

Prepare for **'THE MOMENT'**

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I have heard the story numerous times; as I am sure have you. The motorcyclist is riding along when something happens:

- a car pulls out or turns left in front of the rider
- a deer or dog runs into the rider's path
- the rider suddenly sees a patch of gravel in the middle of a turn
- the rider feels them self drifting wide in a fast turn

Whatever the initiating event, the rider may lock up one or both of the brakes, and has either a low side-crash (lays it down) or a high-side crash (bike throws the rider off). Or, the rider may run out of their lane in the turn and collide with a fixed object (or an oncoming car!) When **'THE MOMENT'** happens, will you be prepared?

When I was in high school, and was taking a geography test (I hated geography...), how well I did on that test had very little to do with how hard I tried on the test. It had everything to do with how well I studied over the previous weeks and months.

When I competed in cross country, how well I did depended on how well I trained over the season much more than how much effort I put in to the race that day.

Whether it's a test in school, a sports event, or motorcycling; when **'THE MOMENT'** comes, it's too late to prepare – it's time to perform. So how do we prepare for **'THE MOMENT'** on our bikes? There are several things we can do to be prepared.

Crash Avoidance – Riding Skills

The three main skills to practice are (1) Maximum Braking, (2) Swerving, and (3) Cornering. While most of us think 'Yeah, I know how to do that,' how much do we really practice? Many riders almost never practice, and when **'THE MOMENT'** comes, they may regret that choice. Here are some simple ways to practice these critical crash avoidance skills:

Maximum Braking – Find an open paved area and set a 'gate' with two halves of a tennis ball (low cost cones!) Approach the gate at 20mph and begin braking at the gate. Stop smoothly with both brakes. Note where you stop (maybe drop a penny at your left foot). Then go back and do it again at the same speed and try to beat that distance using a smooth, increasing squeeze on the front brake (and keeping your eyes on the horizon). A minimum standard at 20mph is 23 feet, but skilled riders can stop in less than 15 feet. When you are

comfortable and confident at 20mph, do the same thing at 30mph. **Note: If you skid the front wheel, immediately release the front brake, then reapply smoothly.

Swerving – Using the same gate, approach at about 15 mph. Once you've passed through the gate, press on the handgrip to initiate a swerve, hold the press until the bike has moved over (enough to miss the imaginary car), then press on the opposite handgrip to straighten the bike back up. Repeat in both directions until your swerves are smooth and crisp and you are making rapid lane changes. Then do the same thing at 20mph. **Note: Do not apply any brakes while swerving!

Cornering – When you are riding, talk yourself through the four steps of cornering – SLOW (slow down before the curve starts), LOOK (turn your head and look as far as you can through the turn), ROLL (start gently rolling on the throttle before the turn starts), and PRESS (press forward on the handgrip to initiate the lean – press left, go left; press right, go right). The more conscious you are about the steps, the more you will build the habits of proper cornering.

Crash Avoidance - Mental/Visual

The primary cause of single vehicle crashes in turns is riders not looking far enough through the curve. Looking ahead gives you information sooner rather than later – giving you time to respond to hazards. And time is the name of the game, folks. Having 2-3 seconds to respond creates an emergency situation; having 5-10 seconds or more to respond gives you plenty of time to take action and avoid the crash altogether. So, practice looking 20 seconds ahead and identifying potential hazards and conflicts **long before you get there.**

Crash Avoidance - Knowledge

We all know that motorcycles don't handle the same as cars. The more you can learn about motorcycle handling dynamics, the better off you will be. There are lots of good resources out there on the subject (books, videos, magazines, etc.). Here are just a few items that many riders (even some long-time veterans) aren't sure about the answers to. If you want to get the answers - take a rider training course (www.idahostar.org), get a book or two on the topic, or both.

- Why does the front wheel have up to 70% or more of the bike's stopping power?
- If you are already in a turn, and feel you are going too fast or start running wide, what should you do?
- If a car or an animal darts out right in front of you, should you brake, swerve, or lay it down?
- If you accidentally lock up the rear wheel, how do you maintain control?

Sometimes bad things happen to good riders, and there is very little we can do about those bad things. However, there is a lot we can do about how prepared we are to respond to those bad things. Go out and practice your riding skills, get your eyes up and look well ahead, and learn what you can about motorcycle handling dynamics. When 'THE MOMENT' comes, it is my hope that we will all be prepared.

Call Ax and tell him you read his article in the Biker Information Guide!