

Sharing the Roadway

As vehicle patterns change, motorists are learning that other vehicles on the roadway are not operated in the same manner as an automobile. The motorcycle is obviously different from a car in size and handling.

THE MOTORCYCLIST, for instance, uses his/her hands to operate throttle, clutch, front brake, as well as turn signals, light switches and horn. In addition, the motorcyclist maintains steering control with his/her hands.

THE MOTORIST, by comparison, uses his/her hands only to operate turn signals, light switches, horn and steering wheel – and steering is frequently power assisted.

THE MOTORCYCLIST is exposed to all the elements. The motorcyclist relies on all his/her senses, including touch, in operating the motorcycle. Clothing is dictated by this exposure: motorcycle helmet manufactured to meet Department of Transportation (DOT) standards, eye protection, over-the-ankle boots, full-fingered gloves, long-sleeved jacket and long pants all protect the rider.

THE MOTORIST, by contrast, is protected by lots of steel in an enclosed compartment. Operation is within the vehicle, and insulated from traffic noises and weather. Four wheels and heavy weight offer stability.

THE MOTORCYCLIST must add the skills of balance and heightened awareness to the other skills necessary for safe vehicle operation. The motorcyclist must be more alert than the motorist because he/she is relatively inconspicuous in traffic. He/she must ride assuming that motorists who don't see him/her in traffic will constantly violate his/her right-of-way.

It is vital for motorists to condition themselves to look for motorcycles in traffic. The appearance of a motorcycle in a traffic situation when the motorist is not prepared can lead to a hazardous situation. The USC study showed that motorists' failure to detect and recognize motorcycles in traffic is the predominant cause of motorcycle crashes. The driver of the vehicle did not see the motorcycle before the collision, or did not see it until it was too late to avoid the crash. Motorcyclists are not difficult to see if the motorist expects to see them. "I didn't see him," usually results from not looking for a motorcyclist.

Both the motorist and the motorcyclist can benefit from using a simple system to heighten awareness of potential problems while on the roadway. It's known as the **SEE** process and consists of the following steps:

- S** - Search for factors in the area.
- E** - Evaluate the potential risks and options.
- E** - Execute with control and precision.

This process causes drivers to scan ahead for potential trouble spots. You learn not to fix your gaze on any one object for more than a moment. How and where to look for hazards will become automatic. Safer highway sharing will be the result. Attitude plays an important part in creating a safe highway environment. Sharing the roadway is a good indication that motorists and motorcyclists both recognize the importance of cooperation. By curbing aggressive behavior and operating the vehicles in accordance with common sense, courtesy and the law, motorists and motorcyclists can ride together on the road.