

We, as motorcyclists are at a great disadvantage on the highway. Motorcycles are less forgiving than four wheelers so we must stay alert and concentrate at all times. Additionally, motorcycles are much smaller than the other vehicles on the road and we are totally exposed. A minor collision for a four wheeler could be deadly for us. However, we do have some advantages. Motorcycles are more nimble and maneuverable than our four wheeled counterparts. We must capitalize on these advantages to compensate for the disadvantages. We can do this by how we position ourselves relative to other vehicles and road hazards. The key is to maintain visibility and sufficient space cushion around our bikes so that we can anticipate potential hazards and act to avoid them before they occur.

Lane Position

The best lane position in which to ride is a compromise between maintaining maximum separation from potential left-turning vehicles crossing your path, having adequate distance to the right side to avoid roadside hazards, being able to see the road and traffic ahead and making yourself visible to others, and establishing an escape route.

Riding in the left wheel track (left third of the lane) is usually the best location for several reasons. It provides the best opportunity to see oncoming vehicles and for them to see you. It puts you in the line of sight (rear view mirror) of the vehicle directly in front of you and keeps you out of the large blind spot that cars and trucks have at the right rear quarter. It allows you to see farther into, and be more easily seen from road junctions on the left. It provides you the best line of sight for the road, and improves the view of potential hazards ahead. It avoids the slippery area that may be formed in the center of the lane caused by leaks from other vehicles. It provides a buffer zone when passing parked vehicles.

However, there are many times when it is advisable to use the center or right portion of the lane. Before cresting a hill, move to the center or right lane position in case an oncoming vehicle is over the center line. When going into a curve, choose a position that will give the best view through the curve and to the exit. When a large vehicle is approaching, move to the right lane position to minimize the turbulence or wind blast that it may create. During the first few minutes of a rain storm, ride in the tracks of the vehicles in front of you. When rain water first enters the pores of the road, it forces up the oil that has been collecting there. The tires of the vehicles in front will tend to push away the water and oil.

Always be prepared to make adjustments based on road conditions and traffic patterns. If the car you're following has its left turn signal on, move to the right side of the lane. This will allow the vehicles following you to see the turn signal of the car ahead. If the car you're following has its right turn signal on, move to the left side of the lane, but just before you stop behind the car, move 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 vehicles behind do not stop in time to avoid a collision.

Controlling your lane is as important as any other consideration when choosing your lane position. Use the full lane you are entitled to, and try to discourage other motorists from sharing or moving into your lane. When preparing to make a turn, don't move to the extreme left or right portion of your lane. Doing so will invite other vehicles to pull up beside you in the lane, especially at a stop.

Space Cushion

You can't control the other vehicles on the road, but you can control how you interact with them. Position your motorcycle to create a "space cushion" all around you. This will allow you time to recognize and respond to changing traffic conditions and road hazards.

When conditions are ideal, stay at least two seconds behind the vehicle ahead of you. Constantly be alert for road hazards. Look far ahead (four to twelve seconds) to allow extra time and space to react. Your best defense against any sort of hazard is to stay away from it.

Use your mirrors to watch the vehicles behind you. If a vehicle behind you is following too closely, increase your following distance from the vehicle ahead. This will allow you more space to stop gradually if necessary and consequently give the vehicle behind you more time to stop, reducing the risk of a rear-end collision. As

you approach a stop, keep an eye on traffic behind you, and look for an escape route. That is, can you go to the right or left of the vehicle in front of you if you have to get out of the way of traffic coming up behind you? When you do stop, stay in first gear, keep both hands on the grips, and scan your mirrors every 3 to 5 seconds, watching for approaching vehicles.

Intersections

Intersections are the most likely place for a motorcycle accident, with another vehicle violating the rider's right-of-way. When approaching an intersection, never assume that you have been seen by other motorists. If a vehicle can enter your path, assume that it will. Slow down, cover your brakes and clutch and proceed with caution. Choose a lane position that makes you most visible to vehicles waiting to turn. Be aware of any drivers behind you who may not have time to stop if you have to brake suddenly. Avoid flashing your high beam, and make sure your turn signals aren't blinking as this can send other drivers the wrong message.

Consider a short beep of your horn and try to make eye contact.

If an oncoming vehicle is about to make a left turn across your lane, slow down and move to the right portion of the lane. This will increase the space between you and the oncoming vehicle. If a vehicle is about to enter the intersection from the right, stay or move to the left portion of your lane. If traffic is about to enter the intersection from both sides of the road, stay in the left portion of the lane, but be prepared to take evasive action or stop.

Multi-Lane Roads

Out on an interstate highway, conditions are considerably different. A limited-access freeway, by definition, has different traffic-flow characteristics and conflict points. The most significant difference is the absence of oncoming and crossing traffic. Conflict points tend to be toward the right side of the highway where ramps funnel traffic on and off. If you aren't entering or exiting, stay away from these areas.

Use your bike's power and maneuverability to ride in open zones in traffic. In any grouping of vehicles there are always some gaps; find these and ride in them. Doing so will separate you from other vehicles, give you additional room to maneuver and allow you to keep away from dangerous situations. And vary your speed. Riding along with the flow can make you invisible to other drivers, especially in heavy traffic.

In moderate-to-heavy traffic, the best place to be is in the (right track of the) left lane. In this lane, you limit your exposure to traffic conflicts on all sides. In the left lane you can essentially eliminate concerns to the left - a significant reduction in area that you must monitor. In all states, motorcycles can use the HOV lanes.

In less congested traffic, just go with the flow. Follow the basic rule of the road and stay to the right except to pass.