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## BLOUNT COUNTY'S DRAGON

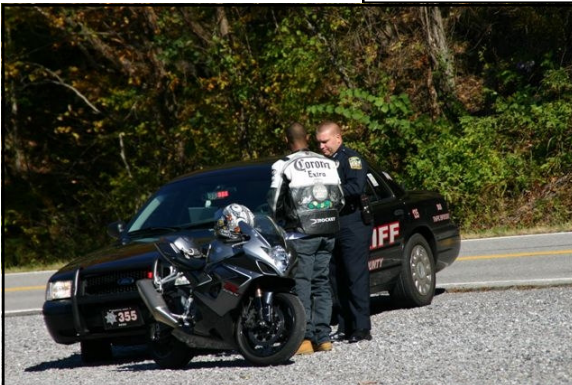
### An Update on Motorcycle Safety

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**THE TAIL OF THE DRAGON.** No, we are not talking about a fire-breathing monster; we are talking about one of the largest tourism attractions of mountainous Blount County, Tennessee. Within Blount County lies part of the heavily-visited Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Around the southwest perimeter of the Park twists U.S. Highway 129, commonly known to motorcycle enthusiasts as "The Tail of the Dragon" or simply "The Dragon" because of its hairpin turns. Bikers from all around the world flock to Blount County to experience this eleven mile portion of the highway that features 318 curves. In addition to the Dragon, other frequented routes inside Blount County include the Foothills Parkway and the various roadways that traverse the National Park, including the Cades Cove Loop.



Saturation Enforcement on the Dragon

Blount County is fortunate to be blessed with the natural beauty that attracts tourists. On the flip side of this blessing; however, is the ever-present and growing safety concern for bikers and other motorists on these heavily populated roads. The Blount County Sheriff's Office and the Tennessee Highway Patrol heavily patrol the Dragon to keep accidents and reckless behavior to a minimum. Unfortunately, though, injuries and deaths occur on this stretch of road at an unfortunate rate. Five died on the dragon in 2006. Many of these crashes could have been avoided if operators and other motorists sharing the road exercised basic safety rules. According to the Blount County Sheriff's Office, an average of three to five accidents are reported in this area every day during the summer months. Many of these crashes are caused by motorcycles and sports cars engaging in reckless behavior.

According to Blount County Sheriff's Deputy Ronnie Reagan, who serves in the Sheriff's Office Motorcycle Unit, one of the most significant problems in crashes is one that is not only STILL the law, but is one of common sense: not wearing a helmet. Reagan says that many riders want to be able to choose whether or not to wear a helmet. Reagan is opinionated himself on the matter; he would rather live to see another day than experience the "freedom" of not wearing a helmet.

Other problems commonly seen in Blount County are failure to maintain lane control and passing in a no-passing zone. A motorcyclist was recently killed on the Dragon when he attempted to pass another motorcycle in a no-passing zone in a curve unfortunately known as "Dead Man's Curve." He met an oncoming car head-on in the curve and subsequently died shortly after the impact.

Because of the high number of motor vehicle crashes on this stretch of roadway, the Blount County Sheriff's Office, Tennessee Highway Patrol, Maryville Police Department, and Alcoa Police Department have teamed up with the Governor's Highway Safety Office to start an aggressive enforcement campaign along this stretch of highway to attempt to abate the number of crashes and otherwise reckless behavior. This campaign will allow for increased personnel to patrol the area during peak times.

When riding on the Dragon or anywhere else, know your limits on a motorcycle. Many of the accidents and crashes involving motorcycles could have been avoided if common sense had been used. Wear a helmet. Stay in your lane and pass only when it is safe to do so.

For those motorcycle enthusiasts who have not yet experienced the Dragon or have not yet visited Blount County, we certainly urge you to do so and would welcome your visit.