

## ALCOHOL AND MOTORCYCLES DON'T MIX

And That Includes Your Gas Tank



Late last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved a new gasoline formulation that contains up to 15 percent alcohol by volume, also known as E15.

Never heard of it? In the coming months you probably will, as ethanol-based E15 will become an important issue for the on- and off-highway motorcycling and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) communities.

In a nutshell, E15 may appear at a fueling station near you and you need to be careful—in fact *very* careful—where you use this new fuel.



By Imre Szauter

In October 2010, the EPA approved E15 for use in model year 2007 and newer light-duty vehicles (cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles). In January 2011, it added model year 2001-06 light-duty vehicles to the approved list. Because flexible-fuel vehicles are approved to use E85 (85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline), they may also use E15.

More important to riders, though, are the vehicles and engines that are not approved for E15, which currently include *all motorcycles and ATVs*.

Also on the unapproved list are vehicles with heavy-duty engines, such as school buses, transit buses and delivery trucks; off-road vehicles, such as boats and snowmobiles; small engines, such as lawnmowers and chain saws; and all cars older than 2001.

While the AMA applauds efforts to make our nation more energy efficient, the problem is that E15 burns hotter than gasoline that contains a lesser amount of ethanol. In engines not designed to dissipate that extra heat, damage in the form of premature wear can result.

Although this is a concern in all motorcycles, it's particularly problematic for air-cooled engines found in many bikes.

When you consider everything in your garage, storage shed and basement that runs on gasoline, you may discover you have more E15 *non-approved* vehicles and engines than *approved* ones.

To double-check whether an engine shouldn't use E15, review the owner's manual for anything you own that runs on gasoline. Check the fuel requirements—it's likely that you'll find a statement that you should only use gasoline with no more than 10 percent ethanol by volume or you'll void the warranty.

So, what should you do?

Keep an eye out for E15, and avoid it. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind:

- Don't dispense E15 into unmarked containers, as you'll likely forget in a week what's in the can.
- Don't store any ethanol-blended gasoline for long periods, as it absorbs water from the air. Make sure you use a quality gasoline

stabilizer if your vehicle or engine won't be started for some time.

- Don't siphon gasoline from a light-duty vehicle for use in any other gasoline-fueled motors, as you may be introducing E15 into an unapproved vehicle or engine.

- Do use the internet to locate and patronize fueling stations that dispense E0—gasoline with no added ethanol. Many marinas still sell E0, so consider bodies of water as R&R (rest and refuel) stops when you travel. Check [pure-gas.org](http://pure-gas.org) for more information.

If you want to take it to another level, there are opportunities to get involved in shaping the E15 issue.

- Contact the fueling stations you visit to let them know your concerns about E15. If a retail location gets enough pushback from customers, they may choose to keep their current fuel offerings, instead of replacing one choice with E15.

- Follow the issue—a good consumer is an informed consumer. Search the Web for articles on ethanol-blended fuels, but carefully note the source of any information you read. Some with a financial interest in ethanol are quick to say we have nothing to worry about. Don't take their word for it—read and decide for yourself.

- Read the science—the Oak Ridge National Laboratory has published "Effects of Intermediate Ethanol Blends on Legacy Vehicles and Small Non-Road Engines, Report 1 – Updated." Although it's quite technical, it's still a good resource on the use of ethanol-blended gasoline on older vehicles and engines. Visit <http://www.ornl.gov/sci/bioenergy/pdfs/EffectsIntermediateEthanolBlends.pdf> to download a copy.

- Ask your federal lawmakers to support H.R. 748, introduced by U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.). H.R. 748 would prohibit the EPA from allowing the sale of gasoline containing more than 10 percent ethanol in light-duty vehicles.

- Go to [AmericanMotorcyclist.com](http://AmericanMotorcyclist.com) > Rights > Get Involved to contact your federal elected officials and for additional ideas. Sharing your personal experiences with ethanol in gasoline can affect their position on the issue.

The bottom line on E15 for motorcyclists and ATV riders?

At this time, you shouldn't use it in your vehicle. Even if E15 is eventually authorized for use in newer motorcycles and ATVs, pay careful attention to the manufacturer's warnings.

Finally, when it comes to alcohol and motorcycling, alcohol in our gas tank shouldn't be our only concern. A large number of motorcycle crashes resulting in serious injury or death reveal that alcohol consumption was involved with riders and/or the drivers in the other vehicles.

When it comes to alcohol and motorcycles, they just don't mix.

*Imre Szauter is the AMA government affairs manager for on-highway issues.*