

# Welcome to the Jungle - The Art of Learning to Ride Skillfully

*A column dedicated to your riding survival*

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## What's on your street?

I live about two miles off a main state-numbered route down a twisty rural road that is dotted with about a dozen homes and a couple of farms.

During my days riding on this street I have come across (and avoided) children, pedestrians, joggers, construction workers, tractors, other riders and vehicles, ATVs, bicycles, cats, dogs, horses, cows, pigs, chickens, deer, turkeys, coyotes, ducks, beavers, turtles, squirrels, frogs, raccoons, skunks, porcupines, a bear, and even three moose having a conversation in the middle of the road. Then there are the inanimate objects like downed wires and trees, potholes, debris fallen from trucks and other vehicles, and the packages left by the larger animals who have visited the road.

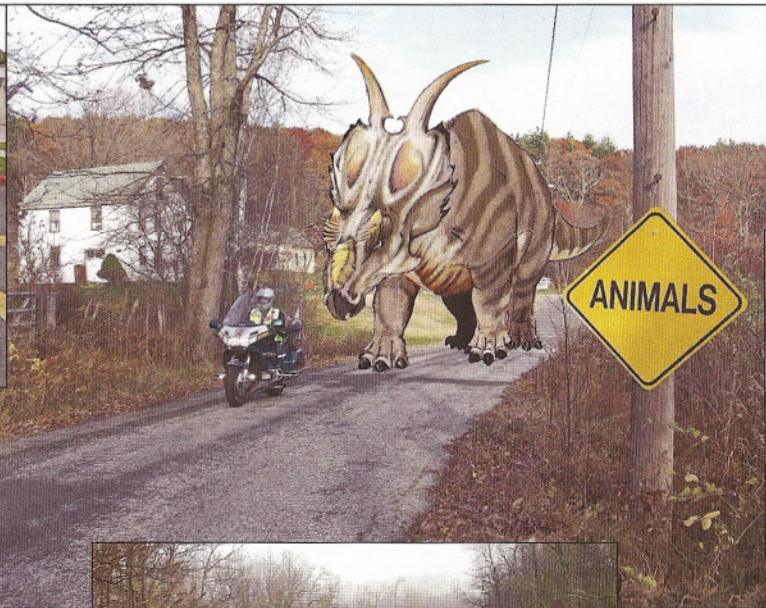
My point? If those obstacles and hazards that pose a risk to you as a rider are within a few yards of the safety of your own home, what could be waiting for you to encounter on the rest of your ride?

will help us recognize those things that may present a danger to us - hopefully long before they directly cross our path.

Keep your mind and your senses sharp by continually playing "what if" with yourself as you progress on your ride. What if that kid on a bike came out into the road? What if that car heading towards you turned across your path? What if that shadow in the road ahead was a pot hole or a group of wet leaves, or a frosty spot on the shaded road? Along with being visually vigilant, the second part of "what if" is your preparation and planned response to "it is a kid riding out into the road in front of me!" Recognizing the potential hazards that may affect the safety of your ride is only one piece of the puzzle. Many riders have "laid it down because I had no other choice" because they recognized a hazard heading for them but did not have a conscious course of action to take to avoid that approaching hazard.

The acronym S.I.P.D.E. helps keep our observation keen for hazards around us as we ride. S.I.P.D.E. stands for Scan, Identify, Predict, Decide, and Execute.

**SCAN.** Our eyes should be constantly on the move. Scan the road ahead. Scan the areas adjacent to the road. Scan your mirrors to observe what is behind. Scan your peripheral vision to identify what may be in your blind spot. When scanning ahead we should be



While operating any vehicle - but especially your motorcycle - you must be constantly "visually vigilant." Recently I was stopped at a crosswalk allowing a pedestrian to pass when I watched the car approaching from the opposite direction. All I could see was the top of the driver's head. His visual vigilance was with an electronic device in his hand. One of the joys of motorcycling is being part of the environment, but with that comes a supreme responsibility to ourselves, our co-riders, and others on the road, that we remain in-tune and focused on that environment. Keeping our observation skills sharp

looking where we will be in about ten seconds. At highway speeds that may be as much as a quarter of a mile down the road. In more rural settings, or in city traffic, that ten second look ahead is closer to a few blocks. By scanning ahead we are able to begin identifying those issues that may require a planned response by us in the next few seconds' time.

**IDENTIFY.** As we scan and see those items that we

recognize as potential problems we consciously identify what they are. There is the kid on the skateboard, the car at the stop sign or at the end of the driveway, the bus picking up passengers, the change in the road's surface. When issues are identified we can make educated guesses on what could happen if the potential hazard comes into play.

**PREDICT.** How might that issue become a hazard to us on our motorcycle? That tree crew working on the edge of the road may drop some debris in our lane. That mail delivery vehicle that is stopped at the mail box may pull back into the travel lane. That large dog playing Frisbee in his yard may find you a more challenging target than a plastic wafer. If we can have some reasonable assumptions to "what could happen if" then we should also be able to begin planning alternative strategies to avoid those conflicts.

**DECIDE.** What can be done? I can slow down, I can stop. I can swerve. I can change my lane position. I can use my horn. I can use other traffic to help buffer or block my position from a hazard. I can use my signals to warn other drivers of my intentions. By developing a mental list with several alternatives to what can be done if one of the hazards identified becomes a threat, I am prepared to make a proactive maneuver to protect myself and avoid the potential problem. Some of those proactive activities occur before you leave the driveway at home. Are all my lights functioning properly? Am I wearing riding gear that makes me more visible to other drivers? Our defenses as a rider can be passive, as in our gear and lighting, and it can be (and should be) active as we constantly evaluate the conditions, our positioning, and what opportunities exist to make us more available to the other drivers' vision.


**EXECUTE.** Whether the hazard directly enters your path or not, you can always choose to execute one of the actions that you developed throughout your S.I.P.D.E. review. Your lane positioning and speed can be altered as you approach the identified potential problem. This places you in a better position to respond more if needed before the crisis arises. You may think that by constantly reviewing the S.I.P.D.E. exercise that you will be continually making aggressive avoidance maneuvers; but on the contrary, by proactively evaluating your environment and identifying potential problems and potential solutions, you can actively place yourself in safer positions as you approach the issues and many will be non-issues as you pass.

This form of visual awareness and situational evaluation helps to keep your skills sharp and keep you aware and focused on what is going on around you as you ride. Instead of "I had to lay it down" the voice in your head may say that "I knew he was going to turn left" and that few seconds of preparation made the interaction between the two vehicles a non-issue.

Ride as if everyone is out to get you, because your powers of observation, control, and avoidance are what is going to help keep you safe and out of harm's way. And it's not paranoia - because they are out to get us!



*The Perfect End to the Perfect Ride*



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