

# **TOURING TIP:**

## **Coping With Severe Weather, Part 1 – Lightning**

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Riders traveling by motorcycle are much more vulnerable to severe weather conditions than passengers in an automobile. Some riders are under the mistaken impression that a motorcycle's rubber tires will protect them in the event of a lightning strike. A car, with its steel frame, usually conducts a lightning charge around the passengers, insulating them from an electrical current that can contain over 100 million volts and reach 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Motorcycles and convertibles, on the other hand, provide little or no protection.

Another common misconception about lightning is that it is an infrequent event. On the contrary, it's estimated that the US alone receives as many as 20 million cloud-to-ground lightning strikes a year from some 100,000 thunderstorms. Another myth is that lightning strikes the highest object on the ground, when in fact it seeks the best conductor for discharging its electrical charge. And that "best conductor" is all too often a human being; hundreds of people are injured or killed each year, largely because they are not aware of when they are at risk.

Although all 50 states receive lightning strikes, some states and areas are much more prone to them than others. Midwestern and southern states generally have a higher incidence of lightning than the west or upper east coasts. Florida, for example, has the dubious distinction of being the lightning leader in the US. Here are a few tips to help you mitigate the risk of a lightning strike while you're on tour:

1. Determine if you will be riding in lightning prone areas before leaving home. Check the Internet and other knowledgeable sources (e.g., [www.weather.com/ready/lightning/risk.html](http://www.weather.com/ready/lightning/risk.html))
2. Consult daily weather forecasts while you're on the road. Many smart phones have applications that let you see radar images of storms.
3. A Severe Thunderstorm Watch means that conditions in the watch area are conducive to the development of severe thunderstorms.
4. A Severe Thunderstorm Warning means that one has been visually spotted or indicated on radar in the warning area. (A severe thunderstorm is one which produces hail of ¾ inches in diameter or larger, wind gusts of 58 mph or greater and/or tornadoes.)
5. Since lightning always accompanies thunderstorms, keep an eye out for threatening cloud formations.
6. Equate the sound of thunder with the presence of lightning. If you're close enough to hear thunder, you can be struck by lightning.
7. In the absence of thunder, the first bolts from a towering cloud can catch you by surprise; these bolts can extend several miles out from the clouds.
8. Estimate the approximate distance to the lightning by using this simple formula: seconds between seeing lightning flash and hearing thunder divided by 5 = miles away.
9. If caught out on the road in a thunderstorm, don't take shelter under trees or other objects likely to attract lightning bolts.
10. Never ride into a thunderstorm; wait it out in an appropriate shelter.

(Source: The Weather Channel website: [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com))