



SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

SEEing The Position

Proper lane positioning to prevent possible accidents is probably the one thing any rider can master and which takes minimal skill to achieve. Picking the right spot to ride in the lane comes more

from education, experience, and foresight than knowing what to do technically. Really, all you're doing is riding and adjusting to conditions.

As bikers, we normally divide our lane into three sections. Since we're moving, our conditions constantly change. That's why we need to always place ourselves within the lane section that presents the best and, hopefully, safest, location for that given time. Let's say you're thundering down a two-lane highway and come up behind several cars, too many to safely pass. You keep a safe distance from the last car, riding within your limits. Is it better to ride in the third of the lane closest to the shoulder (where you can be seen in the right mirror of the vehicle ahead of you) or toward the center of the lane where you can be seen by the car in front, as well as oncoming traffic? Seems like a no-brainer, but lots of folks do make simple mistakes like this, and, once in awhile, they get hurt for it. Let's say you're in the right section of your lane, and there are a few cars coming from the opposite direction. One car decides to pass the slower lead car as soon as the car in front of you allows. The drivers thought the lane was clear, because they didn't see you. An accelerating car approaching in your lane would really mess up a great riding day.

Lane positioning works with the SEE (Search, Evaluate, and Execute), method that MSF courses teach. Search means just that — scan your vision zone aggressively. Keep looking because conditions are always changing. Evaluate is your “what if” and Execute is the action you take to hopefully prevent an oops! or worse. Here's an example to consider: you're riding through town with cars parked to your right. Your evaluation should include scenarios like a car pulling out or opening its driver-side door. What would you do in either instance? How about if someone were to step out from in front of that box truck? If you're properly utilizing the SEE method, you've searched, evaluated the possible conflicts, and now it's time to execute. How about just keeping

to the left side of your lane, slowing down, then maybe keeping your brake and clutch covered for any other surprise you may not have thought of?

We want to be in the best spot of the road, not only to SEE the most we can, but for others (pedestrians and motorists) to notice us as well. Now some folks seem to think that lanes should be portioned into two parts; they're of the opinion that riding in the center of the lane is not advisable due to residual road oils and other gunk collected there. But what if we use our parked car scenario again, but this time, on a one-way street with cars on both sides? Perhaps then the center of the lane could be the safer spot, and you've slowed down to avoid sliding if you need to use your brakes. Once you've slowed your bike, you'll have more time to react, resulting in less potential for using your brakes. Any adjustment could be corrected by just squeezing the clutch or backing off the throttle.

I always tell my students that accidents are like snowflakes — no two are alike. This also goes for riding scenarios. I can't definitely tell anyone that one side of a lane would be more beneficial than the other, nor do I think that breaking a lane into three portions is better than two. I honestly believe that no matter how you perceive your lane, placing yourself in the best spot for that moment can only help you with your riding future. Is it a guarantee that you'll never have a problem? I wish that was the case, but we all should know the answer to that question.

Lane positioning doesn't require much in skill level to achieve, and it often seems to be more of a seasoned rider thing. Does using the Search and Evaluate components of SEE require much skill? Not really; once again, experience has a hand in that. As for Execution, well, that could take a lot of skill depending on the circumstances. Here's a final thought: remember to use your lane positioning to its fullest potential as you're heading to an MSF riding course to become an even better rider. Keep it safe out there. **AIM**