

The March safety article dealt with three components of safe riding; a mental strategy, riding skills and protective equipment. This month I talk about a mental strategy advocated by The Motorcycle Safety Foundation called S.E.E.

SEE Riding Strategy

How many of us go to the casino or buy a lottery ticket and really expect to win big? Casino games like roulette and slot machines are games of chance. The lottery is a game of chance. They all depend on luck to win. And the odds are against us.

Chess, on the other hand, is a game of skill. To win the game of chess, you must have a strategy and keep thinking two or three moves ahead. You must anticipate what your opponent might do and be prepared to counter their actions.

There are similar comparisons in riding a motorcycle. You can depend on luck when you ride. You can hope that everyone else on the road will see you and give you room. You can depend on luck to keep the hazards of the road away from you. But the odds are against you.

Skilled riders don't depend on luck. They rely on a street riding strategy to anticipate the actions of others and to prepare their response. They know a riding strategy will help them enjoy their ride and complete it safely.

A good street riding strategy includes an easily remembered system that focuses your attention on what is going on around you and helps you avoid situations that could be harmful. Your system should manage and minimize the risks to which you are exposed when riding. The strategy taught by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation is S.E.E., which is an acronym for the mental process used to make judgments and take action in traffic.

It stands for:

- **Search** – As you ride, scan the area aggressively, including the areas along the road and behind you. Check your mirrors frequently to maintain a constant awareness of your surroundings.
- **Evaluate** – Use that information to evaluate the situation, predict what unexpected hazards and challenges may arise, and actively formulate strategies to deal with them.
- **Execute** – Adjust your speed and positioning accordingly, while communicating your intentions to others.

SEARCH

The active part of visibility is you're looking for and seeing the things that can affect you – gathering information through your eyes. In essence, this is "searching" everywhere and "seeing" only what is important. This process is scanning: an aggressive search for potential hazards. Scanning provides the information you need to make decisions and take action.

Scanning covers more than just what is in front of you. You must be aware of what is to either side and behind you. Don't let your eyes fix on any one object for more than a split second. This will help you be aware of anything that may affect you. Scan a 12-to-14 second path of travel. This means looking ahead to an area it would take you 12 seconds to reach. This will give you time to prepare for a situation before it is in your immediate path of travel, the area four seconds ahead of you. Situations within this area require your immediate response.

Gather information about roadside and road surfaces: trees can shelter damp or icy spots in their shade; potholes can spread loose gravel on the road. Look at the movement of the traffic around you: cars ahead, behind, and beside you. Remember that intersections, where other vehicles can cross your path of travel, are especially critical. Driveways, parking lots, and side streets can quickly develop into problems. Take the responsibility for knowing what is happening around you. And don't overlook pedestrians and animals. Include your rearview mirrors in your scanning, but

don't rely on them. Turn your head to check the blind spots your mirrors will miss, especially when changing lanes, turning, or stopping.

Locate hazards and potential conflicts. The hazards you encounter can be divided into three groups based on how critical their effect on you may be.

- **Cars, trucks, and other vehicles** - They share the road with you, they move quickly, and your reactions to them are critical.
- **Pedestrians and animals** - They are characterized by unpredictability and short, quick moves.
- **Stationary objects** - Chuckholes, guard rails, bridges, roadway signs, hedges, or rows of trees won't move into your path, but may create or complicate situations.

The greatest potential for a conflict between you and other traffic is at intersections. An intersection can be in the middle of an urban area or at a driveway on a residential street-anywhere other traffic may cross your path of travel. Most motorcycle/automobile collisions occur at intersections. And most of these collisions are caused by an oncoming vehicle turning left into the path of the motorcycle. Using SEE at intersections is critical.

Before you enter an intersection, scan for:

- Oncoming traffic that may turn left in front of you.
- Traffic from the left.
- Traffic from the right.
- Traffic approaching from behind.

Be especially alert at intersections with limited visibility. Be aware of visually "busy" surroundings that could camouflage you and your motorcycle.

EVALUATE

Next you should predict what the consequences of the hazards are and prioritize them. You want to deal with the most important situation first. The direction of a potential hazard is important. Clearly, a vehicle moving away from you is not as critical as a vehicle moving in your path.

Determine what the hazard might do and where a collision might occur. How critical is the hazard? How probable is a collision? What do you need to do to avoid the hazard? Is there a need to downshift to be able to respond more quickly? This is the "What if . . ." phase of SEE that depends on your knowledge and experience. You must then estimate the consequences of the hazard. How might the hazard - or your effort to avoid it - affect you and others?

Determine what you need to do based on your prediction. The mental process of determining your course of action depends on how aggressively you searched. The result is your action and knowing which strategy is best for the situation. You want to eliminate or reduce the potential hazard. You must decide when, where and how to take action. Your constant decision-making tasks must stay sharp to cope with constantly changing traffic situations.

The decisions you make can be grouped by the three types of hazards you encounter:

- **Single hazard** - This situation presents the most basic of decisions. Adjust speed and/or position to create more space and *minimize* the hazard.
- **Two hazards** - Apply the old adage, "One step at a time." Adjust your speed to permit the two hazards to *separate*. Then deal with them one at a time as single hazards.
- **Multiple hazards** - Sometimes two hazards won't separate. Sometimes you will be faced with more than two hazards. This is where decision-making becomes complex. You must weigh the consequences of the various hazards and *compromise* by giving equal distance to the hazards.

EXECUTE

Carry out your decision. This is when your riding skills come into play. And this is where they must be second nature. The best decision will be meaningless without the skills to carry it out.

You carry out your decision in three ways:

1. Communication is the most passive action you can take since it depends on the response of someone else. Use your lights or horn to get the attention of drivers when necessary, but don't rely on them *receiving* your communication and reacting to it. Instead, focus on more *active* responses.
2. Adjust speed by accelerating, slowing, or stopping.
3. Adjust position by changing lane position or completely changing direction.

The degree of adjustment depends on how critical the hazard is and how much time and space you have. The more time and space, the less the degree of adjustment, the less the amount of risk.

In areas of high potential risk, such as intersections, give yourself more space and take steps to reduce the time you need to react. Cover both brakes and the clutch and be ready with possible escape routes. In fact, the greatest risk to all motorcyclists is the violation of their right-of-way by the driver of another vehicle. This occurs most often at intersections when a car turns left in front of the motorcyclist. You should be extra alert in such situations. This is not to suggest that other hazards are not important, but the Hurt Study reported that "the failure of motorists to detect and recognize motorcycles in traffic is the predominating cause of motorcycle accidents. The driver of the other vehicle involved in a collision with the motorcycle did not see the motorcycle before the collision, or did not see the motorcycle until too late to avoid the collision." One-third of all intersection accidents involve car drivers turning in front of other drivers and reporting that they didn't see the other car. The incidence of such accident configurations is higher for motorcyclists. The best approach you can take is to ride like you are invisible. Don't expect anyone to see you.

Smart riding does not depend on luck. It's not a game of chance. Skilled riders know a sound strategy will help them more than luck. The choice is yours. A good mental system will help you enjoy your ride today and allow you to enjoy another ride tomorrow. Remember that riding is more a task of the eyes and the mind than it is of the hands and the feet. The more you use your mental skills to keep you out of trouble, the less you'll have to rely on your physical skills to get you out of a jam.

Portions of this article were taken from "Skill or Luck?" by Chuck Miles and from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's "Guide To Motorcycling Excellence".