

KEEPING IT UP

Your motorcycle goes where you look



Target Fixation demonstrates pretty convincingly that your motorcycle goes where you're looking. But why? Your eyes, after all, are not holding your handlebars and you frequently scan directions other than the one you're traveling in without your bike wandering all over the road. Is it magic?

The idea that your motorcycle will go where you're looking is merely a shorthand way of thinking about a phenomenon that virtually all drivers (of any kind of vehicle) have experienced before: that if you turn your head you tend to STEER in the direction you're looking. In fact, it might be clearer to simply acknowledge that it is HARD to steer in any direction other than the one you are looking at. ALL of your prior experience has taught you how to steer your vehicle where you want it to go. So, if you look where you want to go, you kick in all that prior experience and AUTOMATICALLY steer in that direction.

There is no magic here nor is there a hidden law of physics involved. Your bike TENDS to go in the direction you are looking because, via experience, you have taught yourself to steer, more or less subconsciously.

To take advantage of that phenomenon you merely need to actively look in the direction you want to go - away from danger. The rest is virtually subconscious reaction. Of course it takes more than a turn of your eyes or even your head. You still need to steer away from danger. Since it is HARD to steer away from what you're looking at, and easy (almost automatic) to steer in the direction you are looking, surely it makes sense to look where you want to go.

But, you say, there are many times when you look in directions other than the one you want to go. After all, one of the most important safety practices you engage in is to actively scan all around you looking out for hazards. Why is it that your motorcycle does not wander all over the road while you are scanning if it's true that it tends to go where you're looking? (More often than not, it does!)

The answer to that question is that when you are scanning or looking in a direction other than the one you want to go in you tell yourself to keep going in the direction you want - you turn OFF your 'autopilot'. If you don't believe me, next time you're out on the road and it is safe to do so, point your bike in the direction you want to go and look in any other direction. Notice how a part of your mind is CONSTANTLY VERIFYING that you are still on course. You do not normally have to do that - that's what your autopilot does for you.

But we have also been well advised to keep our head and eyes 'up' and pointed at the horizon. Surely looking down will not cause a motorcycle to go down, or will it?

Well, not directly. If you are in a skid, however, and look down the odds are overwhelming that you will go down. That, because you will have failed to actively steer the bike in such a way as to try to keep it upright. But that's only one reason why you should keep your head up and eyes looking at the horizon. The other is that only by doing so can you actively scan for hazards or know, for sure, if your bike is vertical. But that's another story.

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