

# ***Driving Defensively***

***By Brad Kitchen (SUHOG)***

Defensive driving is one of the most important safety topics that every rider should be aware of. How many times has another rider mentioned to you that you must watch out for the other guy? Drivers in vehicles are distracted by many reasons today such as using their cell phone, watching TV's, and other electronic devices that vehicle manufactures are installing in vehicles. I have seen drivers run through stop lights, causing serious accidents, because a driver was distracted while talking on their cell phone. As a rider, you must be aware of all happenings around you.

To avoid an incident or accident, one must remember to ride defensively. Below are a few tips that might keep you from becoming involved in an accident.

Be especially alert at intersections because approximately 70 percent of motorcycle-vehicle collisions occur there! Watch for vehicles that may unexpectedly turn in front of you or pull out from a side street or driveway. At intersections where vision is limited by shrubbery, parked vehicles, or buildings, slow down, make doubly sure of traffic, and be prepared to react quickly. While stopped at a 4-way intersection and waiting for a light to turn green, try to place yourself in a position so you can watch the cross traffic. When your light turns green, DO NOT get on the throttle because you think your bike sounds good at quick shifts and high RPM's. There's always someone trying to race across the intersection trying to beat the yellow light before it turns red. A broad sided accident can ruin your whole day.

Checking in the rearview mirrors before changing lanes or stopping makes good sense. A quick stop without checking rear traffic may result in a rear-end collision. When changing lanes, use signals and make a visual check to assure that you can change lanes safely. While checking a lane that you would like to move into, don't forget about the guy in front of you. It never fails when you decide to change lanes, the person in front of you decides he or she wants to stop and smell the roses. Colliding with the rear of another vehicle could place you seeing eye to eye with the driver of the other vehicle sooner than you would like.

Watch the road surface and traffic ahead to anticipate problems and road hazards. Road hazards that are minor irritations for an automobile can be a major hazard for a rider. Hazards include potholes, oil slicks, puddles, debris or other objects on the roadway, ruts, uneven pavement, and railroad tracks. Painted roadway markings and manhole covers can be extremely slippery when wet. Go around most hazards. To do so safely, you must be able to spot such hazards from a distance. Slow down before reaching the obstacle and make sure you have enough room before changing direction. Railroad tracks and cattle crossings should be crossed at an angle as close to 90 degrees as possible.

Experienced motorcyclists often have this advice for new riders:

"Assume that you are invisible to other motorists and operate your motorcycle accordingly."

Position yourself to be seen. Ride in the portion of the lane where it is most likely that you will be seen by other motorists. Avoid the car's "No Zone" (i.e., blind spot). Use your headlights, day and night. All motor vehicles have blind spots where other vehicles cannot be seen with mirrors.

Don't ever be in a hurry to get to your destination, know what's around you at all times and always remember, "SAFETY FIRST".