IOWA DOT

SMARTER | SIMPLER | CUSTOMER DRIVEN

www.iowadot.gov

IOWA MOTORCYCLE OPERATOR MANUAL

Prepared by the Iowa Department of Transportation

Available electronically at:
iowadot.gov/mvd/resources/mcmanual.pdf

Preface

Operating a motorcycle safely in traffic requires special skills and knowledge. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation has made this manual available to help novice motorcyclists reduce their risk of having a crash. The manual conveys essential safe riding information and has been designed for use in safe licensing programs. While designed for the novice, all motorcyclists can benefit from the information this manual contains.

The original Motorcycle Operator Manual was developed by the National Public Services Research Institute (NPSRI) under contract to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and within the terms of a cooperative agreement between NHTSA and the MSF. The manual and related tests were used in a multi-year study of improved motorcycle operator licensing procedures, conducted by the California Department of Motor Vehicles under contract to NHTSA.

The purpose of this manual is to educate the reader to help avoid crashes while safely operating a motorcycle. For this edition, the MSF has updated and expanded the content of the original manual.

These revisions reflect:

- The latest finding of motorcycle-safety research.
- Comments and guidance provided by the motorcycling, licensing, and traffic-safety communities.
- Supplementary information for three-wheel vehicles.

In promoting improved licensing programs, the MSF works closely with state licensing agencies. The Foundation has helped more than half the states in the nation adopt the "Motorcycle Operator Manual" for use in their licensing systems.

Improved licensing, along with high-quality motorcycle rider education and increased public awareness, has the potential to reduce crashes. Staff at the Foundation are available to assist state, private and governmental agencies in efforts to improve motorcycle safety.

Tim Buche
President

The Iowa Department of Transportation worked with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation to develop this manual. Our goals are to:

- lower the number of motorcycle-related deaths on Iowa highways; and
- increase your safety while you ride and operate a motorcycle.

We believe that the information in this manual provides you with tools you need for a safe and enjoyable ride.

While you are studying this manual, look closely at the tips for safe riding. The tips can help you stay alive. Remember, as a responsible motorcyclist it is your responsibility to help the motoring public be aware of you while you are on the road.

Help us lower the number of motorcycle-related deaths on Iowa highways by using the information in this manual while you ride.

Have a safe ride.

Paul Trombino III

Director

Iowa Department of Transportation

Permanent Driver License Stations

For additional copies of the Motorcycle Operator Manual, contact one of the following permanent driver license stations or any county office offering licensing services:

For specific driver's license station information, including hours of operation, visit: iowadot.gov/mvd/locations.html

Ames 515-296-2393	**3708 Lincoln Way** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Ankeny 515-244-1052	**6310 SE Convenience Blvd.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Burlington 319-754-8767	**Fairway Shopping Center, 2700 Mount Pleasant St.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Carroll 712-792-5269	**510 Carroll St., Suite 1** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Cedar Rapids 319-377-6461	**3726 Queens Court SW Suite 201** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Clinton 563-243-7144	**316 S. Second St.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Council Bluffs 712-323-1219	**Mall of the Bluffs, 1751 Madison Ave., Suite 330** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Davenport 563-386-1050	**Village Shopping Center, 902 W. Kimberly Road Suite 6D** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Des Moines 515-244-1052	**2339 Euclid Avenue (renewal only)** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Dubuque 563-583-9844	**2460 Gateway Drive** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Fort Dodge 515-573-5141	**2313 First Avenue S.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Iowa City 319-338-5294	**Eastdale Plaza, 1700 S. First Ave.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Marshalltown 641-752-5668	**Marshalltown Plaza Mall, 2500 S. Center St.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Mason City 641-423-8391	**Southport Shopping Center, 1622 S. Federal Ave.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Muscatine 563-263-5414	**1903 Park Ave.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Ottumwa 641-682-4855	**2849 North Court Road** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Sioux City 712-255-5539	**3005 Hamilton Blvd.** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Spencer 712-262-6278	**Gateway North Shopping Center, East 18th and Grand Avenue** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
Waterloo 319-235-0902	**103 Crossroads Center** **Open:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

For further information call:
The Motor Vehicle Information Center in Des Moines at 515-244-8725 or 515-244-8725
To learn more about transportation in Iowa, visit our web site at www.iowadot.gov
To learn more about motorcycle rider education in Iowa, go to www.iowadot.gov/mvd/motorcycle/MCsafety.html

Contents

Preparing to ride

Wear the right gear ... 5
Helmet use ... 5
Helmet selection ... 5
Eye and face protection ... 6
Clothing ... 6
Know your motorcycle ... 6
The right motorcycle for you ... 6
Borrowing and lending ... 7
Get familiar with the motorcycle controls ... 7
Check your motorcycle ... 7
Know your responsibilities ... 8

Ride within your abilities

Basic vehicle control ... 9
Body position ... 9
Shifting gears ... 9
Braking ... 9
Turning ... 10
Keeping your distance ... 10
Lane positions ... 10
Following another vehicle ... 11
Being followed ... 12
Passing and being passed ... 12
Lane sharing ... 12
Merging cars ... 13
Cars alongside ... 13
SEE ... 13
Intersections ... 14
Blind intersections ... 14
Passing parked cars ... 15
Parking at the roadside ... 15
Increasing conspicuity ... 15
Clothing ... 15
Headlight ... 16
Signals ... 16
Brake light ... 16
Using your mirrors ... 16
Head checks ... 17
Horn ... 17
Riding at night ... 17
Crash avoidance ... 17
Quick stops ... 18
Swerving or turning quickly ... 18
Cornering ... 18
Handling dangerous surfaces ... 19
Uneven surfaces and obstacles ... 19
Slippery surfaces ... 19
Railroad tracks, trolley tracks and pavement seams ... 20
Grooves and gratings ... 20
Mechanical problems ... 21
Tire failure ... 21
Stuck throttle ... 21
Wobble ... 21
Drive train problems ... 21
Engine seizure ... 22
Animals ... 22
Flying objects ... 22
Getting off the road ... 22
Carrying passengers and cargo ... 22
Equipment ... 22
Instructing passengers ... 23
Riding with passengers ... 23
Carrying loads ... 23
Group riding ... 23
Keep the group small ... 23
Keep the group together ... 23
Keep your distance ... 24

Being in shape to ride

Why information is important ... 25
Alcohol and other drugs in motorcycle operation ... 25
Alcohol in the body ... 25
Blood alcohol concentration ... 25
Alcohol and the law ... 26
Consequences of conviction ... 26
Minimize the risks ... 27
Step in to protect friends ... 27
Fatigue ... 27

Earning your license

Knowledge test ... 28
On-cycle skill test ... 29

Supplementary information for three-wheeled vehicles

Know your vehicle ... 32
Basic vehicle control ... 33
Carrying passengers and cargo ... 35

Motorcycle instruction permit

You may obtain a motorcycle instruction permit by passing the written knowledge examination and paying a $2 fee for each year the license is valid, not to exceed four years, with no renewal permitted.

If you are ages 14 through 17 years of age:

- **You may drive with a licensed parent or guardian** with a motorcycle endorsement or a member of your immediate family who is licensed and has a motorcycle endorsement and is at least 21 years of age.
- **You may drive with another licensed adult** who is at least 25 years of age and has your parent's/guardian's written permission to accompany you and has a valid license with the motorcycle endorsement.

If you are at least 18 years of age:

- **You may drive with a licensed parent or guardian** with a motorcycle endorsement or a member of your immediate family who is licensed and has a motorcycle endorsement and is at least 21 years of age.
- **Another licensed adult who is at least 25 years of age** and has a valid license with the motorcycle endorsement.

The accompanying person must stay within sight and hearing distance and be on or in a different motor vehicle.

Only one learner may be supervised by any one licensed driver.

To add the motorcycle instruction permit to an existing class, the cost is $2 for each year the license is valid, not to exceed 4 years.

Preparing to ride

What you do before you start a trip goes a long way toward determining whether or not you'll get where you want to go safely. Before taking off on any trip, a safe rider makes a point to:

1. Wear the right gear.

2. Become familiar with the motorcycle.

3. Check the motorcycle equipment.

4. Be a responsible rider.

Wear the right gear

When you ride, your gear is "right" if it protects you. In any crash, you have a far better chance of avoiding serious injury if you wear:

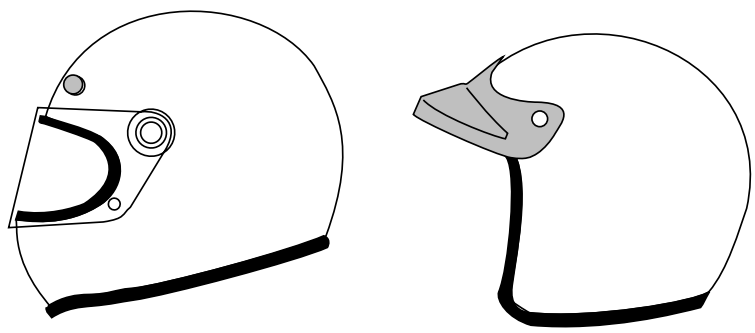
- **A DOT compliant helmet.**
- **Face or eye protection.**
- **Protective clothing.**

Helmet use

Crashes can occur — particularly among untrained, beginning riders. And one out of every five motorcycle crashes results in head or neck injuries. Head injuries are just as severe as neck injuries — and far more common. Crash analyses show that head and neck injuries account for a majority of serious and fatal injuries to motorcyclists. Research also shows that, with few exceptions, head and neck injuries are reduced by properly wearing a quality helmet.

Some riders don't wear helmets because they think helmets will limit their view to the sides. Others wear helmets only on long trips or when riding at high speeds. Here are some facts to consider:

HELMETS



- **A DOT compliant helmet** lets you see as far to the sides as necessary. A study of more than 900 motorcycle crashes, where 40% of the riders wore helmets, did not find even one case in which a helmet kept a rider from spotting danger.
- **Most crashes happen** on short trips (less than five miles long), just a few minutes after starting out.
- **Most riders** are riding slower than 30 mph when a crash occurs. At these speeds, helmets can cut both the number and the severity of head injuries by half.

No matter what the speed, helmeted riders are three times more likely to survive head injuries than those not wearing helmets at the time of the crash. The single most important thing you can do to improve your chances of surviving a crash is to wear a securely-fastened quality helmet.

Helmet selection

There are two primary types of helmets, providing two different levels of coverage: three-quarter and full face.

Whichever style you choose, you can get the most protection by making sure that the helmet:

- **Is designed to meet** U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and state standards. Helmets with a label from the Snell Memorial Foundation give you an added assurance of quality.
- **Fits snugly,** all the way around.
- **Has no obvious defects** such as cracks, loose padding or frayed straps.

Whatever helmet you decide on, keep it securely fastened on your head when you ride. Otherwise, if you are involved in a crash, it's likely to fly off your head before it gets a chance to protect you.

Eye and face protection

A plastic shatter-resistant faceshield can help protect your whole face in a crash. It also protects you from wind, dust, dirt, rain, insects, and pebbles thrown up from cars ahead. These problems are distracting and can be painful. If you have to deal with them, you can't devote your full attention to the road.

Goggles protect your eyes, though they won't protect the rest of your face like a faceshield does. A windshield is not a substitute for a faceshield or goggles. Most windshields will not protect your eyes from the wind. Neither will eyeglasses or sunglasses. Glasses won't keep your eyes from watering, and they might blow off when you turn your head while riding.

To be effective, eye or faceshield protection must:

- **Be free** of scratches.
- **Be resistant** to penetration.
- **Give a clear** view to either side.
- **Fasten securely**, so it does not blow off.
- **Permit air** to pass through, to reduce fogging.
- **Permit enough room** for eyeglasses or sunglasses, if needed.

Tinted eye protection should not be worn at night or any other time when little light is available.

Clothing

The right clothing protects you in a collision. It also provides comfort, as well as protection from heat, cold, debris, and hot and moving parts of the motorcycle. It can also make you more visible to others.

- **Jacket and pants** should cover arms and legs completely. They should fit snugly enough to keep from flapping in the wind, yet loosely enough to move freely. Leather offers the most protection. Sturdy synthetic material provides a lot of protection as well. Wear a jacket even in warm weather to prevent dehydration. Many are designed to protect without getting you overheated, even on summer days.
- **Boots or shoes** should be high and sturdy enough to cover your ankles and give them support. Soles should be made of hard, durable slip resistant material. Keep heels short so they do not catch on rough surfaces. Tuck laces in so they won't catch on your motorcycle.
- **Gloves** allow a better grip and help protect your hands in a crash. Your gloves should be made of leather or similar durable material.

In cold or wet weather, your clothes should keep you warm and dry, as well as protect you from injury. You cannot control a motorcycle well if you are numb. Riding for long periods in cold weather can cause severe chill and fatigue. A winter jacket should resist wind and fit snugly at the neck, wrists, and waist. Good-quality rainsuits designed for motorcycle riding resist tearing apart or ballooning up at high speeds.

1 Test Yourself

A plastic shatter-resistant face shield:

A. Is not necessary if you have a windshield.

B. Only protects your eyes.

C. Helps protect your whole face.

D. Does not protect your face as well as goggles.

Know your motorcycle

There are plenty of things on the highway that can cause you trouble. Your motorcycle should not be one of them. To make sure that your motorcycle won't let you down:

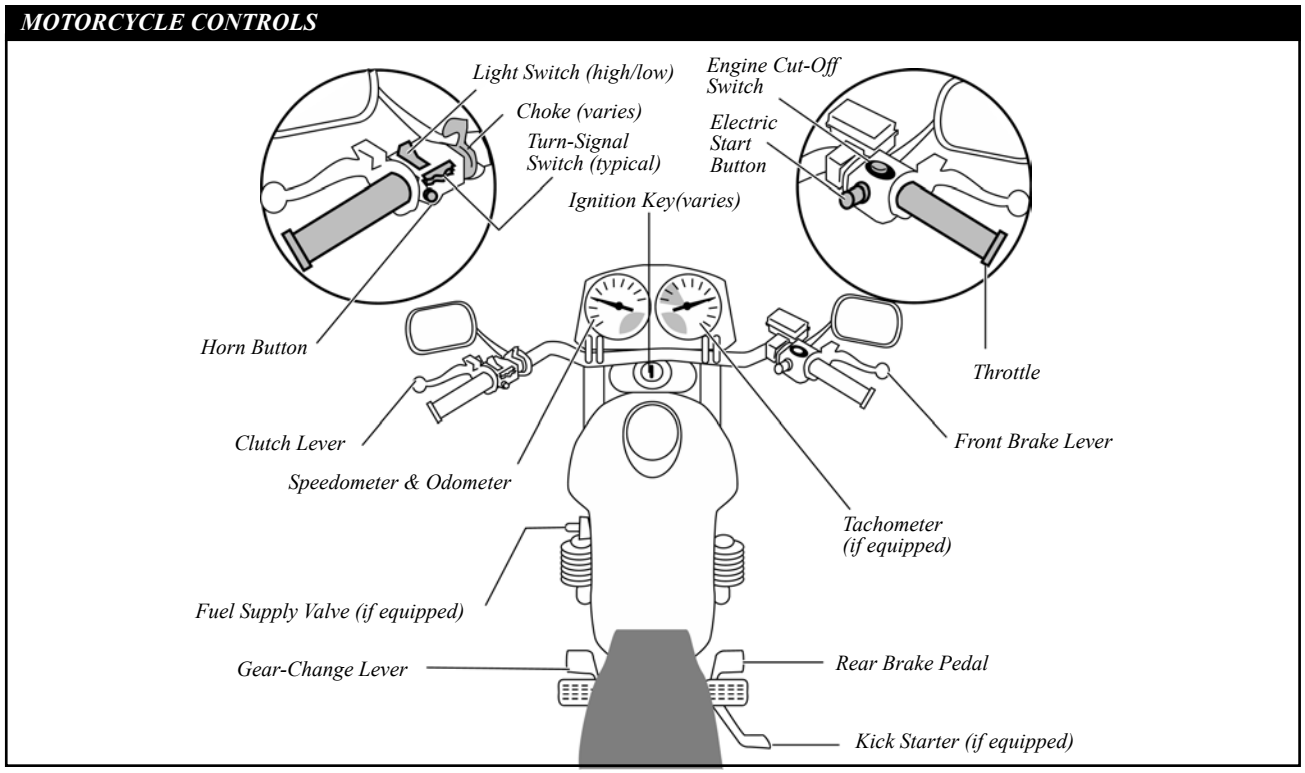
- **Read** owner's manual first.
- **Start** with the right motorcycle for you.
- **Be familiar** with the motorcycle controls.
- **Check** the motorcycle before every ride.
- **Keep** it in safe riding condition between rides.
- **Avoid** add-ons and modifications that make your motorcycle harder to handle.

The right motorcycle for you

First, make sure your motorcycle is right for you. It should "fit" you. Your feet should reach the ground while you are seated on the motorcycle and the controls should be easy to operate. Smaller motorcycles are usually easier for beginners to operate.

At minimum, your street-legal motorcycle should have:

- **Headlight, taillight and brakelight.**
- **Front and rear brakes.**
- **Turn signals.**
- **Horn.**
- **Two mirrors.**



Borrowing and lending

Borrowers and lenders of motorcycles, beware. Crashes are fairly common among beginning riders — especially in the first months of riding. Riding an unfamiliar motorcycle adds to the problem. If you borrow a motorcycle, get familiar with it in a controlled area. And if you lend your motorcycle to friends, make sure they are licensed and know how to ride before allowing them out into traffic.

No matter how experienced you may be, ride extra carefully on any motorcycle that's new or unfamiliar to you. More than half of all crashes involve riders with less than five months of experience on their motorcycle.

Get familiar with the motorcycle controls

Make sure you are completely familiar with the motorcycle before you take it out on the street. Be sure to review the owner's manual. This is particularly important if you are riding a borrowed motorcycle. If you are going to use an unfamiliar motorcycle:

- **Make all the checks** you would on your own motorcycle.
- **Find out where everything is**, particularly the turn signals, horn, headlight switch, fuel-supply valve, and engine cut-off switch. Find and operate these items without having to look for them.
- **Know the gear pattern.** Work the throttle, clutch, and brakes a few times before you start riding. All controls react a little differently.
- **Ride very cautiously** and be aware of surroundings. Accelerate gently, take turns more slowly, and leave extra room for stopping.

Check your motorcycle

A motorcycle needs more frequent attention than a car. A minor technical failure in a car seldom leads to anything more than an inconvenience for the driver.

If something's wrong with the motorcycle, you'll want to find out about it before you get in traffic. Make a complete check of your motorcycle before every ride.

Before mounting the motorcycle make the following checks:

- **Tires** — Check the air pressure, general wear and tread.
- **Fluids** — Oil and fluid levels. At a minimum, check hydraulic fluids and coolants weekly. Look under the motorcycle for signs of an oil or gas leak.

- **Headlights and Taillight** — Check them both. Test your switch to make sure both high and low beams are working.
- **Turn Signals** — Turn on both right and left turn signals. Make sure all lights are working properly.
- **Brake Light** — Try both brake controls, and make sure each one turns on the brake light.

Once you have mounted the motorcycle, complete the following checks before starting out:

- **Clutch and Throttle** — Make sure they work smoothly. The throttle should snap back when you let go. The clutch should feel tight and smooth.
- **Mirrors** — Clean and adjust both mirrors before starting. It's difficult to ride with one hand while you try to adjust a mirror. Adjust each mirror so you can see the lane behind and as much as possible of the lane next to you. When properly adjusted, a mirror may show the edge of your arm or shoulder — but it's the road behind and to the side that's most important.
- **Brakes** — Try the front and rear brake levers one at a time. Make sure each one feels firm and holds the motorcycle when the brake is fully applied.
- **Horn** — Try the horn. Make sure it works.
- **Fuel Supply Valve** — Make sure the valve is open. Your motorcycle may start with fuel still in the lines, but it will stall once the lines are empty.

In addition to the checks you should make before every trip, check the following items at least once a week: Wheels, cables, fasteners, and fluid checks. Follow your owner's manual to get recommendations.

Know your responsibilities

"Accident" implies an unforeseen event that occurs without anyone's fault or negligence. Most often in traffic, that is not the case. In fact, most people involved in a crash can usually claim some responsibility for what takes place.

Consider a situation where someone decides to try to squeeze through an intersection on a yellow light turning red. Your light turns green. You pull into the intersection without checking for possible latecomers. That is all it takes for the two of you to tangle. It was the driver's responsibility to stop. And it was your responsibility to look before pulling out. Neither of you held up your end of the deal. Just because someone else is the first to start the chain of events leading to a crash, doesn't leave any of us free of responsibility.

As a rider you can't be sure that other operators will see you or yield the right of way. To lessen your chances of a crash occurring:

- **Be visible** — wear proper clothing, use your headlight, ride in the best lane position to see and be seen.
- **Communicate your intentions** — use the proper signals, brake light, and lane position.
- **Maintain an adequate space cushion** — following, being followed, lane sharing, passing and being passed.
- **Search your path** of travel 12 seconds ahead.
- **Identify and separate** multiple hazards.
- **Be prepared to act** — remain alert and know how to carry out proper crash-avoidance skills.

Blame doesn't matter when someone is injured in a crash. There is rarely a single cause of any crash. The ability to ride aware, make critical decisions, and carry them out separates responsible riders from all the rest. Remember, it is up to you to keep from being the cause of, or an unprepared participant in, any crash.

2 Test Yourself

More than half of all crashes:

A. Occur at speeds greater than 35 mph.

B. Happen at night.

C. Are caused by worn tires.

D. Involve riders who have ridden their motorcycles less than six months.

Ride within your abilities

This manual cannot teach you how to control direction, speed, or balance. That's something you can learn only through practice, preferably in a formal course of instruction like a MSF rider course. But control begins with knowing your abilities and riding within them, along with knowing and obeying the rules of the road.

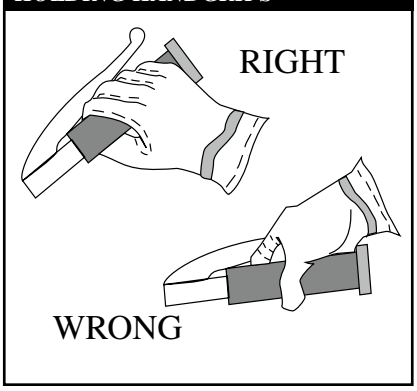
Basic vehicle control

Body position

To control a motorcycle well:

- **Posture** — Sit so you can use your arms to steer the motorcycle rather than to hold yourself up.
- **Seat** — Sit far enough forward so that arms are slightly bent when you hold the handgrips. Bending your arms permits you to press on the handlebars without having to stretch.
- **Hands** — Hold the handgrips firmly to keep your grip over rough surfaces. Start with your right wrist flat. This will help you keep from accidentally using too much throttle. Also, adjust the handlebars so your hands are even with or below your elbows. This permits you to use the proper muscles for precision steering.

HOLDING HANDGRIPS



- **Knees** — Keep your knees against the gas tank to help you keep your balance as the motorcycle turns.
- **Feet** — Keep your feet firmly on the footrests to maintain balance. Don't drag your feet. If your foot catches on something, you can be injured and it could affect your control of the motorcycle. Keep your feet near the controls so you can get to them fast if needed. Also, don't let your toes point downward — they may get caught between the road and the footrests.

Shifting gears

There is more to shifting gears than simply getting the motorcycle to pick up speed smoothly.
Learning to use the gears when downshifting, turning, or starting on hills is important for safe motorcycle operation.

Shift down through the gears with the clutch as you slow or stop. Remain in first gear while you are stopped so that you can move out quickly if you need to.

Make certain you are riding slowly enough when you shift into a lower gear. If not, the motorcycle will lurch, and the rear wheel may skid. When riding downhill or shifting into first gear you may need to use the brakes to slow enough before downshifting safely. Work towards a smooth, even clutch release, especially when downshifting.

It is best to change gears before entering a turn. However, sometimes shifting while in the turn is necessary. If so, remember to do so smoothly. A sudden change in power to the rear wheel can cause a skid.

Braking

Your motorcycle has two brakes: one each for the front and rear wheel. Use both of them at the same time. The front brake is more powerful and can provide **at least three-quarters** of your total stopping power. The front brake is safe to use if you use it properly.

Remember:

- **Use both brakes** *every time* you slow or stop. Using both brakes for even "normal" stops will permit you to develop the proper habit or skill of using both brakes properly in an emergency. Squeeze the front brake and press down on the rear. Grabbing at the front brake or jamming down on the rear can cause the brakes to lock, resulting in control problems.

- **If you know the technique**, using both brakes in a turn is possible, although it should be done very carefully. When leaning the motorcycle some of the traction is used for cornering. Less traction is available for stopping. A skid can occur if you apply too much brake. Also, using the front brake incorrectly on a slippery surface may be hazardous. Use caution and **squeeze** the brake lever, never grab.
- **Some motorcycles** have integrated braking systems that link the front and rear brakes together by applying the rear brake pedal. (Consult the owner's manual for a detailed explanation on the operation and effective use of these systems.)

Turning

Riders often try to take curves or turns too fast. When they can't hold the turn, they end up crossing into another lane of traffic or going off the road. Or, they overreact and brake too hard, causing a skid and loss of control. Approach turns and curves with caution.

Use four steps for better control:

SLOW — Reduce speed before the turn by closing the throttle and, if necessary, applying both brakes.

LOOK — Look through the turn to where you want to go. Turn just your head, not your shoulders, and keep your eyes level with the horizon.

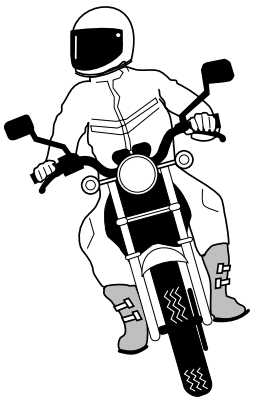
PRESS — To turn, the motorcycle must lean. To lean the motorcycle, press on the handgrip in the direction of the turn. Press left handgrip— lean left — go left. Press right handgrip — lean right — go right. The higher the speed in the turn, the greater the lean angle.

ROLL — Roll on the throttle to maintain or slightly increase speed. This helps stabilize the motorcycle.

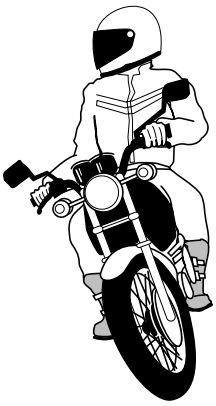
In normal turns, the rider and the motorcycle should lean together at the same angle.

In slow, tight turns, counterbalance by leaning the motorcycle only and keeping your body straight.

NORMAL TURNING



SLOW, TIGHT TURNS



3 Test Yourself

When riding, you should:

A. Turn your head and shoulders to look through turns.

B. Keep your arms straight.

C. Keep your knees away from the gas tank.

D. Turn just your head and eyes to look where you are going.

Keeping your distance

The best protection you can have is distance — a "cushion of space" — all around your motorcycle. If someone else makes a mistake, distance permits you:

- **Time to react.**
- **Space to maneuver.**

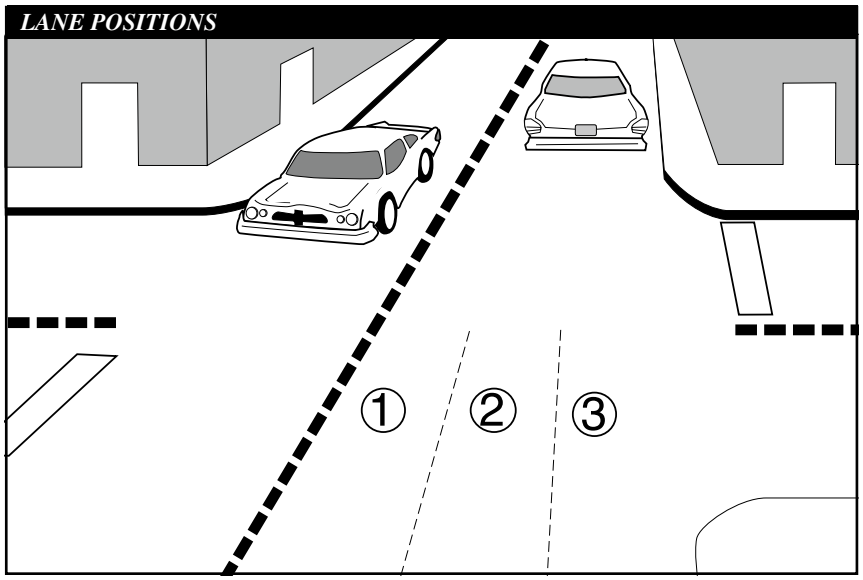
Lane positions

In some ways the size of the motorcycle can work to your advantage. Each traffic lane gives a motorcycle three paths of travel, as indicated in the illustration.

Your lane position should:

- **Increase** your ability to see and be seen.
- **Avoid** others' blind spots.
- **Avoid** surface hazards.
- **Protect** your lane from other drivers.
- **Communicate** your intentions.
- **Avoid** wind blast from other vehicles.
- **Provide** an escape route.

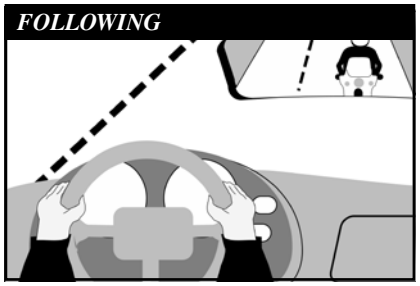
Select the appropriate path to maximize your space cushion and make yourself more easily seen by others on the road.



In general, there is no single best position for riders to be seen and to maintain a space cushion around the motorcycle. No portion of the lane need be avoided — including the center.

Position yourself in the portion of the lane where you are most likely to be seen and you can maintain a space cushion around you. Change position as traffic situations change. Ride in path 2 or 3 if vehicles and other potential problems are on your left only. Remain in path 1 or 2 if hazards are on your right only. If vehicles are being operated on both sides of you, the center of the lane, path 2, is usually your best option.

The oily strip in the center portion that collects drippings from cars is usually no more than two feet wide. Unless the road is wet, the average center strip permits adequate traction to ride on safely. You can operate to the left or right of the grease strip and still be within the center portion of the traffic lane. Avoid riding on big buildups of oil and grease usually found at busy intersections or toll booths.



Following another vehicle

"Following too closely" is a major factor in crashes involving motorcyclists. In traffic, motorcycles need as much distance to stop as cars. Normally, **a minimum of two seconds** distance should be maintained behind the vehicle ahead.

To gauge your following distance:

- **Pick out a marker**, such as a pavement marking or lamppost, on or near the road ahead.
- **When the rear bumper** of the vehicle ahead passes the marker, count off the seconds: "one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two."
- **If you reach the marker** before you reach "two," you are following too closely.

A two-second following distance leaves a minimum amount of space to stop or swerve if the driver ahead stops suddenly. It also permits a better view of potholes and other hazards in the road.

A larger cushion of space is needed if your motorcycle will take longer than normal to stop. If the pavement is slippery, if you cannot see through the vehicle ahead, or if traffic is heavy and someone may squeeze in front of you, open up a three second or more following distance.

Keep well behind the vehicle ahead even when you are stopped. This will make it easier to get out of the way if someone bears down on you from behind. It will also give you a cushion of space if the vehicle ahead starts to back up for some reason.

When behind a car, ride where the driver can see you in the rearview mirror. Riding in the center portion of the lane should put your image in the middle of the rearview mirror — where a driver is most likely to see you.

Riding at the far side of a lane may permit a driver to see you in a sideview mirror. But remember that most drivers don't look at their sideview mirrors nearly as often as they check the rearview mirror. If the traffic situation allows, the center portion of the lane is usually the best place for you to be seen by the drivers ahead and to prevent lane sharing by others.

Being followed

Speeding up to lose someone following too closely only ends up with someone tailgating you at a higher speed.

A better way to handle tailgaters is to get them in front of you. When someone is following too closely, change lanes and let them pass. If you can't do this, slow down and open up extra space ahead of you to allow room for both you and the tailgater to stop. This will also encourage them to pass. If they don't pass, you will have given yourself and the tailgater more time and space to react in case an emergency does develop ahead.

Passing and being passed

Passing and being passed by another vehicle is not much different than with a car. However, visibility is more critical. Be sure other drivers see you, and that you see potential hazards.

Passing

1. **Ride in the left** portion of the lane at a safe following distance to increase your line of sight and make you more visible. Signal and check for oncoming traffic. Use your mirrors and turn your head to look for traffic behind.
2. **When safe,** move into the left lane and accelerate. Select a lane position that doesn't crowd the car you are passing and provides space to avoid hazards in your lane.
3. **Ride through the blind spot** as quickly as possible.
4. **Signal again**, and complete mirror and headchecks before returning to your original lane and then cancel signal.

Remember, passes must be completed within posted speed limits, and only where permitted. Know your signs and road markings!

Being passed

When you are being passed from behind or by an oncoming vehicle, stay in the center portion of your lane. Riding any closer to them could put you in a hazardous situation.

Avoid being hit by:

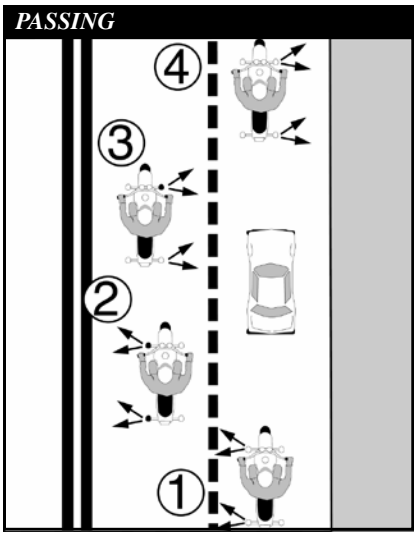
- **The other vehicle** — A slight mistake by you or the passing driver could cause a sideswipe.
- **Extended mirrors** — Some drivers forget that their mirrors hang out farther than their fenders.
- **Objects thrown from windows** — Even if the driver knows you're there, a passenger may not see you and might toss something on you or the road ahead of you.
- **Blasts of wind from larger vehicles** — They can affect your control. You have more room for error if you are in the middle portion when hit by this blast than if you are on either side of the lane.

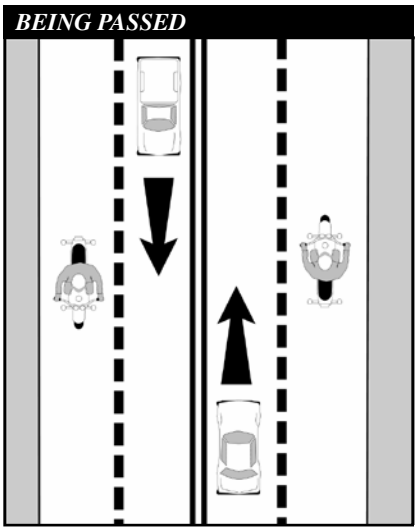
Do not move into the portion of the lane farthest from the passing vehicle. It might invite the other driver to cut back into your lane too early.

Lane sharing

Cars and motorcycles need a full lane to operate safely. Lane sharing is usually prohibited.

Riding between rows of stopped or moving cars in the same lane can leave you vulnerable to the unexpected. A hand could come out of a window; a door could open; a car could turn suddenly. Discourage lane sharing by others.

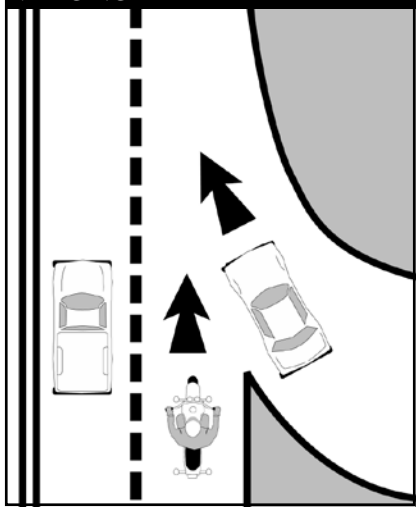




Keep a center-portion position whenever drivers might be tempted to squeeze by you. Drivers are most tempted to do this:

- **In heavy**, bumper-to-bumper traffic.
- **When they** want to pass you.
- **When you** are preparing to turn at an intersection.
- **When you** are getting in an exit lane or leaving a highway.

MERGING



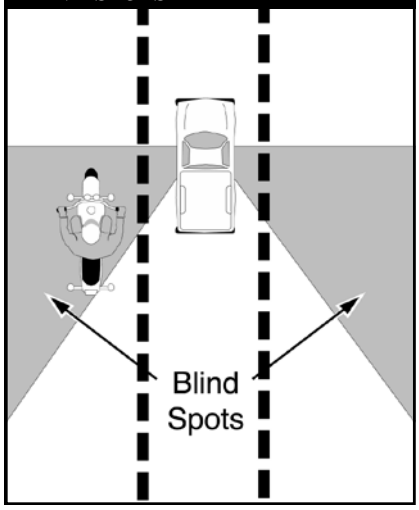
Merging cars

Drivers on an entrance ramp may not see you on the highway. Give them plenty of room. Change to another lane if one is open. If there is no room for a lane change, adjust speed to open up space for the merging driver.

Cars alongside

Do not ride next to cars or trucks in other lanes if you do not have to. You might be in the blind spot of a car in the next lane, which could switch into your lane without warning. Cars in the next lane also block your escape if you come upon danger in your own lane. Speed up or drop back to find a place clear of traffic on both sides.

BLIND SPOTS



4 Test Yourself

Usually, a good way to handle tailgaters is to:

A. Change lanes and let them pass.

B. Use your horn and make obscene gestures.

C. Speed up to put distance between you and the tailgater.

D. Ignore them.

SEE

Good experienced riders remain aware of what is going on around them. They improve their riding strategy by using MFS's SEE strategy, a three-step process used to make appropriate judgments, and apply them correctly in different traffic situations:

- **Search**
- **Evaluate**
- **Execute**

Search

Search aggressively ahead, to the sides and behind to avoid potential hazards even before they arise. How assertively you search, and how much time and space you have, can eliminate or reduce harm. Focus even more on finding potential escape routes in or around intersections, shopping areas, school and construction zones.

Search for factors such as:

- **Oncoming traffic** that may turn left in front of you.
- **Traffic** coming from the left and right.
- **Traffic** approaching from behind.
- **Hazardous** road conditions.

Be especially alert in areas with limited visibility. Visually "busy" surroundings could hide you and your motorcycle from others.

Evaluate

Think about how hazards can interact to create risks for you. Anticipate potential problems and have a plan to reduce risks.

- **Road and surface characteristics** — Potholes, guardrails, bridges, telephone poles and trees won't move into your path but may influence your riding strategy.
- **Traffic control devices** — Look for traffic signals, including regulatory signs, warning signs, and pavement markings, to help you evaluate circumstances ahead.
- **Vehicles and other traffic** — May move into your path and increase likelihood of a crash.

Think about your time and space requirements in order to maintain a margin of safety. You must leave yourself time to react if an emergency arises.

Execute

Carry out your decision.

To create more space and minimize harm from any hazard:

- **Communicate** your presence with lights and/or horn.
- **Adjust your speed** by accelerating, stopping or slowing.
- **Adjust your position** and/or direction.

Apply the old adage "one step at a time" to handle two or more hazards. Adjust speed to permit two hazards to separate. Then deal with them one at a time as single hazards. Decision making becomes more complex with three or more hazards. Evaluate the consequences of each and give equal distance to the hazards.

In potential high risk areas, such as intersections, shopping areas, school and construction zones, cover the clutch and both brakes to reduce the time you need to react.

5 Test Yourself

To reduce your reaction time, you should:

A. Ride slower than the speed limit.

B. Cover the clutch and the brakes.

C. Shift into neutral when slowing.

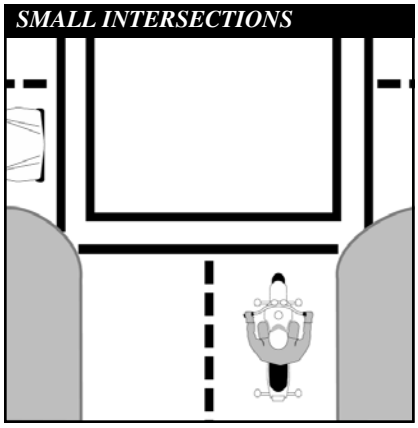
D. Pull in the clutch when turning.

Intersections

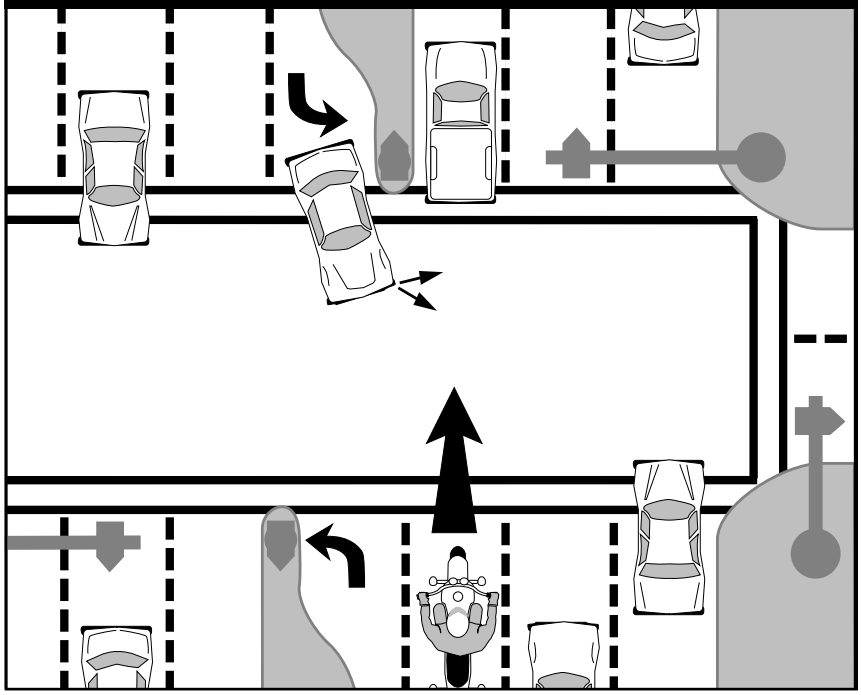
The greatest potential for conflict between you and other traffic is at intersections. An intersection can be in the middle of an urban area or at a driveway on a residential street — anywhere traffic may cross your path of travel. Over one-half of motorcycle/car crashes are caused by drivers entering a rider's right-of-way. Cars that turn left in front of you, including cars turning left from the lane to your right, and cars on side streets that pull into your lane, are the biggest dangers. Your use of SEE [p. 13] at intersections is critical.

There are no guarantees that others see you. Never count on "eye contact" as a sign that a driver will yield. Too often, a driver looks right at a motorcyclist and still fails to "see" him. The only eyes that you can count on are your own. If a car can enter your path, assume that it will. Good riders are always "looking for trouble" — not to get into it, but to stay out of it.

SMALL INTERSECTIONS



LARGE INTERSECTIONS



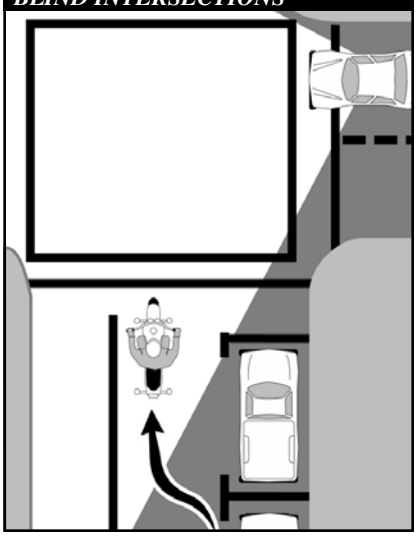
Increase your chances of being seen at intersections. Ride with your headlight on and in a lane position that provides the best view of oncoming traffic. Provide a space cushion around the motorcycle that permits you to take evasive action.

When approaching an intersection where a vehicle driver is preparing to cross your path, select a lane position to increase your visibility to the driver. Cover the clutch lever and both brakes to reduce reaction time.

As you enter the intersection, move away from the vehicle.

Do not change speed or position radically. As drivers might think that you are preparing to turn, be prepared to brake hard and hold your position if an oncoming vehicle turns in front of you, especially if there is other traffic around you. This strategy should also be used whenever a vehicle in the oncoming lane of traffic is signaling for a left turn. Whether at an intersection or not.

BLIND INTERSECTIONS

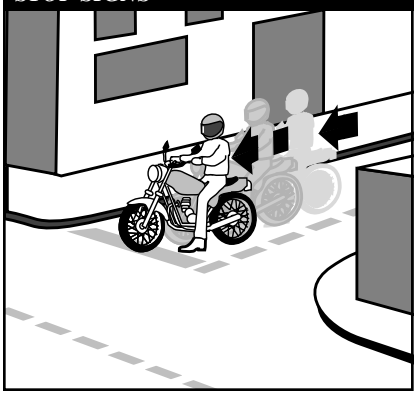


Blind intersections

If you approach a blind intersection, move to the portion of the lane that will bring you into another driver's field of vision at the earliest possible moment. In this picture, the rider has moved to the left portion of the lane — away from the parked car — so the driver on the cross street can see him as soon as possible.

Remember, the key is to see as much as possible and remain visible to others while protecting your space.

STOP SIGNS

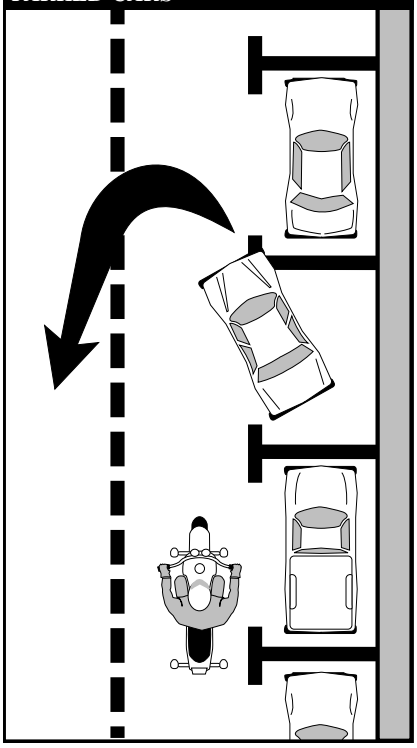


If you have a stop sign or stop line, stop there first. Then edge forward and stop again, just short of where the cross-traffic lane meets your lane. From that position, lean your body forward and look around buildings, parked cars, or bushes to see if anything is coming. Just make sure your front wheel stays out of the cross lane of travel while you're looking.

Passing parked cars

When passing parked cars, stay toward the left of your lane. You can avoid problems caused by doors opening, drivers getting out of cars, or people stepping from between cars. If oncoming traffic is present, it is usually best to remain in the center-lane position to maximize your space cushion.

PARKED CARS



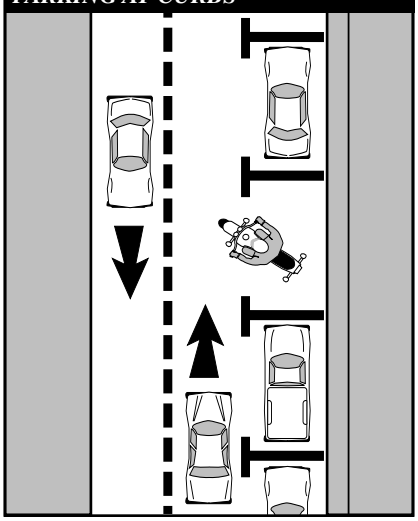
A bigger problem can occur if the driver pulls away from the curb without checking for traffic behind. Even if he does look, he may fail to see you.
In either event, the driver might cut into your path. Slow down or change lanes to make room for someone cutting in.

Cars making a sudden U-turn are the most dangerous. They may cut you off entirely, blocking the whole roadway and leaving you with no place to go. Since you can't tell what a driver will do, slow down and get the driver's attention. Sound your horn and continue with caution.

Parking at the roadside

If parking in a parallel parking space next to a curb, position the motorcycle at an angle with the rear wheel to the curb. (Note: Some cities have ordinances that require motorcycles to park parallel to the curb.

PARKING AT CURBS



6 Test Yourself

Making eye contact with other drivers:

A. Is a good sign they see you.

B. Is not worth the effort it takes.

C. Doesn't mean that the driver will yield.

D. Guarantees that the other driver will yield to you.

Increasing conspicuity

In crashes with motorcyclists, drivers often say that they never saw the motorcycle. From ahead or behind, a motorcycle's outline is much smaller than a car's. Also, it's hard to see something you are not looking for, and most drivers are not looking for motorcycles. More likely, they are looking *through* the skinny, two-wheeled silhouette in search of cars that may pose a problem to them.

Even if a driver does see you coming, you aren't necessarily safe. Smaller vehicles appear farther away, and seem to be traveling slower than they actually are. It is common for drivers to pull out in front of motorcyclists, thinking they have plenty of time. Too often, they are wrong.

However, you can do many things to make it easier for others to recognize you and your motorcycle.

Clothing

Most crashes occur in broad daylight. Wear bright colored clothing to increase your chances of being seen. Remember, your body is half of the visible surface area of the rider/motorcycle unit.

Bright orange, red, yellow or green jackets or vests are your best bets for being seen. Your helmet can do more than protect you in a crash. Brightly colored helmets can also help others see you.

Any bright color is better than drab or dark colors. Reflective, bright colored clothing (helmet and jacket or vest) is best, especially at night.

Reflective material on a vest and on the sides of the helmet will help drivers coming from the side spot you. Reflective material can also be a big help for drivers coming toward you or from behind.

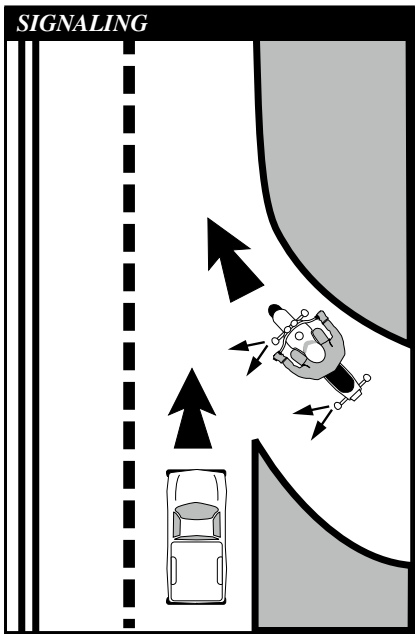
Headlight

The best way to help others see your motorcycle is to keep the headlight on — **at all times** (new motorcycles sold in the U.S. since 1978 automatically have the headlights on when running.) Studies show that, during the day, a motorcycle with its light on is twice as likely to be noticed. Use low beam at night and in fog.

Modulating headlamps conforming with 43C.F.R.} 51.108S7.9.4 are permitted on motorcycles in Iowa.

Signals

The signals on a motorcycle are similar to those on a car. They tell others what you plan to do. However, due to a rider's added vulnerability, signals are even more important. Use them anytime you plan to change lanes or turn. Use them even when you think no one else is around. It's the car you don't see that's going to give you the most trouble. Your signal lights also make you easier to spot. That's why it's a good idea to use your turn signals even when what you plan to do is obvious.



When you enter onto a freeway, drivers approaching from behind are more likely to see your signal blinking and make room for you.

Turning your signal light on before each turn reduces confusion and frustration for the traffic around you. Once you turn, make sure your signal is off or a driver may pull directly into your path, thinking you plan to turn again. Use your signals at every turn so drivers can react accordingly. Don't make them guess what you intend to do.

Brake light

Your motorcycle's brake light is usually not as noticeable as the brake lights on a car — particularly when your taillight is on. (It goes on with the headlight.) If the situation will permit, help others notice you by flashing your brake light before you slow down. It is especially important to flash your brake light before:

- **You slow more quickly** than others might expect (turning off a high-speed highway).
- **You slow where** others may not expect it (in the middle of a block or at an alley).

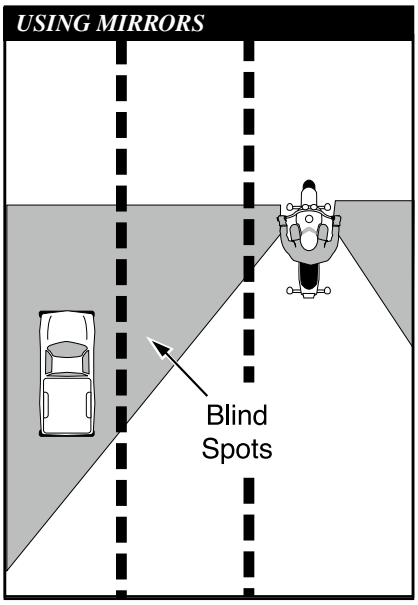
If you are being followed closely, it's a good idea to flash your brake light before you slow. The tailgater may be watching you and not see something ahead that will make you slow down. This will hopefully discourage them from tailgating and warn them of hazards ahead they may not see.

Using your mirrors

While it's most important to keep track of what's happening ahead, you can't afford to ignore situations behind. Traffic conditions change quickly. Knowing what's going on behind is essential for you to make a safe decision about how to handle trouble ahead.

Frequent mirror checks should be part of your normal searching routine. Make a special point of using your mirrors:

- **When you are stopped** at an intersection. Watch cars coming up from behind. If the driver isn't paying attention, he could be on top of you before they see you.
- **Before you change lanes**. Make sure no one is about to pass you.
- **Before you slow down.** The driver behind may not expect you to slow, or may be unsure about where you will slow. For example, you signal a turn and the driver thinks you plan to turn at a distant intersection, rather than at a nearer driveway.



Some motorcycles have rounded (convex) mirrors. These provide a wider view of the road behind than do flat mirrors. They also make cars seem farther away than they really are. If you are not used to convex mirrors, get familiar with them. *(While you are stopped, pick out a parked car in your mirror. Form a mental image of how far away it is. Then, turn around and look at it to see how close you came.)* Practice with your mirrors until you become a good judge of distance. Even then, allow extra distance before you change lanes.

Head checks

Checking your mirrors is not enough. Motorcycles have "blind spots" like cars. Before you change lanes, turn your head, and look to the side for other vehicles.

On a road with several lanes, check the far lane and the one next to you. A driver in the distant lane may head for the same space you plan to take.

Frequent head checks should be your normal scanning routine, also. Only by knowing what is happening **all around** you, are you fully prepared to deal with it.

Horn

Be ready to use your horn to get someone's attention quickly.

It is a good idea to give a quick beep before passing anyone that may move into your lane.

Here are some situations:

- **A driver** in the lane next to you is driving too closely to the vehicle ahead and may want to pass.
- **A parked car** has someone in the driver's seat.
- **Someone is in the street**, riding a bicycle or walking.

In an emergency, press the horn button loud and long. Be ready to stop or swerve away from the danger.

Keep in mind that a motorcycle's horn isn't as loud as a car's, therefore, use it, but don't rely on it. Other strategies, like having time and space to maneuver, may be appropriate along with the horn.

Riding at night

At night it is harder for you to see and be seen. Picking your headlight or taillight out of the car lights around you is not easy for other drivers. To compensate, you should:

Reduce Your Speed — Ride even slower than you would during the day — particularly on roads you don't know well. This will increase your chances of avoiding a hazard.

Increase Distance — Distances are harder to judge at night than during the day. Your eyes rely upon shadows and light contrasts to determine how far away an object is and how fast it is coming. These contrasts are missing or distorted under artificial lights at night. Open up a three-second following distance or more. And allow more distance to pass and be passed.

Use the Car Ahead — The headlights of the car ahead can give you a better view of the road than even your high beam can. Taillights bouncing up and down can alert you to bumps or rough pavement.

Use Your High Beam — Get all the light you can. Use your high beam whenever you are not following or meeting a car. Be visible, wear reflective materials when riding at night.

Be flexible about lane position. Change to whatever portion of the lane is best able to help you see, be seen, and keep an adequate space cushion.

Crash avoidance

No matter how careful you are, there will be times when you find yourself in a tight spot. Your chances of getting out safely depend on your ability to react quickly and properly. Often, a crash occurs because a rider is not prepared or skilled in crash-avoidance maneuvers.

Know when and how to stop or swerve, two skills critical to avoiding a crash. It is not always desirable or possible to stop quickly to avoid an obstacle. Riders must also be able to swerve around an obstacle. Determining the skill necessary for the situation is important as well.

Studies show that most crash-involved riders:

- **Underbrake** the front tire and overbrake the rear.
- **Did not** separate braking from swerving or did not choose swerving when it was appropriate.

7 Test Yourself

Reflective clothing should:

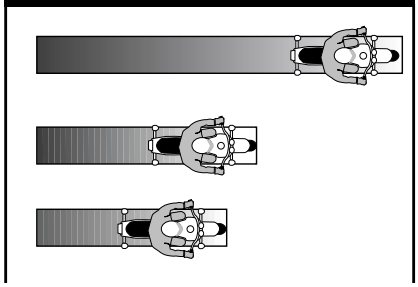
A. Be worn at night.

B. Be worn during the day.

C. Not be worn.

D. Be worn day and night.

STOPPING DISTANCE



The following information offers some good advice.

Quick stops

To stop quickly, apply both brakes at the same time. Don't be shy about using the front brake, but don't "grab" it, either. Squeeze the brake lever firmly and progressively. If the front wheel locks, release the front brake immediately then reapply it firmly. At the same time, press down on the rear brake. If you accidentally lock the rear brake on a good traction surface, you should keep it locked until you have completely stopped; but even with a locked rear wheel, you can control the motorcycle on a straightaway if it is upright and going in a straight line.

Always use both brakes at the same time to stop. The front brake can provide 70% or more of the potential stopping power.

If you must stop quickly while turning or riding a curve, the best technique is to straighten the bike upright first and then brake. However, it may not always be possible to straighten the motorcycle and then stop. If you must brake while leaning, apply light brakes and reduce the throttle. As you slow, you can reduce your lean angle and apply more brake pressure until the motorcycle is straight and maximum brake pressure is possible. You should "straighten" the handlebars in the last few feet of stopping, the motorcycle should then be straight up and in balance.

Swerving or turning quickly

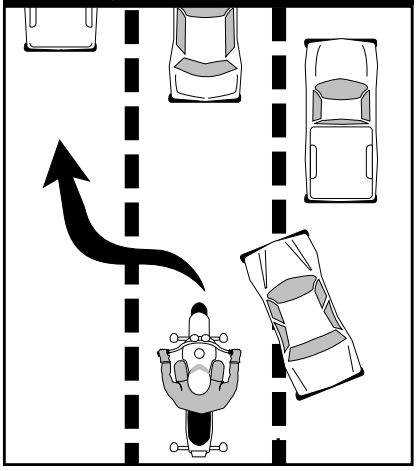
Sometimes you may not have enough room to stop, even if you use both brakes properly. An object might appear suddenly in your path. Or the car ahead might squeal to a stop. The only way to avoid a crash may be to turn quickly, or swerve around it.

A swerve is any sudden change in direction. It can be two quick turns, or a rapid shift to the side. Apply a small amount of pressure to the handgrip located on the side of your intended direction of escape. This will cause the motorcycle to lean quickly. The sharper the turn(s), the more the motorcycle must lean.

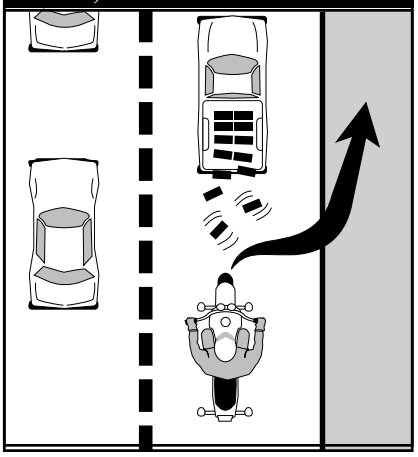
Keep your body upright and allow the motorcycle to lean in the direction of the turn while keeping your knees against the tank and your feet solidly on the footrests. Let the motorcycle move underneath you. Make your escape route the target of your vision. Press on the opposite handgrip once you clear the obstacle to return you to your original direction of travel. To swerve to the left, press the left handgrip, then press the right to recover. To swerve to the right, press right, then left.

IF BRAKING IS REQUIRED, SEPARATE IT FROM SWERVING. Brake before or after — never while swerving.

SWERVE, THEN BRAKE



BRAKE, THEN SWERVE



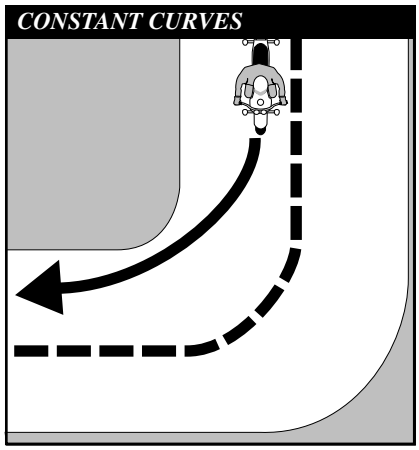
Cornering

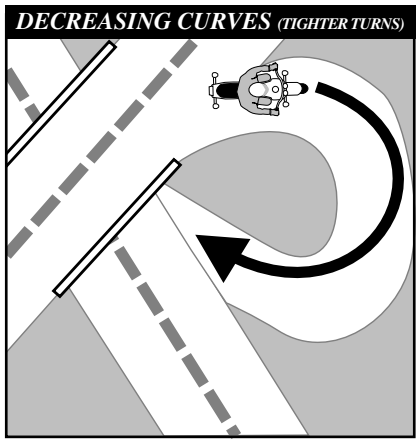
A primary cause of single-vehicle crashes is motorcyclists running wide in a curve or turn and colliding with the roadway or a fixed object.

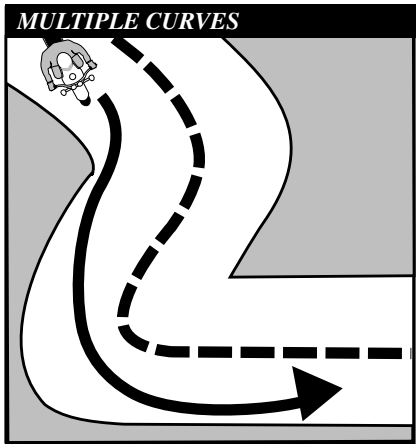
Every curve is different. Be alert to whether a curve remains constant, gradually widens, gets tighter, or involves multiple turns.

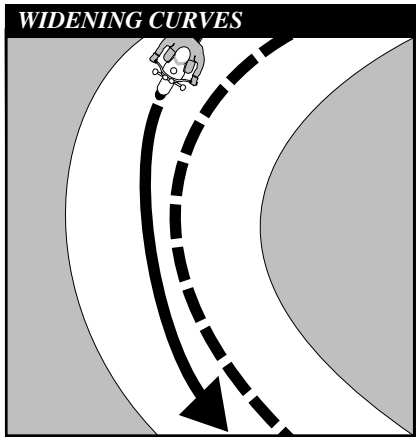
Ride within your skill level and posted speed limits.

Your best path may not always follow the curve of the road. Change lane position depending on traffic, road conditions and curve of the road. If no traffic is present, start at the outside of a curve to increase your line of sight and the effective radius of the turn. As you turn, move toward the inside of the curve, and as you pass the center, move to the outside to exit.









Another alternative is to move to the center of your lane before entering a curve — and stay there until you exit. This permits you to spot approaching traffic as soon as possible. You can also adjust for traffic "crowding" the center line, or debris blocking part of your lane.

8 Test Yourself

The best way to stop quickly is to:

A. Use the front brake only.

B. Use the rear brake first.

C. Throttle down and use the front brake.

D. Use both brakes at the same time.

Handling dangerous surfaces

Your chance of falling or being involved in a crash increases whenever you ride across:

- **Uneven surfaces or obstacles.**
- **Slippery surfaces.**
- **Railroad tracks.**
- **Grooves and gratings.**

Uneven surfaces and obstacles

Watch for uneven surfaces such as bumps, broken pavement, potholes, or small pieces of highway trash.

Try to avoid obstacles by slowing or going around them.

If you must go over the obstacle, first, determine if it is possible. Approach it at as close to a 90° angle as possible. Look where you want to go to control your path of travel. If you have to ride over the obstacle, you should:

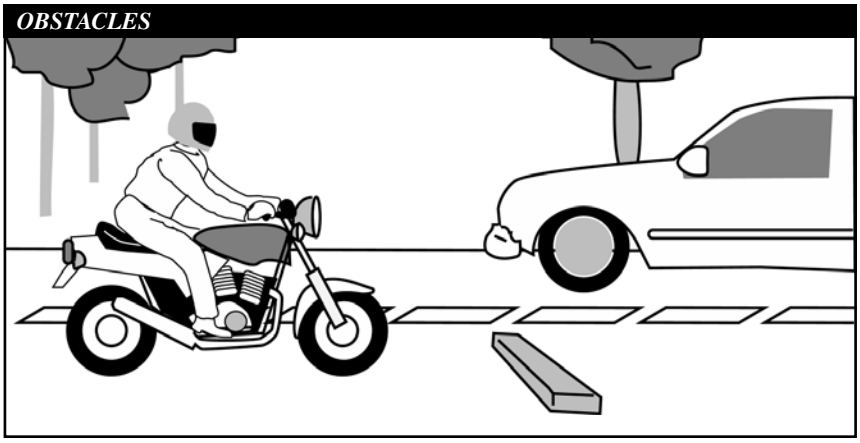
- **Slow down** as much as possible before contact.
- **Make sure** the motorcycle is straight.
- **Rise slightly** off the seat with your weight on the footpegs to absorb the shock with your knees and elbows, and avoid being thrown off the motorcycle.
- **Just before contact**, roll on the throttle slightly to lighten the front end.

If you ride over an object on the street, pull off the road and check your tires and rims for damage before riding any farther.

Slippery surfaces

Motorcycles handle better when ridden on surfaces that permit good traction. Surfaces that provide poor traction include:

- **Wet pavement**, particularly just after it starts to rain and before surface oil washes to the side of the road.
- **Gravel roads**, or where sand and gravel collect.
- **Mud, snow, and ice**.



- **Lane markings (painted lines)**, steel plates and manhole covers, especially when wet.

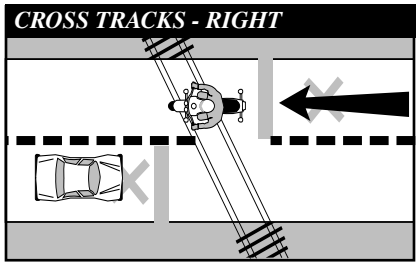
To ride safely on slippery surfaces:

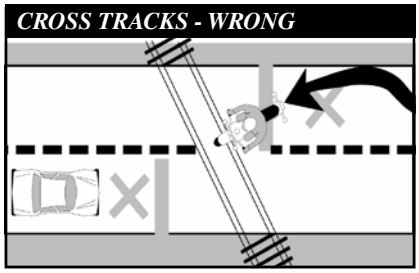
- **Reduce Speed** — Slow down before you get to a slippery surface to lessen your chances of skidding. Your motorcycle needs more distance to stop. And, it is particularly important to reduce speed before entering wet curves.
- **Avoid Sudden Moves** — Any sudden change in speed or direction can cause a skid. Be as smooth as possible when you speed up, shift gears, turn or brake.
- **Use Both Brakes** — The front brake is still effective, even on a slippery surface. Squeeze the brake lever gradually to avoid locking the front wheel. Remember, gentle pressure on the rear brake.
- **The center of a lane** can be hazardous when wet. When it starts to rain, ride in the tire tracks left by cars. Often, the left tire track will be the best position, depending on traffic and other road conditions as well.
- **Watch for oil spots** when you put your foot down to stop or park. You may slip and fall.
- **Dirt and gravel** collect along the sides of the road — especially on curves and ramps leading to and from highways. Be aware of what's on the edge of the road, particularly when making sharp turns and getting on or off freeways at high speeds.
- **Rain dries and snow melts faster** on some sections of a road than on others. Patches of ice tend to crop up in low or shaded areas and on bridges and overpasses. Wet surfaces or wet leaves are just as slippery. Ride on the least slippery portion of the lane and reduce speed.

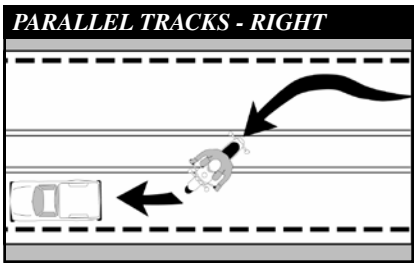
Cautious riders steer clear of roads covered with ice or snow. If you can't avoid a slippery surface, keep your motorcycle straight up and proceed as *slowly* as possible. If you encounter a large surface so slippery that you must coast, or travel at a walking pace, consider letting your feet skim along the surface. If the motorcycle starts to fall, you can catch yourself. Be sure to keep off the brakes. If possible, squeeze the clutch and coast. Attempting this maneuver at anything other than the slowest of speeds could prove hazardous.

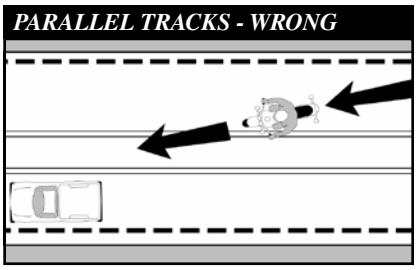
Railroad tracks, trolley tracks and pavement seams

Usually it is safer to ride straight within your lane to cross tracks. Turning to take tracks head-on (at a 90° angle) can be more dangerous—your path may carry you into another lane of traffic.



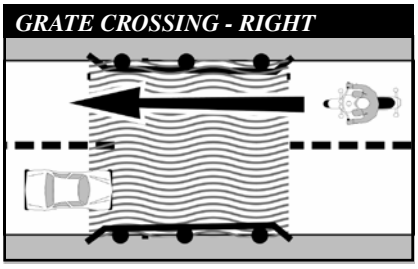


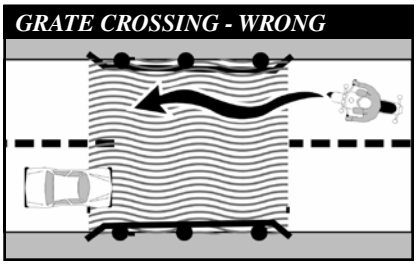




For track and road seams that run parallel to your course, move far enough away from tracks, ruts, or pavement seams to cross at an angle of at least 45°. Then, make a deliberate turn. Edging across could catch your tires and throw you off balance.

Grooves and gratings





Riding over rain grooves or bridge gratings may cause a motorcycle to weave. The uneasy, wandering feeling is generally not hazardous. Relax, maintain a steady speed and ride straight across. Crossing at an angle forces riders to zigzag to stay in the lane. The zigzag is far more hazardous than the wandering feeling.

9 Test Yourself

When it starts to rain it is usually best to:

A. Ride in the center of the lane.

B. Pull off to the side until the rain stops.

C. Ride in the tire tracks left by cars.

D. Increase your speed.

Mechanical problems

You can find yourself in an emergency the moment something goes wrong with your motorcycle. In dealing with any mechanical problem, take into account the road and traffic conditions you face. Here are some guidelines that can help you handle mechanical problems safely.

Tire failure

You will seldom hear a tire go flat. If the motorcycle starts handling differently, it may be a tire failure. This can be dangerous. You must be able to tell from the way the motorcycle reacts. If one of your tires suddenly loses air, react quickly to keep your balance. Pull off and check the tires.

If the front tire goes flat, the steering will feel "heavy." A front-wheel flat is particularly hazardous because it affects your steering. You have to steer well to keep your balance.

If the rear tire goes flat, the back of the motorcycle may jerk or sway from side to side.

If either tire goes flat while riding:

- **Hold handgrips** firmly, ease off the throttle, and keep a straight course.
- **If braking is required,** however, gradually apply the brake of the tire that isn't flat, if you are sure which one it is.
- **When the motorcycle slows**, edge to the side of the road, squeeze clutch and stop.

Stuck throttle

Twist the throttle back and forth several times. If the throttle cable is stuck, this may free it. If the throttle stays stuck immediately operate the engine cut-off switch and pull in the clutch at the same time. This will remove power from the rear wheel, though engine noise may not immediately decline. Once the motorcycle is "under control," pull off and stop.

After you have stopped, check the throttle cable carefully to find the source of the trouble. Make certain the throttle works freely before you start to ride again.

Wobble

A "wobble" occurs when the front wheel and handlebars suddenly start to shake from side to side at any speed. Most wobbles can be traced to improper loading, unsuitable accessories, or incorrect tire pressure. If you are carrying a heavy load, lighten it. If you can't, shift it. Center the weight lower and farther forward on the motorcycle. Make sure tire pressure, spring pre-load, air shocks, and dampers are at the settings recommended for that much weight. Make sure windshields and fairings are mounted properly.

Check for poorly adjusted steering; worn steering parts; a front wheel that is bent, misaligned, or out of balance; loose wheel bearings or spokes; and swingarm bearings. If none of these are determined to be the cause, have the motorcycle checked out thoroughly by a qualified professional.

Trying to "accelerate out of a wobble" will only make the motorcycle more unstable. Instead:

- **Grip the handlebars firmly**, but don't fight the wobble.
- **Close the throttle gradually** to slow down. Do not apply the brakes; braking could make the wobble worse.
- **Move your weight** as far forward and down as possible.
- **Pull off the road** as soon as you can to fix the problem.

Drive train problems

The drive train for a motorcycle uses either a chain, belt, or drive shaft to transfer power from the engine to the rear wheel. Routine inspection, adjustment, and maintenance makes failure a rare occurrence. A chain or belt that slips or breaks while riding could lock the rear wheel and cause your motorcycle to skid.

If the chain or belt breaks, you'll notice an instant loss of power to the rear wheel. Close the throttle and brake to a stop in a safe area.

On models with a drive shaft, loss of oil in the rear differential can cause the rear wheel to lock, and you may not be able to prevent a skid.

10 Test Yourself

If your motorcycle starts to wobble:

A. Accelerate out of the wobble.

B. Use the brakes gradually.

C. Grip the handlebars firmly and close the throttle gradually.

D. Downshift.

Engine seizure

When the engine "locks" or "freezes" it is usually low on oil. The engine's moving parts can't move smoothly against each other, and the engine overheats. The first sign may be a loss of engine power or a change in the engine's sound. Squeeze the clutch lever to disengage the engine from the rear wheel. Pull off the road and stop. Check the oil. If needed, oil should be added as soon as possible or the engine will seize. When this happens, the effect is the same as a locked rear wheel. Let the engine cool before restarting.

Animals

Naturally, you should do everything you safely can to avoid hitting an animal. If you are in traffic, however, remain in your lane. Hitting something small is less dangerous to you than hitting something big — like a car.

Motorcycles seem to attract dogs. If you are chased, downshift and approach the animal slowly. As you approach it, accelerate away and leave the animal behind. Don't kick at an animal. Keep control of your motorcycle, and look to where you want to go.

For larger animals (deer, elk, cattle) brake and prepare to stop, they are unpredictable.

11 Test Yourself

If you are chased by a dog:

A. Kick it away.

B. Stop until the animal loses interest.

C. Swerve around the animal.

D. Approach the animal slowly, then speed up.

Flying Objects

From time to time riders are struck by insects, cigarettes thrown from cars, or pebbles kicked up by the tires of the vehicle ahead. If you are wearing face protection, it might get smeared or cracked, making it difficult to see. Without face protection, an object could hit you in the eye, face, or mouth. Whatever happens, keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the handlebars. When safe, pull off the road and repair the damage.

Getting off the road

If you need to leave the road to check the motorcycle (or just to rest for a while), be sure you:

- **Check the roadside** — Make sure the surface of the roadside is firm enough to ride on. If it is soft grass, loose sand, or if you're just not sure about it, slow way down before you turn onto it.
- **Signal** — Drivers behind might not expect you to slow down. Give a clear signal that you will be slowing down and changing direction. Check your mirror and make a head check before you take any action.
- **Pull off the road** — Get as far off the road as you can. It can be very hard to spot a motorcycle by the side of the road. You don't want someone else pulling off at the same place you are.
- **Park carefully** — Loose and sloped shoulders can make setting the side or center stand difficult.

Carrying passengers and cargo

Only experienced riders should carry passengers or large loads. The extra weight changes the way the motorcycle handles, balances, turns, speeds up, and slows down. Before taking a passenger or heavy load on the street, practice away from traffic.

Equipment

To carry passengers safely:

- **Equip and adjust** your motorcycle to carry passengers.
- **Instruct the passenger** before you start.
- **Adjust your riding** technique for the added weight.

Equipment should include:

- **A proper seat** — large enough to hold both of you without crowding. You should not sit any farther forward than you usually do.
- **Footrests** — for the passenger. Firm footing prevents your passenger from falling off and pulling you off, too.
- **Protective equipment** — the same protective gear recommended for operators.

Adjust the suspension to handle the additional weight. You will probably need to add a few pounds of pressure to the tires if you carry a passenger. (Check your owner's manual for appropriate settings.) While your passenger sits on the seat with you, adjust the mirrors and headlight according to the change in the motorcycle's angle.

Instructing passengers

Even if your passenger is a motorcycle rider, provide complete instructions before you start. Tell your passenger to:

- **Get on** the motorcycle only after you have started the engine.
- **Sit as far forward** as possible without crowding you.
- **Hold firmly** to your waist, hips, belt or to the bike's passenger handholds.
- **Keep both feet** on the footrests, even when stopped.
- **Keep legs away** from the muffler(s), chains or moving parts.
- **Stay directly behind you**, leaning as you lean.
- **Avoid unnecessary** talk or motion.

Also, tell your passenger to tighten his or her hold when you:

- **Approach** surface problems.
- **Are about to start** from a stop.
- **Warn that you** will make a sudden move.

Riding with passengers

Your motorcycle will respond more slowly with a passenger on board. The heavier your passenger, the longer it may take to slow down or speed up — especially on a light motorcycle.

- **Ride a little slower**, especially when taking curves, corners, or bumps.
- **Start slowing earlier** as you approach a stop.
- **Open up a larger cushion** of space ahead and to the sides.
- **Wait for larger gaps** to cross, enter, or merge in traffic.

Warn your passenger of special conditions — when you will pull out, stop quickly, turn sharply, or ride over a bump. Turn your head slightly to make yourself understood, but keep your eyes on the road ahead.

12 Test Yourself

Passengers should:

A. Lean as you lean.

B. Hold on to the motorcycle seat.

C. Sit as far back as possible.

D. Never hold onto you.

Carrying loads

Most motorcycles are not designed to carry much cargo. Small loads can be carried safely if positioned and fastened properly.

- **Keep the Load Low** — Fasten loads securely, or put them in saddle bags. Piling loads against a sissybar or frame on the back of the seat raises the motorcycle's center of gravity and disturbs its balance.
- **Keep the Load Forward** — Place the load over, or in front of, the rear axle. Tank bags keep loads forward, but use caution when loading hard or sharp objects. Make sure tank bag does not interfere with handlebars or controls. Mounting loads behind the rear axle can affect how the motorcycle turns and brakes. It can also cause a wobble.
- **Distribute the Load Evenly** — Load saddlebags with about the same weight. An uneven load can cause the motorcycle to drift to one side.
- **Secure the Load** — Fasten the load securely with elastic cords (bungee cords or nets). Elastic cords with more than one attachment point per side are more secure. A tight load won't catch in the wheel or chain, causing it to lock up and skid. Rope tends to stretch and knots come loose, permitting the load to shift or fall.
- **Check the Load** — Stop and check the load every so often to make sure it has not worked loose or moved.

Group riding

If you ride with others, do it in a way that promotes safety and doesn't interfere with the flow of traffic.

Keep the group small

Small groups make it easier and safer for car drivers who need to get around them. A small number isn't separated as easily by traffic or red lights. Riders won't always be hurrying to catch up. If your group is larger than four or five riders, divide it up into two or more smaller groups.

Keep the group together

- **Plan** — The leader should look ahead for changes and signal early so "the word gets back" in plenty of time. Start lane changes early to permit everyone to complete the change.
- **Put Beginners Up Front** -— Place inexperienced riders just behind the leader. That way the more experienced riders can watch them from the back.
- **Follow Those Behind** — Let the tailender set the pace. Use your mirrors to keep an eye on the person behind. If a rider falls behind, everyone should slow down a little to stay with the tailender.

- **Know the Route** — Make sure everyone knows the route. Then, if someone is separated they won't have to hurry to keep from getting lost or taking a wrong turn. Plan frequent stops on long rides.

Keep your distance

Maintain close ranks but at the same time keep a safe distance to allow each rider in the group time and space to react to hazards. A close group takes up less space on the highway, is easier to see and is less likely to be separated. However, it must be done properly.

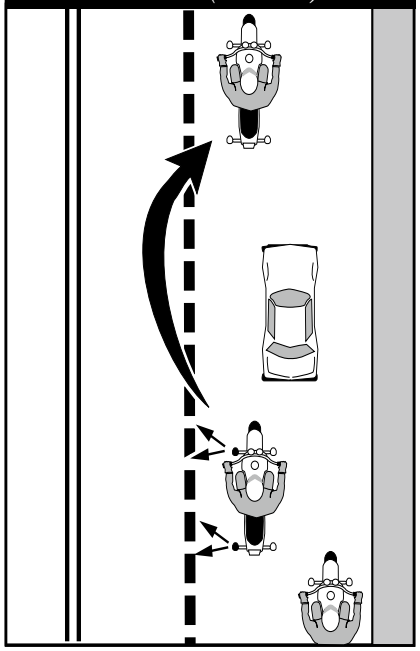
Don't Pair Up — Never operate directly alongside another rider. There is no place to go if you have to avoid a car or something on the road. To talk, wait until you are both stopped.

Staggered Formation — This is the best way to keep ranks close yet maintain an adequate space cushion. The leader rides in the left side of the lane, while the second rider stays one second behind in the right side of the lane.

A third rider maintains in the left position, two seconds behind the first rider. The fourth rider would keep a two-second distance behind the second rider. This formation keeps the group close and permits each rider a safe distance from others ahead, behind and to the sides.

- **Passing in Formation** — Riders in a staggered formation should pass one at a time.

GROUP PASSING (STAGE 1)

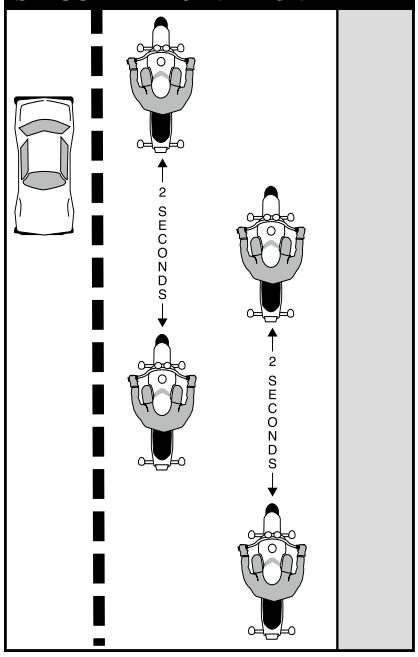


- **First, the lead rider should pull out** and pass when it is safe. After passing, the leader should return to the left position and continue riding at passing speed to open room for the next rider.
- **After the first rider passes safely**, the second rider should move up to the left position and watch for a safe chance to pass. After passing, this rider should return to the right position and open up room for the next rider.

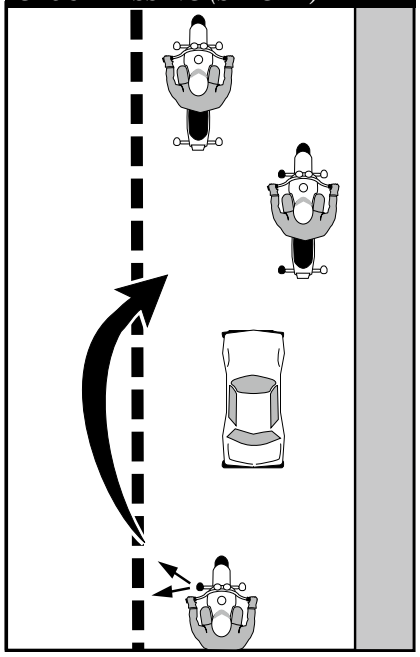
Some people suggest that the leader should move to the right side after passing a vehicle. This is not a good idea. It encourages the second rider to pass and cut back in before there is a large enough space cushion in front of the passed vehicle. It's simpler and safer to wait until there is enough room ahead of the passed vehicle to allow each rider to move into the same position held before the pass.

Single-File Formation — It is best to move into a single-file formation when riding curves, turning, entering or leaving a highway.

STAGGERED FORMATION



GROUP PASSING (STAGE 2)



13 Test Yourself

When riding in a group, inexperienced riders should position themselves:

A. Just behind the leader.

B. In front of the group.

C. At the tail end of the group.

D. Beside the leader.

Be in shape to ride

Riding a motorcycle is a demanding and complex task. Skilled riders pay attention to the riding environment and to operating the motorcycle, identifying potential hazards, making good judgments, and executing decisions quickly and skillfully. Your ability to perform and respond to changing road and traffic conditions is influenced by how fit and alert you are. Alcohol and other drugs, more than any other factor, degrade your ability to think clearly and to ride safely. As little as one drink can have a significant effect on your performance.

Let's look at the risks involved in riding after drinking or using drugs. What to do to protect yourself and your fellow riders is also examined.

Why this information is important

Alcohol is a major contributor to motorcycle crashes, particularly fatal crashes. Studies show that nearly 40% of all riders killed in motorcycle crashes had been drinking. The rest had only a few drinks in their systems — enough to impair riding skills. In the past, drug levels have been harder to distinguish or have not been separated from drinking violations for the traffic records. But riding "under the influence" of either alcohol or drugs poses physical and legal hazards for every rider.

Drinking and drug use is as big a problem among motorcyclists as it is among automobile drivers. Motorcyclists, however, are more likely to be killed or severely injured in a crash. Injuries occur in 90% of motorcycle crashes and 33% of automobile crashes that involve abuse of substances. On a yearly basis, 2,000 motorcyclists are killed and about 50,000 seriously injured in this same type of crash. These statistics are too overwhelming to ignore.

By becoming knowledgeable about the effects of alcohol and other drugs you will see that riding and substance abuse don't mix. Take positive steps to protect yourself and prevent others from injuring themselves.

Alcohol and other drugs in motorcycle operation

No one is immune to the effects of alcohol or drugs. Friends may brag about their ability to hold their liquor or perform better on drugs, but alcohol or drugs make them less able to think clearly and perform physical tasks skillfully. Judgment and the decision-making processes needed for vehicle operation are affected long before legal limitations are reached.

Many over-the-counter, prescription, and illegal drugs have side effects that increase the risk of riding. It is difficult to accurately measure the involvement of particular drugs in motorcycle crashes. But we do know what effects various drugs have on the process involved in riding a motorcycle. We also know that the combined effects of alcohol and other drugs are more dangerous than either is alone.

Alcohol in the body

Alcohol enters the bloodstream quickly. Unlike most foods and beverages, it does not need to be digested. Within minutes after being consumed, it reaches the brain and begins to affect the drinker. The major effect alcohol has is to slow down and impair bodily functions — both mental and physical. Whatever you do, you do less well after consuming alcohol.

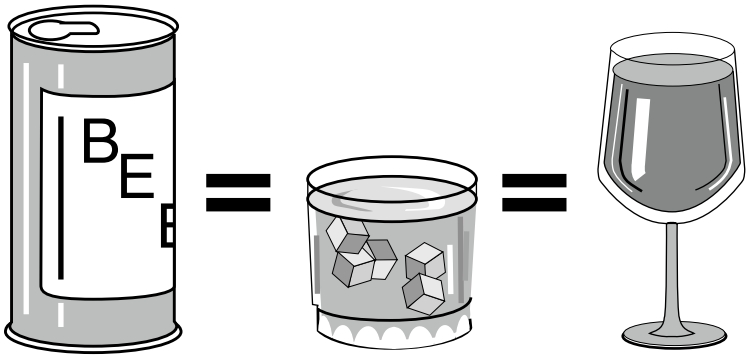
Blood alcohol concentration

Blood Alcohol Concentration or BAC is the amount of alcohol in relation to blood in the body. Generally, alcohol can be eliminated in the body at the rate of almost one drink per hour. But a variety of other factors may also influence the level of alcohol retained. The more alcohol in your blood, the greater the degree of impairment.

Three factors play a major part in determining BAC:

- **The amount** of alcohol you consume.
- **How fast** you drink.
- **Your body** weight.

ALCOHOL CONTENT



Other factors also contribute to the way alcohol affects your system. Your sex, physical condition and food intake are just a few that may cause your BAC level to be even higher. But the full effects of these are not completely known. **Alcohol may still accumulate in your body even if you are drinking at a rate of one drink per hour.** Abilities and judgment can be affected by that one drink.

A 12-ounce can of beer, a mixed drink with one shot of liquor and a 5-ounce glass of wine all contain the same amount of alcohol.

The faster you drink, the more alcohol accumulates in your body. If you drink two drinks in an hour, at the end of that hour, at least one drink will remain in your bloodstream.

Without taking into account any of the other factors, these examples illustrate why time is a critical factor when a rider decides to drink.

A person drinking:

– Seven drinks over the span of three hours would have at least four (7 – 3 = 4) drinks remaining in their system at the end of three hours. They would need at least another four hours to eliminate the four remaining drinks before they consider riding.

– Four drinks over the span of two hours would have at least two (4 –2 = 2) drinks remaining in their system at the end of the two hours. They would need at least another two hours to eliminate the two remaining drinks before they consider riding.

There are times when a larger person may not accumulate as high a concentration of alcohol for each drink consumed. They have more blood and other bodily fluids. But because of individual differences it is better not to take the chance that abilities and judgment have not been affected. Whether or not you are legally intoxicated is not the real issue. Impairment of judgment and skills begins well below the legal limit.

Alcohol and the law

In all states, an adult with a BAC of .08% or above is considered intoxicated; for operators under the age of 21 lower BAC limits (0.000 to 0.02%, depending on the state) apply. It doesn't matter how sober you may look or act. The breath or urine test is what usually determines whether you are riding legally or illegally.

Your chances of being stopped for riding under the influence of alcohol are increasing. Law enforcement is being stepped up across the country in response to the senseless deaths and injuries caused by drinking drivers and riders.

Consequences of conviction

Years ago, first offenders had a good chance of getting off with a small fine and participation in alcohol-abuse classes. Today the laws of most states impose stiff penalties on drinking operators. And those penalties are mandatory, meaning that judges must impose them.

If you are convicted of riding under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you may receive any of the following penalties:

- **License Revocation** — Mandatory revocation for conviction, arrest or refusal to submit to a breath test.
- **Fines** — Severe fines are another aspect of a conviction usually levied with a license revocation.
- **Community Service** — Performing tasks such as picking up litter along the highway, washing cars in the motor-vehicle pool, or working at an emergency ward.
- **Costs** — Additional lawyer's fees to pay; lost work time spent in court or alcohol-education programs; public transportation costs (while your license is suspended); and the added psychological costs of being tagged a "drunk driver."

Minimize the risks

Your ability to judge how well you are riding is affected first. Although you may be performing more and more poorly, you think you are doing better and better. The result is that you ride confidently, taking greater and greater risks. Minimize the risks of drinking and riding by taking steps before you drink. Control your drinking or control your riding.

Make an intelligent choice

Don't drink — Once you start, your resistance becomes weaker.

Setting a limit or pacing yourself are poor alternatives at best. Your ability to exercise good judgment is one of the first things affected by alcohol. Even if you have tried to drink in moderation, you may not realize to what extent your skills have suffered from alcohol's fatiguing effects.

Or, Don't Ride — If you haven't controlled your drinking, you must control your riding.

- **Leave the motorcycle home** — so you won't be tempted to ride. Arrange another way to get home.
- **Wait** — If you exceed your limit, wait until your system eliminates the alcohol and its fatiguing effects.

Step in to protect friends

People who have had too much to drink are unable to make a responsible decision. It is up to others to step in and keep them from taking too great a risk. No one wants to do this — it's uncomfortable, embarrassing and thankless. You are rarely thanked for your efforts at the time. But the alternatives are often worse.

There are several ways to keep friends from hurting themselves:

- **Arrange a safe ride** — Provide alternative ways for them to get home.
- **Slow the pace of drinking** — Involve them in other activities.
- **Keep them there** — Use any excuse to keep them from getting on their motorcycle. Serve them food and coffee to pass the time. Explain your concerns for their risks of getting arrested or hurt, or hurting someone else.
- **Get friends involved** — Use peer pressure from a group of friends to intervene.

It helps to enlist support from others when you decide to step in. The more people on your side, the easier it is to be firm and the harder it is for the rider to resist. While you may not be thanked at the time, you will never have to say,"If only I had..."

Fatigue

Riding a motorcycle is more tiring than driving a car. On a long trip, you'll tire sooner than you would in a car. Avoid riding when tired. Fatigue can affect your control of the motorcycle.

- **Protect yourself** from the elements — Wind, cold, and rain make you tire quickly. Dress warmly. A windshield is worth its cost if you plan to ride long distances.
- **Limit your distance** — Experienced riders seldom try to ride more than about six hours a day.
- **Take frequent rest breaks** — Stop, and get off the motorcycle at least every two hours.
- **Don't drink or use drugs — Artificial stimulants often result in extreme fatigue or depression when they start to wear off. Riders are unable to concentrate on the task at hand.**

14 Test Yourself

If you wait an hour for each drink before riding:

A. You cannot be arrested for drinking and riding.

B. Your riding skills will not be affected.

C. Side effects from the drinking may still remain.

D. You will be okay as long as you ride slowly.

Earning your license

Safe riding requires knowledge and skill. Licensing tests are the best measurement of the skills necessary to operate safely in traffic. Assessing your own skills is not enough. People often overestimate their own abilities. It's even harder for friends and relatives to be totally honest about your skills. Licensing exams are designed to be scored more objectively.

To earn your license, you must pass a knowledge test and an on-cycle skill test. Knowledge test questions are based on information, practices, and ideas from this manual. They require that you know and understand road rules and safe riding practices.

Knowledge test
(sample questions)

1. It is MOST important to flash your brake light when:

A. Someone is following too closely.
B. You will be slowing suddenly.
C. There is a stop sign ahead.
D. Your signals are not working.

2. The FRONT brake supplies how much of the potential stopping power?

A. About one-quarter.
B. About one-half.
C. About three-quarters.
D. All of the stopping power.

3. To swerve correctly:

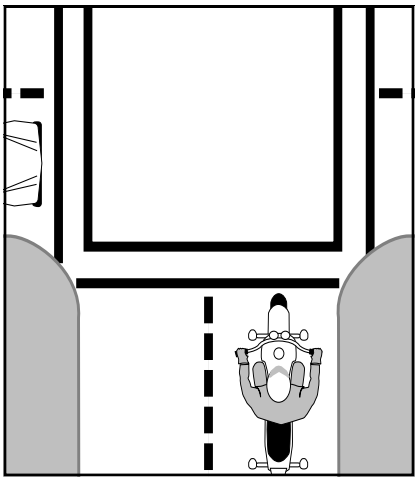
A. Shift your weight quickly.
B. Turn the handlebars quickly.
C. Press the handgrip in the direction of the turn.
D. Press the handgrip in the opposite direction of the turn.

4. If a tire goes flat while riding, and you must stop, it is usually best to:

A. Relax on the handlegrips.
B. Shift your weight toward the good tire.
C. Brake on the good tire and steer to the side of the road.
D. Use both brakes and stop quickly.

5. The car below is waiting to enter the intersection. It is best to:

A. Make eye contact with the driver.
B. Reduce speed and be ready to react.
C. Maintain speed and position.
D. Maintain speed and move right.



On-Motorcycle Skill Test

Basic vehicle control and crash-avoidance skills are included in on-cycle tests to determine your ability to handle normal and hazardous traffic situations.

You may be tested for your ability to:

- **Know your motorcycle** and your riding limits.
- **Accelerate, brake, and turn safely.**
- **See, be seen** and communicate with others.
- **Adjust speed** and position to the traffic situation.
- **Stop, turn and swerve quickly.**
- **Make critical decisions** and carry them out.

Examiners may score on factors related to safety such as:

- **Selecting** safe speeds to perform maneuvers.
- **Choosing** the correct path and staying within boundaries.
- **Completing** normal and quick stops.
- **Completing** normal and quick turns, or swerves.

Answers to Test Yourself (previous pages)
1-C, 2-D, 3-D, 4-A, 5-B, 6-C, 7-D, 8-D, 9-C, 10-C, 11-D, 12-A, 13-A, 14-C

Answers to above Knowledge Test:
1-B, 2-C, 3-C, 4-C, 5-B

Iowa motorcycle skill test

*Iowa's Motorcycle Skills Test includes maneuvers recommended by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. The test is also referred to as the **Rider Skill Test**.*

SAFETY GEAR REQUIRED TO TAKE THE TEST
You must come prepared with a helmet, long pants, and sturdy shoes to take the test.
Full fingered gloves and a long sleeve shirt are recommended, but not required.

ENGINE STALLING
Points are assessed if you stall your engine at any time during any exercise.
Stalling the engine four times during this test is an automatic failure.

Description of the skills maneuvers

1. **SHARP LEFT TURN:** This exercise evaluates a rider's ability to maintain control and remain within a specific path when turning sharply.

2. **NORMAL STOP:** This exercise evaluates a rider's ability to stop in a designated area, such as before a crosswalk or stop sign, without interfering with traffic.

3. **RIGHT U-TURN:** This exercise evaluates a rider's ability to coordinate multiple controls while negotiating a turn.

4. **CONE WEAVE:** This exercise evaluates a rider's ability to coordinate clutch and throttle to complete turns and avoid hazards.

5. **OBSTACLE SWERVE:** According to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, 32 percent of riders involved in crashes fail to take any evasive action, and 76 percent improperly execute their evasive action. This exercise evaluates a rider's ability to maneuver quickly to avoid a hazard.

6. **QUICK STOP:** According to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, approximately 70 percent of riders involved in crashes fail to use, or incorrectly use their brakes in an emergency situation. This exercise measures a rider's ability to stop quickly.

It is recommended you practice the maneuvers included in the motorcycle skills test before test time. You might consider observing the testing on a day prior to your attempt. You should review the Motorcycle Operator Manual and pay close attention to the areas explaining rider position, braking, turning, quick stops and swerving quickly.

The examiner will assess points for placing a foot on the ground, touching a cone or boundary line, and for stalling the motorcycle. More than 10 points accumulated is unsatisfactory performance. The test will be discontinued at any time when more than 10 points are accumulated.

In addition to point accumulation, the following will also result in failure of the test: dropping your motorcycle; bringing the front wheel off the ground; running off the course out of control; committing any unsafe act; or having a crash, such as hitting a car or pole.

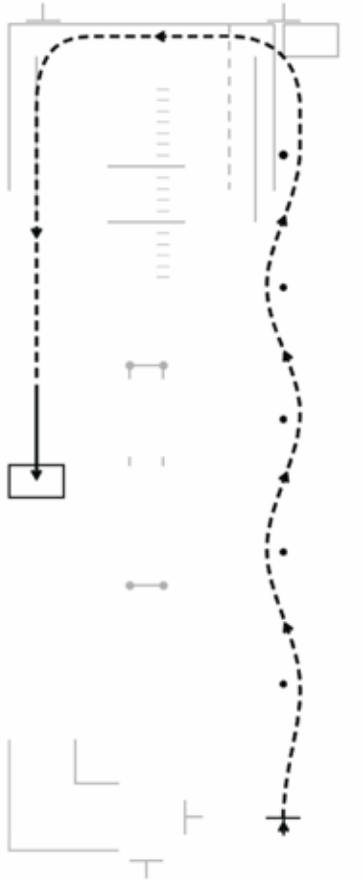
To receive a motorcycle license with full privileges, most states require that maneuvers be performed as designed for single-track, two-wheeled motorcycles.

On-cycle skill tests are not designed for sidecars or three-wheel vehicles. Those vehicles maneuver differently than a two-wheeled motorcycle. Depending on the state, a driver examiner may follow you on a car test-route. Restrictions (sidecar, three-wheeled vehicle) may be added until completion of a two-wheel cycle test

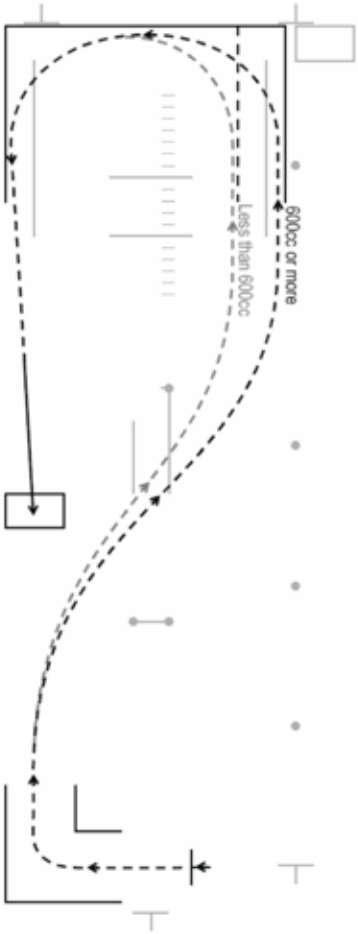
Diagrams and drawings used in this manual are for reference only and are not to correct scale for size of vehicles and distances.

Rider Skill Test - 2 Wheel

1 - Cone Weave, Normal Stop



2 - Turning from a Stop, U-turn

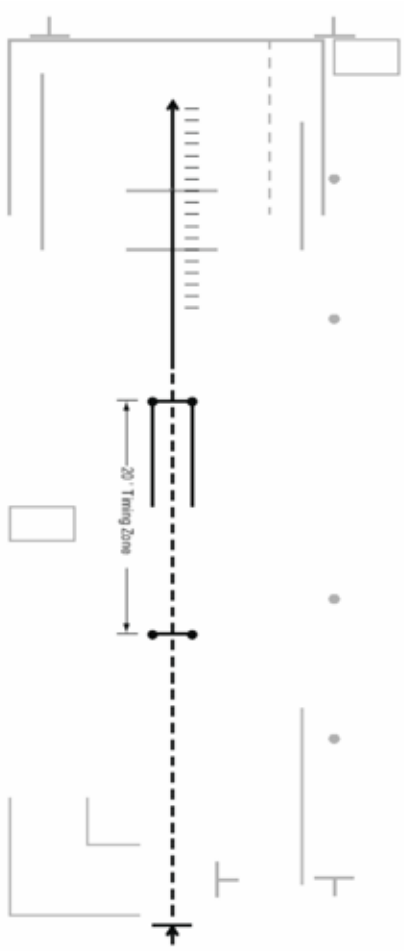


1. **CONE WEAVE, NORMAL STOP**
   - When signaled, ride to the right of the first cone, to the left of the second, and so on. Weave past all five cones without touching or skipping a cone or putting a foot down.
   - Turn left and ride toward that side of the course. Make a smooth, non-skidding stop with your front tire inside that box.
   - When stopped, your front tire must not touch the painted lines. Remain stopped.

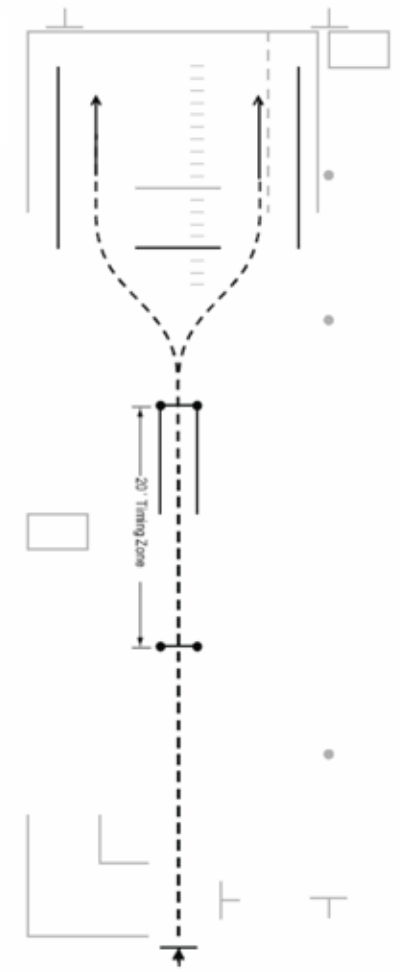
2. **TURN FROM A STOP, U-TURN**
   - When signaled, make a right turn between the boundary lines. Do not touch either line or put a foot down.
   - Diagonally, cross to the opposite side of the range and make a left u-turn inside the painted box at the far end of the range.
   - Do not touch the solid line (motorcycles 600cc or more) or the dashed line (motorcycles less than 600cc) or put a foot down.
   - Stop with your front tire inside that box and wait for further instructions.

Rider Skill Test - 2 Wheel

3 - Quick Stop



4 - Obstacle Swerve



3. **QUICK STOP**
   - **Position your motorcycle on that T.**
   - **On my signal, accelerate straight up this path. Stabilize your speed between 12-18 mph by the time you reach the first line.**
   - **Maintain a steady speed.**
   - **When your front tire crosses the second line, stop as fast as you safely can. You will not lose points if you skid.**
   - **Once stopped, do not allow your motorcycle to roll in either direction.**

4. **OBSTACLE SWERVE**
   - Start at the same start T.
   - On my signal, accelerate straight up this path. Stabilize your speed between 12-18 mph by the time you reach the first line.
   - Maintain a steady speed.
   - When your front tire passes the second line, swerve to the (right/left).
   - Avoid the obstacle line and stay to the inside of the sideline. Do not touch either line.
   - Stop smoothly and wait for further instructions.
   - Stop with your front tire inside that box and wait for further instructions.

Supplementary information for three-wheel vehicles

Many states require a separate license endorsement to operate a three-wheel vehicle. This requires the rider to pass both a written and a skills test. The purpose of this supplement is to help prepare riders to complete the written exam for a three-wheel vehicle license or endorsement. This information is provided in addition to that offered in the first part of this Motorcycle Operator Manual, so when preparing to take the written test, begin by reading the information on two-wheel motorcycles thoroughly. It provides information on safe operation of your vehicle in traffic. This supplement contains information specific to the safe operation of a three-wheel vehicle, including both three-track vehicles and motorcycles with sidecars.

Know your vehicle

Due to the many three-wheel vehicle designs available on the market today, standards suitable for testing may vary.

However, vehicles should conform to standards determined by your state. In general, three-wheel vehicles will have the following specifications.

1. **Three wheels** leaving two or three separate tracks during straight line operation.

2. **Motorcycle-based** conversion or design with:
   - Handlebar steering.
   - Motorcycle-type controls arranged with the standard layout.
   - Convenience alterations such as a single brake pedal or lever control, automatic clutch or automatic transmission are allowed.
   - Saddle seating:
   – Seating in which the rider/ passenger straddles the vehicle.
   – If designed for a passenger, the passenger must be seated behind the operator (or in a separate passenger compartment in the case of a motorcycle with sidecar).

3. **Turning** diameter of the vehicle at its widest point must be less than 40 feet.

4. **The vehicle** meets all applicable federal on-road vehicle standards.

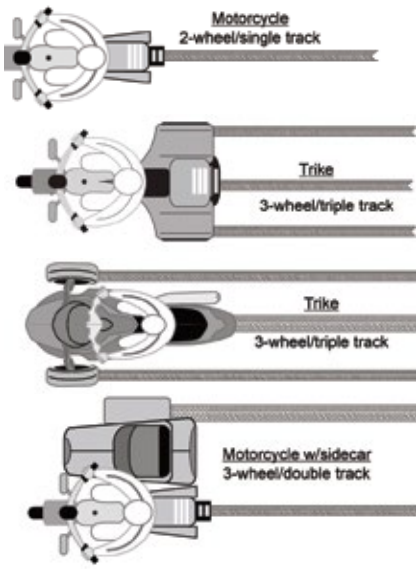
The following vehicles are not included in this definition, and, therefore, testing requirements may not be applicable. Always refer to your state Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Licensing or other appropriate state regulatory agency for exact regulations regarding testing for:

- **Automotive hybrids** or automotive conversions.
- **Vehicles with automotive** controls or seating.
- **Vehicles with front- or rear-mounted engines** (engines must be mounted mid-frame below the rider to be considered motorcycle based).
- **Vehicles with enclosed** or semi-enclosed riding compartments.
- **Motorcycles or scooters** with two close-set wheels in front (contact patches less than 18.1 inches apart) that lean and maneuver like standard, single-track, two-wheel motorcycles, or
- **Vehicles** with any other departure from the above standards.

Three-Wheel Vehicle Designs

As shown below in the figure, vehicle designs vary among manufacturers. Unlike traditional motorcycles, which are considered single-track vehicles, three-wheel vehicles could be either dual- or triple-track design. Dual-track vehicles are motorcycles with sidecars, while triple-track vehicles can be configured either with dual front wheels or dual rear wheels.

MOTORCYCLE AND THREE-WHEEL VEHICLES



The right vehicle for you

Make sure your three-wheel vehicle or sidecar-equipped motorcycle is right for you. You should be able to comfortably reach and operate all of the controls and be able to complete full vehicle turns using the handlebars without excessive upper body movements that could jeopardize stability and control.

Borrowing and lending

Borrowers and lenders, beware.

Crashes are fairly common among beginning operators, especially in the first months of riding. Operating an unfamiliar vehicle adds to the problem. If you borrow a three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with sidecar, get familiar with it in a controlled area. If you lend your three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with sidecar to friends, make sure they are licensed and know how to ride before you allow them to operate in traffic. Such vehicles operate very differently than two-wheel motorcycles.

No matter how experienced you are, be extra careful on any vehicle that is unfamiliar or new to you.

Get familiar with vehicle controls

Be sure you are familiar with the controls of the three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with a sidecar before attempting to operate it on any highway, because some vehicle controls may differ from those found on other three-wheel vehicles or motorcycles. This is especially important if you are riding on a borrowed vehicle. Before beginning the ride:

- **Make all the checks** you would on your own vehicle.
- **Familiarize yourself** with all controls, such as the turn signals, horn, headlight switch, fuel control valve, and cut-off switch. Locate and operate these items without having to search for them.
- **Operate all the controls** before you start riding. Know the gearshift pattern and operate the throttle, clutch and brakes a few times. Controls react differently on different vehicles, and exact locations of controls may vary slightly. Additionally, some motorcycle conversions may be equipped with a single brake pedal or lever control, automatic clutch or automatic transmission.
- **As you begin to ride, start out slowly and carefully and be aware of your surroundings. Accelerate gently, take turns a little more slowly, and leave extra room for stopping.**

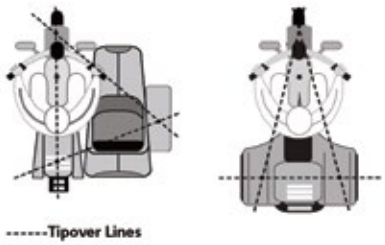
Basic vehicle controls

Steering and tipping

Three-wheel vehicles handle differently than motorcycles. With three wheels on the ground, they are naturally more stable than a motorcycle. They also steer differently. Because conventional three-wheel vehicles cannot lean, they cannot counter steer. Instead, the front wheel is pointed in the direction the rider wants the vehicle to go.

Under some conditions during the operation of a three-wheel vehicle, it is possible to have only two wheels in contact with the road surface. This could occur during turning or tight maneuvers whenever enough weight is transferred outside of what are called tip-over lines. The figure shows the tip-over lines on three-wheel vehicles. Because of this tendency, careful load and passenger positioning inside the tip-over lines will help maintain maximum stability of the vehicle.

TIP-OVER LINES



Body position

As with any motor vehicle, operator position is important for control and for reducing or preventing fatigue. The operator should be able to reach both handgrips comfortably, because more handlebar movement is necessary than when riding a motorcycle. While it is not necessary for the rider of a three-wheel vehicle to move drastically during operation, shifting weight in the direction of the turn can improve control.

Braking

On a motorcycle with a sidecar, during braking in a sharp turn, the sidecar wheel may lift off the ground. Motorcycle and sidecar tires have limited traction or grip on the road surface and traction is greater when the vehicle is rolling, not skidding or slipping. During turning, some of the available tire traction is used for cornering, so less is available for stopping. Thus, a skid can occur if you brake too hard.

Turning

The tendency of the rear, inside wheel to lift during turning is greater with increased vehicle speed and a tighter curve radius. During a turn, inertia causes the center of gravity of the vehicle to shift sideways and outward toward the tip-over line. The reduced weight over the opposite side wheel can cause it to lift slightly.

Because the weight of a three-track vehicle is distributed almost equally between the two front or two rear wheels, these vehicles handle the same in left- and right-hand turns.

When turning a three-track vehicle:

- **Approach a turn** at speed with your head up and look through the turn.
- **Concentrate** on pointing the front wheel in the direction you want the vehicle to go.
- **Roll off the throttle** before entering the turn.
- **Apply the brakes** enough to slow the vehicle to a speed at which you can ride safely through the turn, then release the brakes before the turn.
- **Slightly lean** your upper body in the direction you intend to turn.
- **Steer the front wheel** toward the turn.
- **Roll on the throttle** to pull the vehicle through the turn.

Because the center of gravity of a motorcycle with sidecar is close to the motorcycle itself, the behavior of the vehicle when turning right or left is quite different.

During a right turn, a slight sideways movement of the center of gravity creates a greater tendency for the sidecar wheel to lift. The lift will be greater if the sidecar is empty or lightly loaded.

When turning right on a motorcycle with sidecar:

- **Anticipate** the degree of turn required.
- **Reduce speed** before entering the curve by downshifting or braking.
- **Slightly lean** your upper body in the direction you intend to turn.
- **Maintain speed** as you enter the curve.
- **Accelerate** gradually as you exit the curve.

During a left-hand turn, the sidecar acts as a stabilizer, so the sidecar wheel stays on the ground. However, if the turn is taken too sharply or at too high a rate of speed, there is a tendency for the motorcycle rear suspension to extend, and this may cause the rear wheel of the motorcycle to lift off the ground.

When turning left on a motorcycle with sidecar:

- **Reduce speed** prior to entering the turn.
- **Apply more pressure** on the rear brake than on the front.

Hills

When riding uphill on a three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with a sidecar some weight will shift to the rear, causing the front of the vehicle to become lighter. This weight shift reduces the traction on the front tire for steering and tire grip.

When riding downhill, gravity increases the amount of braking force required to slow or stop the vehicle. It is important to begin slowing earlier for cornering and stopping.

Lane position

The track of the dual wheels of a three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with a sidecar is almost the same width as some automobiles. Unlike a motorcycle, you are limited in lane positioning. Keep toward the center of the lane to be sure the track of the dual wheels does not cross the painted lines into opposing traffic. Riding too far to the right could cause loss of traction if the tire leaves the pavement.

Lane positioning when riding in groups is also an important consideration. You will not be able to use a staggered formation as you would when riding motorcycles. Ride single file and always maintain a safe margin, two seconds minimum, between vehicles.

Parking at the roadside

Because of the limitations on mobility and vehicle length, it is not practical to park your vehicle at a 90-degree angle with your rear wheel touching the curb as you would with a motorcycle. Position your vehicle in a parking space so you are parked parallel to the curb and set the parking brake. Some three-wheel vehicles have reverse, so you can more easily maneuver into a parking space designed for an automobile. Parking parallel to the curb will facilitate pulling away from the curb and entering the lanes of traffic.

Acceleration and deceleration

A three-wheel vehicle with two drive wheels seems to be more stable during acceleration and braking than a motorcycle with a sidecar. Attaching a sidecar to your motorcycle adds a nonpowered, off-centered mass of weight. So, during acceleration the sidecar will feel as though it is lagging behind you, causing the vehicle to feel as though it is being steered to the right. During deceleration or braking, the momentum of the sidecar continues to carry it forward, giving the feeling that the sidecar is trying to pass you and making the vehicle feel as though it is being steered to the left.

- **On acceleration**, compensate for this yaw tendency by steering slightly in the opposite direction from the sidecar.
- **On deceleration**, compensate for this tendency by steering slightly in the direction of the sidecar. You can also pull in the clutch when braking.

Swerving

A quick stop may not always be sufficient to avoid an obstacle in your path, even if you properly apply both brakes. Sometimes the only way to avoid a collision is to swerve. A swerve is any sudden change of direction. It can be two quick turns or a rapid shift to the side when maneuvering the vehicle. Often, there is not much time to adjust your body position.

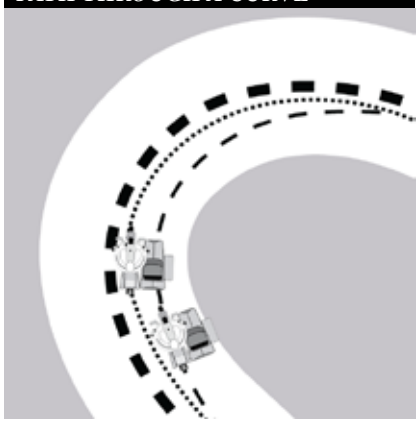
A three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with sidecar is not as maneuverable as a motorcycle, so plan well ahead to avoid the need for any sudden turns or swerving. If braking is required, brake either before or after the swerve, never while swerving.

Cornering and curves

The cornering characteristics of a three-wheel vehicle or motorcycle with a sidecar differ from those of a motorcycle. Even with three wheels on the ground, a sidecar can tip over if it is being turned too sharply or is going too fast for a corner. Therefore, it is best to always slow before entering a corner.

The best path to follow in the curve may not be the one that follows the curve of the road. Following the center of the lane may actually increase the tip-over forces. Check opposing traffic carefully, and if safe, enter the curve toward the outside of your lane as shown in the figure.

PATH THROUGH A CURVE



This increases your line of sight through the curve and reduces the effective radius of the curve. As you turn, move the vehicle toward the inside of the curve. Then as you pass the center of the curve, move to the outside to exit the curve—always remember to stay in your lane.

Carrying passengers and cargo

Three-wheel vehicles are designed to carry passengers and cargo, but always be sure not to exceed the tire or vehicle loading capacity. The extra weight could change the handling characteristics of the vehicle slightly, so you must give some thought to where the loads are positioned.

Many three-track vehicles will have built-in storage compartments for cargo, either in front of or behind the rider. On these vehicles, center the load and keep it low in the storage areas so it is positioned within the tip-over lines and balanced side-to-side. If a passenger is being carried, the passenger will sit directly behind the rider.

On a motorcycle with a sidecar, the best place for a passenger is in the sidecar. Never put a single passenger on the saddle; the added weight on the tip-over-line will increase the instability of the vehicle. While a second passenger can be carried on the seat behind the rider, the heavier passenger should always be in the sidecar.

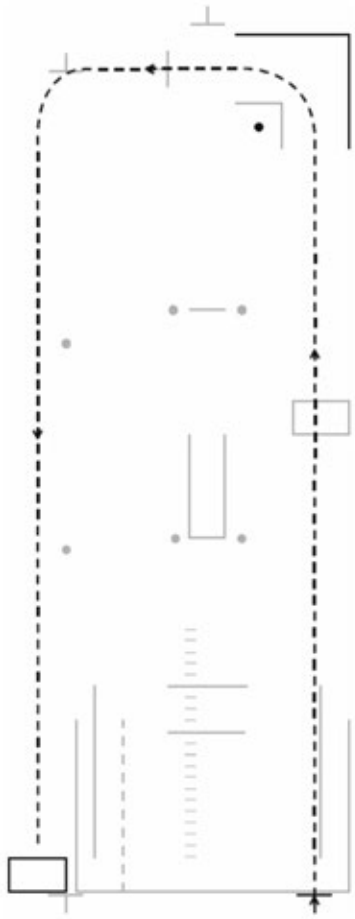
The passenger sitting behind the rider should sit upright at all times. It is not necessary for the passenger to lean into curves with the rider.

When carrying loads in a sidecar, secure the load firmly in place. If the load shifts, handling will be affected. Loads should be distributed toward the rear of the sidecar to reduce tipping of the nose of the sidecar in the event of a sudden left turn.

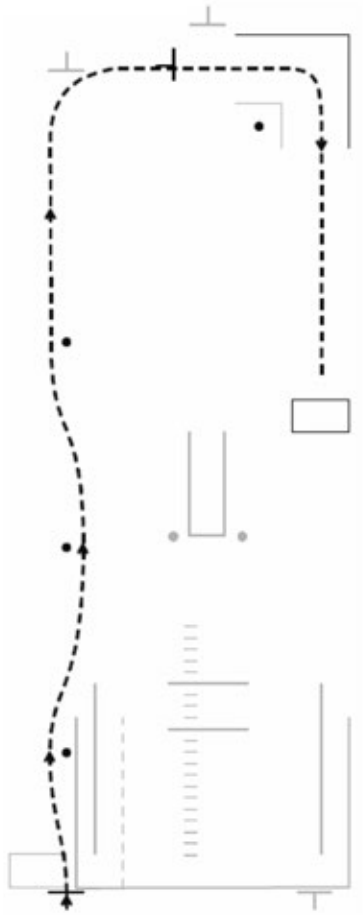
When carrying a load, you may find performance is reduced and stopping distances are longer—so allow a little extra distance. The addition of a sidecar passenger will greatly improve stability, and right-hand turns can be made at a slightly higher speed. Turning left, however, will require more turning force.

Rider Skill Test - 3 Wheel

1 - Left Turn, Normal Stop



2 - Cone Weave, Turn From a Stop



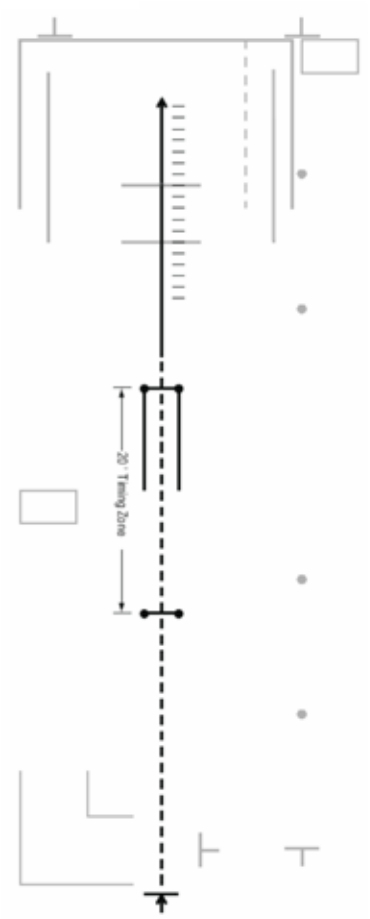
ENGINE STALLING
Points are assessed if you stall your engine at any time during any exercise.
Stalling the engine four times during this test is an automatic failure.

1. **LEFT TURN, NORMAL STOP**
   - Accelerate straight ahead and make a sharp left turn between the outside boundary line and the cone marker. Do not touch the outside line or the cone.
   - Then ride toward this end of the course. Make a smooth, non-skidding stop with your front tire inside that box. (Left front tire on vehicles with two front tires.)
   - When stopped, your front tire must not touch the painted lines. Remain stopped.

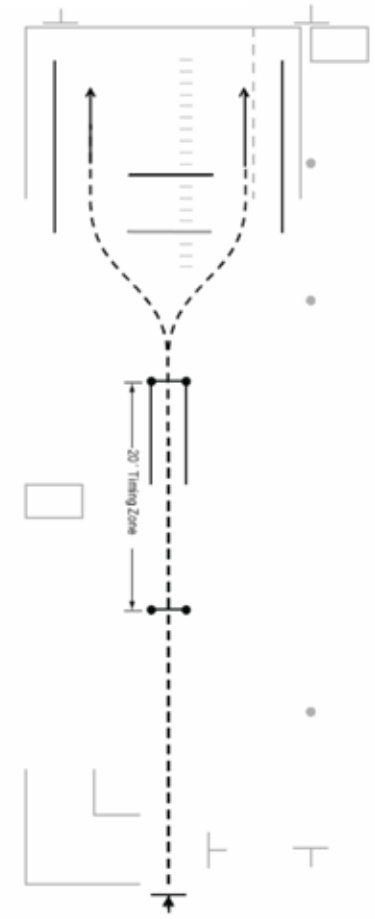
2. **CONE WEAVE, TURN FROM A STOP**
   - When signaled, ride to the left of the first cone, to the right of the second, and to the left of the third. Weave past all three cones without touching or skipping any of the cones.
   - Turn right at the end of the course and stop at the Start "T" facing the other side of the course.
   - On my next signal, make a right hand turn between the outside boundary line and the cone. Do not touch the outside boundary lines or the cone.
   - Make a smooth, non-skidding stop with your front tire inside that box and wait for further instruction.

Rider Skill Test - 3 Wheel

3 - Quick Stop



4 - Obstacle Swerve



3. QUICK STOP

- Position your motorcycle on that T.
- On my signal, accelerate straight up this path. Stabilize your speed between 12-18 mph by the time you reach the first line.
- Maintain a steady speed.
- When your front tire/overhang crosses the second line, stop as fast as you safely can. You will not lose points if you skid.
- Once stopped, do not allow your vehicle to roll in either direction.

4. OBSTACLE SWERVE

- Start at the same start T.
- On my signal, accelerate straight up this path. Stabilize your speed between 12-18 mph by the time you reach the first line.
- Maintain a steady speed.
- When your front tire/overhang passes the second line, swerve to the (right/left).
- Avoid the obstacle line and stay to the inside of the sideline. Do not touch either line.
- Stop smoothly and wait for further instructions.

Motorcycles make sense...so does professional training

Motorcycles are inexpensive to operate, fun to ride and easy to park. Unfortunately, many riders never learn critical skills needed to ride safely.

Professional training for beginning and experienced riders prepares them for real-world traffic situations. Motorcycle Safety Foundation Rider Courses® teach and improve such skills as:

- Effective turning
- Obstacle avoidance
- Braking maneuvers
- Traffic strategies
- Protective apparel selection
- Maintenance

For the basic or experienced Rider Course nearest you, call toll free: 800-446-9227 or visit www.msf-usa.org.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation's (MSF) purpose is to improve the safety of motorcyclists on the nation's streets and highways. In an attempt to reduce motorcycle crashes and injuries, the MSF has programs in rider education, licensing improvement, public information, and statistics. These programs are designed for both motorcyclists and motorists. A national not-for-profit organization, the MSF is sponsored by BMW, BRP, Ducati, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Kawasaki, KTM, Piaggio/Vespa, Suzuki, Triumph, Victory, and Yamaha.

The information contained in this publication is offered for the benefit of those who have an interest in riding motorcycles. The information has been compiled from publications, interviews and observations of individuals and organizations familiar with the use of motorcycles, accessories and training. Because there are many differences in product design, riding styles, federal, state, and local laws, there may be organizations and individuals who hold differing opinions. Consult your local regulatory agencies for information concerning the operation of motorcycles in your area. Although the MSF will continue to research, field test and publish responsible viewpoints on the subject, it disclaims any liability for the views expressed herein.

Printing and distribution courtesy of
Motorcycle Safety Foundation
2 Jenner, Suite 150, Irvine, CA 92618-3806
http://www.msf-usa.org

Second Revision ..... December 1978
Third Revision ..... February 1981
Fourth Revision ..... January 1983
Fifth Revision ..... October 1987
Sixth Revision ..... April 1991
Seventh Revision ..... September 1992
Eighth Revision ..... January 1999
Ninth Revision ..... March 2000
Tenth Revision ..... January 2002
Eleventh Revision ..... July 2002
Twelfth Revision ..... May 2004
Thirteenth Revision ..... June 2007
Fourteenth Revision ..... March 2008
Fifteenth Revision ..... June 2009
Sixteenth Revision ..... October 2009

Printed in USA 000254

Federal and state laws prohibit employment and/or public accommodation discrimination on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, gender identity, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or veteran's status. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please contact the Iowa Civil Rights Commission at 800-457-4416 or Iowa Department of Transportation's a affirmative action officer. If you need accommodations because of a disability to access the Iowa Department of Transportation's services, contact the agency's affirmative action officer at 800-262-0003.

Notes

Notes

Notes

Federal and state laws prohibit employment and/or public accommodation discrimination on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, gender identity, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please contact the Iowa Civil Rights Commission at 800-457-4416 or Iowa Department of Transportation's affirmative action officer. If you need accommodations because of a disability to access the Iowa Department of Transportation's services, contact the agency's affirmative action officer at 800-262-0003.