

Safety at Intersections

General guidance for approaching and riding through intersections

Approach intersections with extreme caution and a high level of alertness. This is where serious accidents happen.

When approaching an intersection, ride in a position that provides you best view of the traffic situation. Separate yourself from traffic to increase your visibility to other vehicles. Maintain a space cushion to allow room to maneuver and be aware of possible escape routes.

Reduce speed, cover your brakes, and prepare yourself for avoidance maneuvers. Reducing speed gives you more time to scan and assess the situation and to react to possible hazards. It also shortens your braking distance. Covering your brakes reduces your reaction time. Slowing just 10 mph reduces your necessary stopping distance by almost half. Be in a gear in which you can accelerate if necessary to avoid a collision.

Check for traffic coming from all directions before going through an intersection. Don't accelerate to try to get through the intersection on a yellow light. It takes much longer to stop if accelerating. Watch for surface hazards at the intersection and avoid putting your foot down on a slippery surface when stopping.

Vehicles approaching from the front

The most common serious crash occurs because an approaching vehicle turns left into the path of an oncoming motorcycle. When approaching an intersection, become extremely alert if you see a vehicle in a position to turn left in front of you. Drivers don't see a motorcycle or see it too late to avoid a collision. Riders must be conspicuous to left turning drivers, try to anticipate drivers' actions, and prepare for avoidance maneuvers.

Ride in a position so that the driver can see you. Don't be hidden by a large vehicle that you are following closely. A driver may attempt to turn left right behind the vehicle because he doesn't see you and thinks that the area is clear.

Add more and brighter lighting to increase the frontal conspicuity of your bike. A bright headlamp or a modulating headlamp may get the driver's attention as you approach. Auxiliary lights or running lights on either side of the headlamp make the bike appear wider and assist drivers in seeing the bike and judging its distance and closure rate. Be more conspicuous by weaving slightly back and forth within your lane as you approach.

Be aware of the sun. If the sun is casting a long shadow in front of you and the oncoming driver has his sun visor down, it is possible that he will have difficulty seeing you because of sun glare in his eyes.

Anticipating the actions of a driver who may not see you may reduce your vulnerability. Look for clues that the vehicle intends to turn left. A turn signal light is an obvious sign. The vehicle reducing speed as it approaches the intersection, the hood dipping slightly as the vehicle brakes, the vehicle moving closer to the centerline, and the front tires turning left are indications that the vehicle intends to turn. If it is stopped, watch the top of the left wheel. Its movement will provide the first indication that the turn has started. Reduce your speed. If traffic permits, move further to the right. Sounding your horn may alert the driver to your presence but be prepared to brake hard.

Vehicles approaching from roads on the right or left

When riding through an intersection, there is a presumption that vehicles approaching from roads on the right or left are stopped at a traffic light or Stop sign and that you have the right of way. Caution is still advised, however. Drivers run red lights and Stop signs and don't always notice the motorcycles in their paths. Try to ride in a position to see and be seen by this traffic entering the road from the sides.

Vehicles approaching from the right are of particular concern. They are closer to your path of travel and your view of them may be limited by buildings, other vehicles, etc. Moving to the left lane or to the left part of your lane allows you to see them and them to see you earlier than if you ride close to the right side of the road. It also gives you more room to maneuver if necessary. Beware of a driver coming in from the right, intending to turn right on a red light, and unable to see you because of stopped traffic in the lane to his left. In general, moving away from a potential threat has merit, e.g., moving to the left when approaching a vehicle entering the intersection from the right and moving to the right when approaching one on the left.

When stopped at a red light or stop sign, don't proceed through an intersection until you are absolutely certain that the way is clear. Beware of drivers running red lights. Wait a second or two after the light changes before entering the intersection. Often traffic will block your view when stopped at an intersection, especially if a turning lane is present. If you find your view blocked, slowly ease ahead and lean forward until you can see past the offending vehicle, while keeping your front tire from entering the path of traffic.

Don't pass a vehicle on a single lane road if there is an intersecting road ahead on the left. A driver on that road intending to turn right will naturally look to his left for approaching traffic. He may not look as carefully to the right where he expects the lane to be clear. This puts a passing motorcycle in jeopardy.

Vehicles approaching from the rear

The most likely hazard from the rear is a vehicle running into a bike that is slowing down or stopped at the intersection. A distracted driver may fail to see a motorcycle stopped in front of him. Glare from the sun can also increase risk. If the sun

is in your eyes as you approach the intersection, it is also in the eyes of the driver behind you.

On the rear of your bike, more lights, brighter lights, and brake lights that flash may make it more conspicuous to a following driver. Signal your intention to slow down to a following vehicle. Flash your brake lights, especially if you are reducing speed only by gearing down or rolling off the throttle. Use the hand signal for slowing or stopping.

As you approach your stopping point, identify an escape route that you can use if needed. Stop at least a car length behind a vehicle stopped ahead of you. This space cushion facilitates possible use of your escape route to the left or right of the vehicle.

Monitor the vehicle approaching you from behind in your rear view mirror. Flash your brake lights a few times to become more conspicuous. Keep your bike in first gear and be ready to escape if the vehicle's closure rate and perhaps the sound of its screeching tires indicate that it may not stop in time. If you want to shift to neutral, do so only after the vehicle has come to a complete stop and you feel it is no longer a threat.

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