

Braking ... The Rules

IF YOU'D LIKE TO SEE A RIDING INSTRUCTOR'S head spin faster than Andrew Hines' rear tire at a green light, tell him the following: "If a car pulls out, or turns in front of you, it's better to lay down the bike than hit the car."

Now, you may have heard this before, and perhaps even said it yourself, but I think we need to evaluate this statement before we proceed.

First of all, if you lay a bike down, you're really crashing. Causing a crash to prevent one doesn't make much sense, does it? Along these lines, how many riders do you think could really lay down a 700-pound hog and do it safely? Excluding Hollywood stunt riders and some motor officers from the equation, the number would be extremely low. Okay, let's say you were able to lay down your pride and joy. How easy would it be to control your sliding mass of metal, leather, and chrome? Worse yet, could you control a sliding bike if it were on top of you? There's the chance a part of your bike might dig into the pavement, forcing it to suddenly flip, and that's not really a much better alternative. If you consider that your body would be hitting the pavement with a force you'd rather not deal with (at the same elevation as the bottom of the car), things start to look pretty bleak. But wait ... what about your passenger? Where the heck will he/she be flying off to? Throw in the fact that you may be riding without proper riding gear and the pavement we just spoke about won't feel too good on your exposed body. To think that all this happens in less time than you can say, "What the ...?"

Believe it or not, there really is a better way to approach this scenario. Agencies have been collecting information from accidents such as the infamous left-turner that shows there are instances when cyclists have enough time to react properly. Although the car turning in front of you is the cause of the possible conflict, there is research that shows a crash can result from actions taken (or not taken) by the rider. Essentially, in a crash situation, some of us are making a bad thing worse.

So, what is the approach that can change things in our favor? Simple: learning proper braking techniques. Too many riders have never been taught how to use their brakes. "What are you talking about? I know how to stop," "I was told not to use the front brake at higher speeds because you can flip," and "It's usually the other guy you have to watch out for" are all statements instructors have heard before. We need to understand that our safety starts as our responsibility and the first step is becoming educated and improving our riding and, in



this case, stopping skills.

The key to stopping in an emergency is to correctly use the brakes, front and rear, without locking up either wheel. If you're skidding, you're not stopping at the bike's fullest potential, and you're just sliding out of control. There is a chance that skidding would slow you down to a lesser speed when you hit the car (which is a little better than riding into it). It's better that we stop before any impact happens. Since the front brake gives us 70 percent of our stopping power, we may want to learn how to use it better in conjunction with the rear brake.

When stopping quickly, first ascertain that your handlebar is square to the motorcycle and the bike is upright. By checking both, you're taking steps to help keep your ride up on two wheels, which is a good thing! Next, you should apply steady pressure to both brakes. Do not grab a handful of the front brake, which will cause other problems we'll discuss later. The same goes for the rear brake — don't slam your size 12 H-D logger boot on it, forcing the back tire to lock and the bike to skid. This can lead to more trouble. Steady, even pressure is what you want. Now, as you come to a stop, you'll need to look in the direction you're traveling. Keep your head and eyes up and be sure to look straight ahead. This will help keep the motorcycle better balanced because a bike that stops smoothly always has a better chance of staying upright. Sounds simple, but a lot of riders crash because of improper braking techniques.

What else can we do? Get educated! Take a certified riding course that will teach you to stop skillfully. Then go out and practice those skills on a regular basis, until they become second nature. I wouldn't recommend practicing braking without learning to do it properly because you could be setting yourself up for trouble. Learning to stop in time, before getting up close and personal with that cager, is definitely a better option. Granted, there will be situations when riders — skilled or otherwise — won't have time to react quickly enough. Personally, I'd rather have the skills in place *before* a possible emergency occurs. Next time, we'll take a closer look at more braking conditions, their outcomes, and how to prevent such situations. Until then, rubber side down, head and eyes up. **AIM**