

Motorcycle Laws

Motorcycle (Definition): A motorcycle is defined under the California Vehicle Code as a vehicle that has a seat or saddle for the rider and is designed to travel on no more than three wheels.

Motor-driven cycles (Definition): The California Vehicle Code defines a “motor-driven cycle” as a motorcycle with an engine of 149cc or less.

Motorized bicycles (moped) (Definition): Defined under the California Vehicle Code as (1) a two or three-wheeled vehicle capable of no more than 30 mph on level ground and equipped with fully operative pedals for human propulsion, a motor producing less than two gross brake horsepower and an automatic transmission, and an electric motor with or without pedals for human propulsion [Cal. Veh. Code Sec. 406(a)] or (2) a vehicle with pedals and an electric motor which cannot be driven at speeds of more than 20 mph on level ground even if assisted by human power [Cal. Veh. Code Sec 406(b)].

Motorized scooter (Definition): Defined under the California Vehicle Code as a two-wheeled device with a motor, handlebars, and a floorboard for standing on when riding and having either a driver seat which cannot interfere with the operator's ability to stand or ride, or, the ability to be powered by human propulsion.

License Requirements: Riders must either have a Class M1 or M2 license to operate a motorized cycle on California roadways. A motorcyclist with a Class M1 license may operate any two-wheel motorcycle, motor-driven cycle, or motorized scooter and all vehicles listed under Class M2. A Class M2 license allows the holder to operate any motorized bicycle, moped, or a bicycle with an attached motor, or a motorized scooter.

California Helmet Law: Cal. Veh. Code Sec. 27803 states that any driver or passenger of a motorcycle, motor-driven cycle or bicycle shall wear a safety helmet meeting the standards of Sec. 27802 (fastened by helmet straps and is of a size that fits the wearing person's head securely without excessive lateral or vertical movement).

Lane Sharing/Splitting: Lane sharing is legal in California but is discouraged because it is potentially very dangerous. A motorcycle rider may share a lane with another car or motorcycle rider. Cal. Veh. Code Sec 21200. Motorcyclists should know that police officers will often blame the motorcyclist for an injury accident involving lane splitting.

Modification of Motorcycle Exhaust System: Under the California Vehicle Code, Sections 27150-27159, exhaust systems may be modified so long as the modification meets the law's strict requirements. With regard to the noise produced by the exhaust system, the loudness can be no louder than 92dbA for motorcycles manufactured before 1970, 88 dba for motorcycles produced between 1970 and 1973, 86 dba for motorcycles produced between 1972 and 1975, 83 dba for motorcycles produced between 1974 and 1986, and 80 dbA for motorcycles produced after 1985. In short, the newer the motorcycle, the less noise it can legally produce.