never knew what that meant until then: your attention comes to an abrupt halt about twenty feet in front of you. Your hearing narrows. Your vision narrows--tight. I began to entertain the thought that the legal limit is disturbingly high.

So when round two of the test came, I was liquid with confidence. My cup spilled over. I felt strong. Powerful. Smooth. I was gonna ace this test. I had forgotten all about wedding pictures. I had forgotten all about personal injury. I had forgotten where my car keys were. I didn't care, I was a motorcycle god. I could do this baby in my sleep. There was nothing I wanted more than to be on that bike. I threw on my gear and performed flawlessly on the second test.

Well, not flawless, exactly. The directions seemed a little unclear. Lining up the bike on the little white "T" was particularly troublesome. I almost dropped the bike when I set my right foot down hard on a small patch of sand. My clutch control was dubious but I managed the cone weave without actually hurting anyone, though the SAGA guys with the big expensive camera looked kind of alarmed for a few seconds. I performed the test perfectly, no points off. But how embarrassing! Fortunately, no one saw the mistakes I made. Nobody was watching that close, right? Well, I mean, except for the eight or ten people standing there smiling at me. I didn't stick around to watch the others did because I lost interest and headed back to the bar.

Four more drinks and an hour later and I was again out in the sun, this time lit up like a scoreboard, pinching butts, and ready to "...get this SHOW ON THE ROAD." I blew a .09 for Trooper Doug, who, for some reason, seemed terribly amused. I gave him a quick salute, threw a leg over, and proceeded to ace another one. Every maneuver perfect. Every stop, every start smooth. No cones, no lines, no trouble. Well, I had a little trouble with the "T's" again. And I guess I had a little trouble with the cone weave. Somehow it felt like my clutch and throttle hands were no longer connected to my arms, but that was okay, because instinct took over. I think. And I did cut that one turn a little close, but I still made it. "Sorry to wreck the experiment, Karen. I won't tell anybody if you don't." I was very pleased with myself.

That is, until I saw the score-sheet. Not only had I gone over on the braking, amateurishly skidding the rear tire, I had completely blown the sharp turn, running over the boundary on the inside with both tires. The scary thing was I hadn't realized either mistake--and I knew this test, inside and out. (I help train license examiners every spring.) In the real world, it would have sounded more like this, "One minute I was just riding

along and the next minute, I woke up in this hospital room." Gordy and Trooper Doug were grinning at me and asking me how I felt. "Great--and thirsty. I passed, didn't I?" Doug told me that if he had seen me out in public somewhere, he would have stopped me. My weight had been shifting from side to side while Gordy had read the instructions, my awareness of things around me was gone, and I dismounted before putting the kickstand down, almost dropping the thing. I told Trooper Doug, "But I'm only at a point oh-nine," to which he taunted me with, "Wanna blow another one, hotshot?" I tactfully declined. I don't know if that same refusal would have gone over so well on the side of the road.

Again, I didn't pay much attention to the rest of the show, but I learned that they all did pretty much the same. Dirkie also almost dropped the bike too. Sue didn't even want to get on it. Michele failed her final test so miserably they stopped her halfway through. I believe she threw up shortly thereafter.


The consensus was that we all thought we rode better than we actually did, the little stuff gave us a lot of trouble, and the big mistakes we made were ones that could have been pretty dramatic in the real world. Fortunately, no one got hurt, and we were all sort of relieved when it was over. Back in the trailer, Carla flatly refused to serve me ANY more drinks and instead force-fed me a sandwich.

I've never had to make a decision about whether to drink and ride, so I didn't learn anything that will change my behavior. But what I learned about BAC--how bombed I was, even when I was well below the legal limit--was a real wake-up call. I know that a person can be arrested at less than a 0.10%, but I never realized just how badly two or three drinks can jam up your senses. It bothers me a little to know that a person could have seven cocktails in two-and-a-half hours and still be "legal." Actually, it bothers me a lot.

Watch yourselves out there. Author's Note: This article was written when the legal limit was 0.10 BAC in Minnesota. The legal limit is now 0.08 in all fifty states.



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