



Street Tactics- Steve Warmath, Safety Officer

May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

Check Your Six

Baseball great Satchel Paige once said, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." Good advice, maybe, for a seemingly ageless pitcher, but not so good for motorcyclists, especially when they're stopped at an intersection and don't see the distracted driver bearing down on them from behind. It takes more than a working brake light to prevent being bunted into a busy intersection or squashed like a bug between two bumpers. Here are some tips to help you avoid getting caught in a

squeeze play. As you decelerate for a stoplight, check your mirrors to see if the traffic behind you is slowing down, too. Touch the brakes several times to flash your brake lights. Be extra vigilant if you decide to stop for a fresh yellow light in case the guy behind you decides to run it. And while we don't generally advocate running a yellow, that's your best course of action if it's clear that the car behind you is planning to.

Now that you've stopped, be ready to go again in a heartbeat in case the space you're in seems in imminent danger of being occupied by a speeding car. Position your bike on either side of the greasy center of the lane. Leave the transmission in gear and hold the clutch in. If that's not practical, put your right foot down, leave your left foot on the peg ready to engage first gear, and cover the clutch lever.

Always have an out in case the car in your mirror is becoming alarmingly large, alarmingly quick. If you're turning left and there's a curb or a median to your left and a car in front of you, position your bike on the right side of the lane so you can slip around the car if necessary. But be aware of through traffic coming up behind you that are not slowing down to turn. Stop far enough back from the car ahead to give yourself room to maneuver. If your front tire is inches from a bumper, you won't be able to turn without backing up first. That's a bad place to be.

In addition to bike placement, bike equipment can help tip the odds in your favor. Keep your mirrors clean and adjusted properly, and if all you can see in them is your elbows, swap them out for ones that do what mirrors are supposed to do. Check your brake light and taillights often, invest in some auxiliary brake lights, and add some reflective tape to the back of your bike for night riding. Every little bit helps.

Smokey and the Bandit

You didn't see **The Law** heading the other direction at light speed until it was too late. But The Law has seen you. A tap of the brakes, a quick trip across the median and he's on the way to have a nice little roadside chat with you.

Wonderful. You know you're going to have a conversation, and you probably already know exactly why you're going to have it. So the burning question is: Can you do anything to get out of a ticket? Are there any surefire ways to get let off with a warning instead of a piece of paper? No. At least nothing that will absolutely, positively work every time. But there are tactics you should use in every encounter with police or the highway patrol to aid your chances.

Be calm. Acknowledge the fact that you're being pulled over with a wave if you're being followed and by nodding should the officer come up beside you. Smooth, easy movements; just let him know that you know your next destination is the side of the road. On that note, pick a safe spot where the bike won't get mired in sand and where he has sufficient room to park the cruiser. If you've been tagged by a motor officer, provide him room and a reasonable surface to stop his bike.

The next minute is critical. Stop the bike, turn off the ignition, set the bike on the side stand and slowly get off the bike. Stand on the side of the bike away from the road and open your helmet visor. Keep your hands in view. What you're doing is assuring the officer that you're not going to run, or produce a weapon from your jacket or luggage and cause him physical harm. Your sole goal at this point is to put the officer at ease.



Don't talk. The officer will begin the conversation, usually asking for license and registration, though sometimes you may be asked to remove your helmet before you get to that stage. Again, do it slowly. Before going for the license, tell him where it is before you reach for it. "Yes, sir. It's in my wallet, back pocket." After handing over your license, let him know where the registration and insurance paperwork is. Produce it with a minimum of fuss; a big portion of getting through the next few minutes with the benefit of the doubt is to have all your paperwork in order. If you're riding on an expired license or registration, don't have a motorcycle endorsement, or can't find your insurance paperwork (for states with compulsory insurance), you're most of the way to getting some kind of ticket, if only because you seem to say, "I don't care about the law." "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" like crazy. Confrontational behavior will only be met with more of the same. Do not admit to any speed. Sometimes, that "how fast do you think you were going?" question is a fishing expedition. Don't bite. Worst of all is flat-out lying. If you've been doing 80 mph, don't try to say you were going 60. Traffic officers pride themselves on being able to judge speed at a glance, and the best ones can guess within 2-3 mph of actual. You are not going to win that argument.

Show remorse. Unless the officer has retreated to his heated/air-conditioned car to write the ticket, stand there and apologize for your stupidity. If he says you were going 80, the best thing you can say is, "Geez, that seems kinda dumb, huh?" Answer his questions in a forthright way, succinctly. Then stop talking. A pause in the conversation as he stands there with your license in hand, looking over you and your motorcycle means he is probably thinking about letting you off. Don't change his mind by saying something dumb. No doughnut jokes, ever. This is human nature in action. If you seem reasonable and sincere, and don't act like the kind of fool who would serially run triple digits in a school zone, you stand a decent chance of getting a warning. Proper, complete gear, a bike that's not the latest 190-horsepower beast and a bit of gray hair are also helpful. And if you do get a ticket, hold your argument for court. No whining to the cop.

Animal Hazards

It doesn't happen very often but even while traveling on a freeway you can suddenly be confronted with an animal in your path. Certainly it happens with some frequency in the country, and on city streets you must be ever concerned about usually domesticated types.

Those who ride in the country tend to confront five types of animals with some regularity: deer, dogs, cattle, birds and horses in roughly that order of frequency. On surface streets there are usually just two varieties: dogs and children (both an animal and wildlife in my book.) Dogs on a freeway are usually road kill before you get to them.



If you see an animal in your path, given plenty of warning, the obvious best move is to slow down and give it as wide a clearance as possible. However, in the case of an animal that 'was in front of me out of nowhere' situations, you have an immediate decision to make ... to swerve and try to avoid it, or to panic stop.

That is a false choice to make! If you think that you can figure out where a deer is going to be in the next 5 seconds, you are dead wrong! But more than that, if you think that you can, in a panic, swerve your motorcycle and retain control of it - not run into oncoming traffic, or the side of the mountain, or off the road, or over steer it into a crash after avoiding the animal, or swerve right into the animal which has jumped into your new path, then you are probably also of the opinion that it can't happen to you in any event.

If you hit a cement truck at 5 mph you will probably walk away from it. If you hit ANYTHING while traveling at 50 mph or faster, you probably will not. The difference is your speed. Swerving does not reduce your speed. What it will do is give away some control.

Your best move is almost always to try a CONTROLLED panic stop. Do not lose control of your bike. Minimize the speed of impact. If you are good, and practiced, you might not hit anything at all. Even if luck is against you you will

probably still walk away from it.

“Be careful out there....it’s a jungle.” *Steve*