



SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

Concrete Canyons

Heavy traffic, pedestrians, potholes, construction, mucho traffic lights, one-way streets ... doesn't sound like fun, does it? These things are just some of the many reasons most of us do what we can

to stay away from riding through metropolitan areas. Adding confusion and stress to the mix would certainly keep us from riding around big cities. But, believe it or not, if you know how to approach motoring through the valleys of steel and glass, it can be enjoyable. You just need to keep a lot of things in check prior to attempting such a journey. Let's look at some of the risks you may encounter and see how you can address them.

I've ridden through and around several cities in the good ol' US of A, but since I regularly commute to and ride in New York City, I think I can use that as a good basis for review. The first thing that comes to anyone's mind is the excessive amount of cages we need to deal with in cities. Depending on the time of day or day of the week, traffic can be a real hassle to navigate through. The primary strategy we have is the process of SEEing (search, evaluate, and execute) what's happening all around us. When I ride within the confines of a city like New York, I have a tendency to cover my clutch and brake for any quick reaction needed. You need to watch the traffic constantly; cars come to quick stops for various reasons, and there are the ever-present jaywalkers. You need to be ready. Also watch out for those cabbies cutting across your lane to pick up fares. I still can't figure out how half of them received their licenses. Unlike the open road, it may be impossible to keep the minimum following distances, so you have to be on your best offense/defense.

Then there are the inevitable surprises. Cars will suddenly pull out of parking spots or hidden driveways along the street, people step out from between cars, and my personal favorite nuisance: bicycle messengers. As much as I try to stare aware, these messengers are hard to see in my mirrors, and they often ride recklessly. Now how about road conditions? Potholes, steel plates, manhole covers, grating, and ongoing construction, to name a few. When traffic is heavy and you're riding to stay within the mix, you may not see these obstacles quickly enough. Steady, careful swerving maneuvers may work, but more than likely you'll ride over what's suddenly in your path. Maintain a firm grip on that

handlebar, and get ready to lift your butt a lot so you're not always taking the full impact. You may want to pass the same info on to your passengers. Also keep in mind all the painted areas to be wary of: crosswalks, stop lines, etc. These sections can be slippery when it's dry out, and they're even worse when the road is wet.

Besides too many traffic lights to deal with, try not to jump a green light. You just may confront another cyclist or driver trying to beat the light in the other direction. And don't try to beat a changing light either. That scenario could have a bad outcome as well.

One thing I highly recommend is for cyclists to review where they're heading, especially when riding in a metropolitan area. Check your directions before firing up your bikes. You certainly don't want to make a wrong turn and head up a one-way street in the opposite direction. Traffic patterns can change within a few blocks, so it helps to have an idea of where you're going before you get underway. A GPS is useful, but I've noticed that sometimes the reception cuts out where certain streets become narrower and are flanked with tall buildings. By the time your GPS recalculates, you may have passed your intended turn, thus causing another headache.

So, with all these issues, how can riding in the city hold any enjoyment? Well, I find the best times to ride are either early in the morning or during the late evenings after rush hour has passed (just keep in mind you're less visible at night) or weekends when traffic is light. Cutting through the concrete canyons, listening to the rumble of your machine has a sensation all its own. Cruising the boulevards at night, amidst all the city lights, can also be enjoyable. Plus, when you consider the endless spots to hang out — be they clubs, restaurants, or cultural locations, you can't beat the city.

When you're idling at the light, raising your coolness meter with all the folks walking by checking you out, just remember to keep some of these skills and safety tactics in mind, along with some common sense. You'll be ready to take on a new world of adventures. Keep it safe out there. **AIM**