

the right line

— — — Tips for better riding — —





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- Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council (VMAC)
- Experienced riders
- Motorcycle Testing and Training Providers
- Motorcycle retailers

the right line

keeping to the right line

the right line is about tips for riding safely and how to be a better rider. These are based on what is known about where, when and how crashes involving motorcycles and scooters occur. These tips will help you to stay in control and not become a crash statistic.

The inside line on crashes

From motorcycle and scooter crashes that have been reported to police (where someone was injured or killed), we know that the majority of crashes occur in dry weather. This is most likely because this is when more people ride. Not surprisingly more than half of all crashes take place in metropolitan areas where traffic is heavier. We also know that:

- Half involve a motorcycle or scooter only with no other vehicle reported.
- Half involve crashes with other vehicles – sometimes the fault of other drivers.
- Around half of all crashes happen on curves.
- Over a third happen at intersections where other vehicle drivers often do not see the motorcycle.

Source: VicRoads Road Crash Information System

Regardless of who causes crashes, there are things you can do to reduce your risk.

- **Every ride is a chance to build your experience.**
- **Further training can refresh your skills.**

Experience makes a difference

It takes time to build experience and skills. Whether you are new to riding, returning to riding after a break or an experienced rider, there is usually plenty you can still learn.

Every ride is an opportunity to refine your skills, so practise the tips in this booklet till they become automatic. You will become a better rider and enjoy your riding more.

Consider doing some more training in addition to the programs designed to help you get your licence. Many VicRoads accredited motorcycle and scooter trainers offer refresher skills courses and programs for making you a better rider. Look for courses designed to develop road skills and awareness of hazards, not those designed for the racetrack. Some courses now involve on-road training in a real traffic environment. Courses on offer vary so shop around.

For VicRoads accredited training provider contacts, visit the VicRoads website (vicroads.vic.gov.au) and follow the *Licences* link to *Other licences*.



staying out of trouble

The key to staying out of trouble on the road is to:

- continuously OBSERVE the road around you
- ANTICIPATE what may happen, and
- RESPOND in advance.

Then you can stay in control and shouldn't get caught in a risky situation where you have to brake suddenly or swerve sharply to avoid a crash.

OBSERVE

Scan the whole road scene to take in the big picture. Think about what you can and can't see. Look ahead, behind and to each side.

Hazards can appear anywhere so keep asking yourself:

- What are traffic signs or other cues telling you?
For instance, if you are near a school, look out for children crossing the road or cars suddenly pulling in or out, particularly at the start and end of the school day.
- What are other vehicles doing? Look for hints that something may be about to happen, such as brake lights or indicators on vehicles ahead and to the side, a truck moving slightly into your lane, or a car travelling too closely behind. Do regular headchecks – where you look quickly over your shoulder to see the areas behind and to the side that can't be seen in your mirrors (your blindspots).
- What is the condition of the road ahead?
Look for changes in the road surface ahead – such as gravel, oil, water or grooves on the road.

- **OBSERVE** – constantly scan the road ahead, behind and to the sides.
- **ANTICIPATE** – think about what might happen that could be a risk to you.
- **RESPOND** – take appropriate action before the risk increases.

ANTICIPATE

Think about what you've observed and what might be about to happen. Assume in most cases that other drivers haven't seen you. Expect the unexpected! Think about the moves the other vehicles around you could make – the vehicle ahead may suddenly brake, a parked car may make an unexpected U-turn, or a vehicle may merge into your lane without signalling. Consider all the possibilities and plan your response to avoid the risk or hazard.

RESPOND

Your response should be to avoid risky situations. You may need to:

- Change your position on the road to maintain your survival space (the room between you and other vehicles and objects) – see page 9 for more details.
- Slow down a little by applying your brakes. This will give you more time to react and your brake lights will warn drivers in other vehicles behind.

By responding well in advance you can keep out of trouble and avoid the need for an emergency brake or swerve.



riding curves

When it comes to curves, riding on the road is not like on a racetrack, but some riders forget this.

On the racetrack you:

- usually have a clear view all the way around a curve.
- can be fairly confident that the road surface is smooth and clean.
- don't have to worry about other vehicles coming towards you.

This is not the case on the road, where:

- you often can't see all the way round a curve.
- the road surface can be anything but smooth and clean.
- you may find a car or truck on your side of the road.
- worst of all, if you come off, you're likely to hit more than just the track!

Approach speed and braking

As you approach a curve, observe warning signs and check the road surface ahead. Look for clues that tell you what to expect. For instance, lots of overhanging trees could mean branches, sap or leaf litter on the road, or damp spots where there is shade.

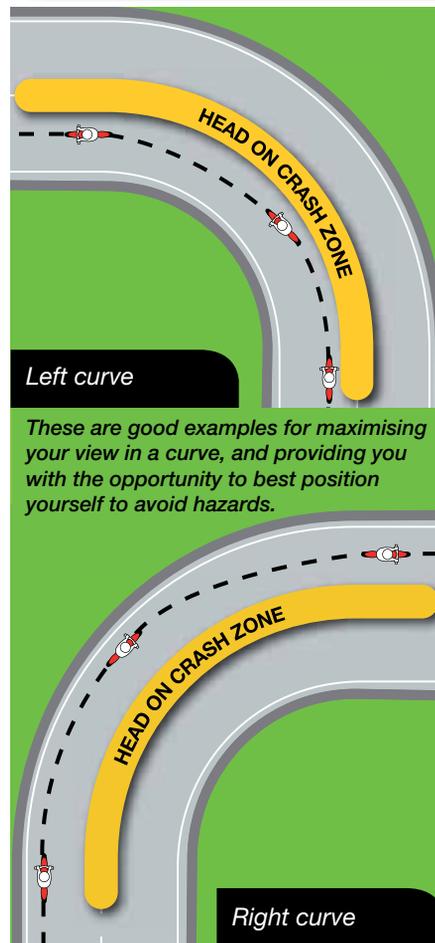
Always set up your speed before you enter the curve by backing off the throttle or braking before you begin to lean. Enter at a speed that will easily allow you to respond to anything that crops up. Depending on the conditions, such as in the rain, this may be below the advisory speed shown for a curve.

Positioning

The key to riding safely through a curve is positioning yourself to have the maximum view possible of the road ahead, not only as you approach, but also as you ride through. Your position will vary depending on whether it is a left or right curve, the road ahead and what other traffic is on the road.

Enter wide so you can see as far as possible around the corner, and finish in more tightly if the road is clear. This way you have better vision and you avoid the 'head on crash zone'.

- **Set up your speed before you enter a curve.**
- **Position yourself wide as you enter and avoid the 'head on crash zone'.**
- **Look through the curve to where you are going.**



Left curve

These are good examples for maximising your view in a curve, and providing you with the opportunity to best position yourself to avoid hazards.

Right curve

Looking through the curve

Always look ahead to where you want to go as you approach and move through a curve. This helps you keep to the right line all the way round. You are also looking ahead rather than focusing on the road immediately in front of you, so you will see a hazard more quickly (such as an oncoming vehicle that is on your side of the road) and have time to respond.

dealing with intersections

Intersections are very dangerous for motorcycle and scooter riders. Many crashes with cars and other vehicles happen at intersections. The key to safety at intersections is to use the OBSERVE–ANTICIPATE–RESPOND sequence and to place yourself in the best possible position to see, and be seen by, other road users.

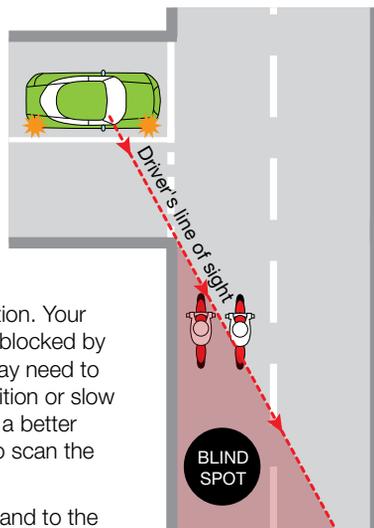
To increase your chances of being seen:

- Ride with your headlight on at all times.
- Make sure your riding gear (including your helmet) is in light/bright colours.

OBSERVE traffic approaching and in the intersection

Take in the big picture. Make sure you are clear of other traffic as you approach an intersection. Your view needs to not be blocked by other vehicles. You may need to change your lane position or slow down to give yourself a better view and more time to scan the intersection.

Scan the road ahead and to the side by looking through or over the top of other vehicles. Watch in your mirrors for vehicles behind. Look for clues to what other road users are likely to do. For instance, cars with indicators on, front wheels turned or brake lights on may show you what a driver is about to do.



ANTICIPATE and expect the unexpected

Intersections are particularly risky because other drivers sometimes act without warning or without looking properly – “I didn’t see the bike” is a common excuse. Don’t count on other drivers seeing you!

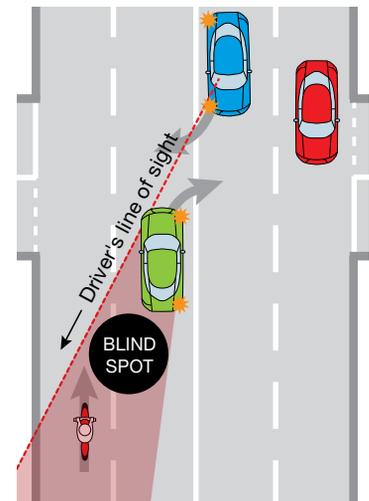
- **Be seen - wear light/bright colours and use the headlight.**
- **Have a clear view of traffic in the intersection.**
- **Don’t count on other drivers seeing you.**
- **Approach intersections carefully.**
- **Be ready to stop or take other evasive action.**

If there is a car that could turn into your path, or pull out on you, assume that it will and be ready for it. Be aware of the line of sight of other drivers, and think about how you may be hidden behind another vehicle. Don’t assume that because other drivers should give way at an intersection, that they will do so. If you have a green light it really means “only proceed if it is safe to do so”.

RESPOND with care

Always approach intersections carefully. Set up for the intersection by lightly applying your brakes as you approach. This way you are ready to respond more quickly if you need to stop. Try to make eye contact with drivers coming in the opposite direction. If they are not looking at you, they probably haven’t seen you. Be ready to stop or take

other evasive action, and make sure you have the room (your survival space) to do so. Keep an eye on vehicles behind you, especially when slowing or coming to a stop. Keep first gear engaged until the car behind has stopped, just in case you need to move to avoid being rear-ended.



keeping your survival space

Keep a safe distance from other road users, parked cars and fixed objects on the side of the road. This is called your survival space. It gives you more time to see a potential problem and to respond if something unexpected happens.

Remember other road users can act in ways you may not expect. Maintaining your survival space is usually as simple as changing your position on the road or braking slightly to slow down. It gives you the time to respond if, for example:

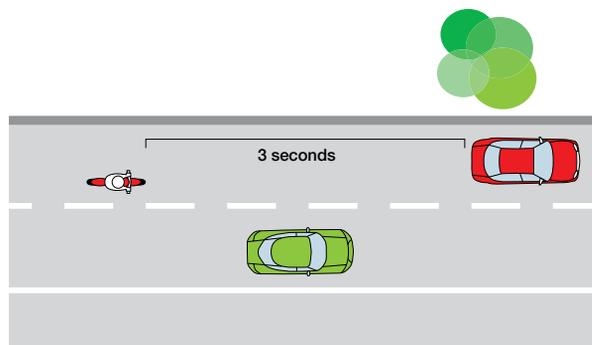
- a driver ahead suddenly brakes.
- a car pulls out without indicating.
- a driver, overtaking a line of traffic, misjudges and is forced into your lane.
- a driver ahead decides to turn suddenly without warning.
- a pedestrian steps onto the road from between parked cars.



- **Keep at least a 3 second gap to the vehicle in front.**
- **Change lane position to maintain your survival space on each side.**
- **Change lanes to get away from a tailgater or let them overtake.**

The gap in front

It is essential to keep a safe gap between you and the vehicle in front. Remember that a car will often stop faster than a motorcycle or scooter, so riding too close can be a recipe for disaster.



When riding, use the “3 second” rule – always keeping at least 3 seconds between you and the vehicle in front. One way of checking this is to note when the vehicle ahead passes a fixed object on the side of the road (such as a power pole) and start counting to yourself “one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three”. If you pass the fixed object before you get to “three”, you’re travelling too close!

Depending on the conditions you may need more than a 3-second gap, such as when riding:

- in reduced visibility like fog, at night or in the rain.
- on poor road surfaces, such as on gravel, wet or icy roads.
- with a pillion passenger or heavy load.

Vehicles on each side

Keep a safe distance from vehicles on each side of you, regardless of whether they are travelling in the same or opposite direction. A simple strategy like changing your lane position by moving from one side of your lane to the other, or by changing lanes, can increase your distance from other vehicles. Always check your mirrors and do a headcheck first. Some examples of times you may change your lane position are when:

- being overtaken or passed by another vehicle.
- passing cars parked on the side of the road.
- approaching an intersection with vehicles waiting to turn from the intersecting road.

Place yourself where you can see and be seen by 'claiming' the lane. Discourage drivers from trying to share it with you, as this is dangerous and can, for example, lead to you being pushed out into oncoming traffic.

Don't ride in vehicle blind spots. Ride where you can see a driver's eyes in the car's mirror – that means the driver should be able to see you too.

Remember that when riding between lines of traffic you lose your survival space completely. This can be dangerous and may break a number of road rules.



Vehicles behind

Unfortunately, the driver behind you has more control over this part of your survival space than you do. If someone is too close behind and is tailgating you, if you're on a multi-lane road, try to change lanes. Another option is to drop back to increase the survival space between you and the car in front. Then, if you can, let the tailgater overtake you. Drivers like this are better in front of you, where you can see them.



riding for the conditions

All roads are different. Even a familiar road can change overnight because of rain, different patterns of road use, roadworks or unexpected traffic conditions. Experienced riders “read” the road and adapt their riding to suit.

Riding for the conditions is mostly about managing speed, but it is also about being seen and using the OBSERVE–ANTICIPATE–RESPOND sequence. Sometimes experienced riders choose not to ride at all in certain conditions, such as when rain or fog reduce visibility and increase the risk of crashing.

Bad weather and poor light

The key to riding in bad weather and poor light conditions, such as at night, is to:

- Increase your survival space (see page 9) so that you have more time to OBSERVE–ANTICIPATE–RESPOND to any hazards. Slow down and give yourself time to read the road ahead.
- Increase your chances of being seen by other drivers. Ride with your headlight on. Wear riding gear that is in light/bright colours and has reflective panels/stripes – a reflective vest can be a good idea.
- Make sure you can see clearly. You need to be looking through a visor (or goggles) that are clean, not tinted, and free from scratches.

Variable road surfaces

There are more challenges for riders of motorcycles and scooters than for car drivers when it comes to road surfaces. Observe the road ahead, anticipate and respond by slowing down and taking care when the road surface becomes tricky. Look out especially for:

- painted lines (pedestrian crossings, lines at traffic lights), which can be more slippery than unpainted surfaces, particularly when wet.
- loose surfaces (like dirt or gravel roads and loose gravel on sealed roads), because motorcycles and scooters are harder to control on these surfaces.
- potholes and the sides of tarred roads that have broken edges.

- **Adjust your riding to suit the conditions.**
- **Avoid the temptation to speed.**
- **Speeding increases the risk of a crash and being killed or seriously injured.**

- the oily strip in the middle of traffic lanes, especially near intersections, which becomes slippery when it’s raining.
- shiny bitumen that is very slippery and especially dangerous in wet conditions.

Tram and railway tracks require special care, especially in the wet. They are steel, slippery and can have ridges of road material alongside them. Don’t follow the rails because your motorcycle’s or scooter’s tyres could become trapped in the grooves. When crossing tracks try to ride as close to a right angle as is practical, and keep your motorcycle or scooter upright.

To report hazardous road conditions or signal faults telephone 13 11 70 any time.

Riding in good conditions

It is easy to think that if the road conditions are good and the traffic is light then it is OK to go a bit faster. The reality is, however, that the majority of crashes involving motorcycles and scooters happen in good conditions and speed is often a factor. The faster you ride, the less time you have to react, and the longer it will take to brake or take evasive action. Don’t use good road conditions as an excuse to speed.



staying alert

To ride safely and stay in control on the road, you need to be able to think clearly. Mixing riding with alcohol and other drugs, and riding when you are tired are not worth the risk.

Ride straight

Alcohol and various other drugs (even something like cold and flu tablets) affect your reflexes, coordination and vision – the three key things you need to control a bike. You may also take more risks than you would normally take.

In Victoria, learner permit holders and probationary and restricted motorcycle licence holders must have a “zero” blood alcohol concentration (BAC) reading. Experienced riders must be below the limit of .05 g/100ml. When you know you’ll be drinking, plan to stay overnight or make alternative transport arrangements.

Some drugs can also affect your riding ability, especially if combined with alcohol. In Victoria, it is an offence to ride while impaired by a drug. Remember, it is best to plan ahead, rather than leave decisions till the last moment.

Avoid fatigue

Riding when tired can be just as dangerous as riding after drinking. It is not so much that you risk falling asleep, although this can happen, it is more that you will lose concentration. This can have disastrous results.

The secret to avoiding fatigue is planning your trips, especially longer ones. To make riding less tiring:

- wear the right protective gear for the weather conditions – heat and dehydration can make you tired just as much as cold and rain.
- avoid alcohol and drugs.
- plan to take regular and frequent stops.
- be well rested before you start.
- don’t ride during times when you would normally be asleep.
- avoid eating heavy meals.

If you are feeling tired before you to set out, change your plans and sleep instead.

- *Plan trips to avoid fatigue.*
- *Don’t ride if affected by drugs, alcohol or fatigue.*
- *Always plan your ride and ride to your plan!*



- *Remember to keep your motorcycle or scooter in top condition by having it regularly serviced by a qualified motorcycle mechanic.*
- *Carry out simple safety checks yourself every time you ride – especially tyres, brakes and lights.*

More information

Websites

vicroads.vic.gov.au

– follow the link for *Safety & rules* for motorcycle safety information from VicRoads

spokes.com.au

– motorcycle safety information from the TAC

Other resources available free

Discover Safe Riding

Useful practice manual for new and returning riders, available on the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au

Ride Smart CD-ROM

An interactive and fun way to develop skills in the OBSERVE – ANTICIPATE – RESPOND sequence. Details available from the TAC: spokes.com.au

Chasing the Dream

Information for riders aged 30 and over, especially those new to riding or coming back after a break. Available from the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au

The Right Stuff

This guide to choosing protective riding gear is available from VicRoads Customer Service Centres, motorcycle retailers or from the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au

Get your gear on

Information from the TAC about protective riding gear, available from motorcycle retailers.

To report hazardous road conditions or signal faults telephone 13 11 70 any time.

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