

Things to Think About

A curious thing happens when you're on a motorcycle. Ordinary things become interesting, and attract your attention. So you need to stay focused on the task at hand; riding safely and keeping out of danger. Think about what tasks you do every time you get on your bike. You must coordinate the actions of your hands, feet, eyes, ears, and body movements. At the same time, you must decide how to react to what you see, hear, and feel in relation to other vehicles and drivers, traffic signs and signals, conditions of the highway, and the performance of your bike. These decisions are usually made close to other vehicles and must be converted quickly into action - brake, steer, accelerate, or a combination of all - to maintain or adjust your position in traffic. And these decisions must be made frequently. About 20 major decisions are needed for each mile ridden and riders frequently have less than one-half second to act to avoid a collision.

There are everyday, every ride things you need to practice. On typical rides, do you notice the location of sewer grates, manhole covers, potholes, or even run-of-the-mill bumps? Do you find a "line" through even the straightest pieces of road; a line that will allow you the safest, smoothest route? Having this sense of awareness will not only make you a better rider, but also keep your risk level at a minimum.

Do you know how many cars are ahead of you at all times? Behind you? Do you watch not only the car in front of you, but also the car in front of it? Do you take heed to the warning signs of danger like a driver up ahead checking his sideview mirrors? Or kids jumping around like maniacs in the back of a mini van? What about keeping your bike in gear at a stoplight, while keeping one eye on traffic in your mirrors? Do you adjust the position of your bike within your lane according to specific situations?

If the car you're following has its left turn signal on, do you move over to the right side of the lane? This allows the cars following you to see without obstruction the turn signal of the car ahead and warns them of stopped vehicles up in front. If the car you're tailing has its right turn signal on, do you move over to the left side of the lane? This again permits cars following to see more clearly. But just before you stop behind the car, do you move over to the right hand side of the lane? Being stopped behind the car on the right hand side offers an escape route if in fact the cars behind do not stop in time to avoid a collision.

Are you aware of the dangers of a vehicle pulling out into your path from a side road, or turning left in front of you? There may be some early warning signs that this is about to happen. Do you look the other driver in the eyes? This will help you determine if he is aware of your presence. But, don't assume that he will yield just because he (acts as though he) sees you. Do you watch the car's brake lights if you can see them? If they go off, it's a pretty good bet that he will pull out. Do you watch the vehicle's front wheels? This may give you an early warning that the driver is about to start rolling. What this strategy does is allow you to practice Time & Space Management.

Remember, recognizing hazards is not enough. You must be ready to take action in order to avoid incident. The best way to prepare yourself is to practice SEE: Scan, Evaluate, and Execute. So, if you don't remember ever doing any of the things mentioned above, pay attention next time. It could save your life.