

# Some tips for safer motorcycling

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## Introduction

These notes are intended to help Members training with us for the RoSPA Advanced Motorcycle Test.

Every tip should be seen as being prefaced by the phrase “If it is safe to do so”. These tips and pointers are based on the most common faults that we encounter. Some techniques and strategies are provided to help correct them.

Nothing however replaces a thorough knowledge of Motorcycle Roadcraft (HMSO Publications).

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## Overtaking

1. Don't treat an overtake as an isolated manoeuvre. It should be part of a natural and continuous flow of the ride. Resist the temptation to move in immediately once the target vehicle has been passed - it may be possible to stay out safely to get a better view or to make another overtake. Having gone to the trouble of getting on the offside, often with a superior view, don't throw it away if it is safe to stay out. Often your original ambition to pass one vehicle can change to overtaking another by staying out and seeing new opportunities unfold.
2. Consider moving out to the offside, before committing to the overtake, but holding back from the target vehicle for a full view. If you have to drop back in, it is far easier than having to brake while alongside the target vehicle. It also declares your intention to the target vehicle.
3. Use the 3 times rules in the 50 to 70mph range - estimate your return point and ensure that this distance is no more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the overall distance that you can see to be clear. Sounds luxurious but this is the clearance you need. You need even more space, not less, when your start speed is lower than 50mph!
4. Test your judgement by estimating the return point above and seeing if you are accurate. This estimate automatically takes your speed and the target vehicle's into account.
5. Look down the nearside of a truck being followed; this often gives a great view in left hand bends.
6. Don't get obsessed with an overtake - if it can't be done safely, then relax and wait for the right circumstances. Fall back for a better view to the following position.
7. As soon as a vehicle to be overtaken is spotted, start planning. Don't race up behind it and then start planning. Use the time it takes to move up on the vehicle as an opportunity to gather information relevant to the eventual overtake, e.g. are there vehicles behind me, any junctions coming up, any pubs or petrol stations looming, any gates into fields or house entrances, any dips in the road?
8. Regard a vehicle to be overtaken as a chance to show your skill, not as an obstacle.
9. If overtaking a stream of vehicles one by one, acceleration and speed can be decreased during the overtake e.g. while alongside the target vehicle - still allowing you to overtake, but in a better position to drop in neatly to the gap ahead of the target vehicle. This technique also avoids unnecessary braking which can look messy and can easily upset the overtaken vehicle.
10. Always have a gap to drop into when overtaking a line of vehicles - never start a multiple overtake "in the hope" that a gap will magically appear.
11. Treat tightly packed cars as one long vehicle if no "holes" exist.
12. Never commit to any piece of road that you cannot see 100% of - 95% is not enough.
13. Avoid piecing together various glimpses in twisty sections and mathematically working out that nothing could possibly be in that hidden section of road - always see every bit of the road you intend to use - 100% of it. A single strategically placed leaf can obscure a car. I have once seen a situation where I

could have betted that no oncoming cars could possibly be in an S bend, only to find 3 cars there.

14. Give yourself plenty of clearance from the target vehicle - if the offside is safe (as it should always be) then use it all. This also allows a straight line return to nearside, allowing approaching vehicles to see that you are not coming straight at them.
15. Always look for signs that the vehicle being overtaken might decide to overtake as you are about to come through - head movements and hand movements on the steering wheel can give you a vital clue.

### Bends

1. Settle your entry speed for the bend in good time. Maintain that speed in the bend by keeping power on slightly (to counter the slowing effect of the turn), then roll on smoothly when the exit is in view.
2. Resist the temptation to steer too early into the bend - this will lose your desired position. Remember that you control the bike. It will go where you tell it to. You must decide your line.
3. Steering too early loses your desired position, reduces your view and cuts down your choices if the bend tightens more than you imagined. Practice picking a mark on the road or a tree as a marker where you will begin the turn, then wait till you're there before turning.
4. Are you sure that you will be able to come to a stop on your own side of the road, in the distance that you can see to be clear? If an old man is walking slowly in the road round a tight bend, will you be able to stop? You may not always have the ability to skirt around him. Assume that every bend may contain a problem. If you cannot positively see that there is no danger, you must assume that there is a danger.
5. Physically twist your head in the direction of the bend well in advance of the bend (not just the eyes), so that your main focus is on the exit. This will give smoother cornering - the subsequent lean angle that you will adopt will feel more natural. Swivel eyes back to the bend if necessary, but keep head turned all the time, eyes well up.
6. Create a marker for yourself. With your bike leaned over in a typical bend, use your peripheral vision to note where a mirror edge or the edge of the screen lines up with the road. Some edge of the bike, e.g. the screen edge or the mirror usually lines up with the road centre markings in right-handers or the nearside edge in left-handers. You can then use this line-up of your marker with the road to keep track of your position in the turn. This saves checking and re-checking your position as you go through the bend.
7. Don't power away too rapidly as soon as a bend is cleared - immediately seek the next bend or the next set of hazards. Often the temptation is to power out of the bend with a flourish and a self-congratulation on a bend well taken, only to have to brake and change down for the next bend, stop sign or 30 limit.
8. Remind yourself consciously as you enter a bend to "expect an oncoming car" to avoid an unnecessary reaction to the "sudden" appearance of a car as you are cranked over.

9. "The road is gone - where's the road gone?" Never lose interest in the road. If you can't see where the road has gone when out of view temporarily, start searching for it - look for clues in the tree line, telephone poles. Don't passively wait for it to reappear into view.
10. An oncoming car in a bend can give you a good clue as to the severity of the bend ahead - if he exits really slowly and it's a GTI, it is probably severe.

### Road usage

1. Use all the available space when sensible, e.g. when filtering past slow moving traffic, get well out. This takes you away from pedestrians coming out from between vehicles and gives you the maximum distance from Transit Man doing the impulsive U-turn into your path. Look for clues - indicators, wheels turning right/left.
2. Keep a constant eye out for oncoming vehicles as you filter - it is easy to get obsessed with watching the vehicles you are filtering past, and to forget about the oncoming vehicles.
3. The same applies for passing stationary vehicles in towns - use the offside fully to give plenty of clearance. You can use the offside, but do watch for hazards from the offside, eg drives, exits, etc.
4. Adopt a commanding position on your side of the carriageway, on straight normal roads free of immediate hazards, about 2/3rds of the way out into your lane.
5. In a right hand bend with a junction on the nearside and a waiting vehicle, don't position too much to the left as the exiting vehicle may misinterpret your position as meaning that you are entering his road. Consider your positioning even if no car is actually waiting - one might appear as you traverse the bend.
6. Don't focus on the car immediately in front - be aware of it, but look beyond it and gather information.
7. Pace your arrival to a bunch of cars temporarily stopped ahead. Why bother having to brake, come to a halt, put your foot down, select neutral, select 1<sup>st</sup> gear, build up speed again when, if you judge it right, you can arrive just as the cars move on again - you may have a golden opportunity to overtake them as they regain their speed.

### General

1. Work on a tidy consistent style - same foot down whenever possible. Replace your foot on the peg immediately. Do not trail your foot as you move off. Avoid putting both feet down unless necessary.
2. Use low attention times, e.g. on clear motorways to check posture, arm position, ensure that you have not tensed up, etc. Try and do this at regular intervals. Loosen up.
3. Try and keep arms as horizontal (wrist down) as possible - steering inputs will require less effort than if you are pushing down from above the bars.
4. Do a spoken commentary to maintain attention - actively seek every sign, every clue.

5. Don't look into junctions as you pass them - do it as you approach in good time.
6. Always use shoulder checks in 30 and 40 limits before changing position even within your lane.
7. Change position in plenty of time - avoids rushed manoeuvres - also sharpens forward observation.
8. Stopping is not the only escape from a hazard - acceleration can often be a safer option especially if being tailed. Aim to always have a plan as you approach a hazard - what will I do if...?
9. While waiting to exit a junction, e.g. with a car ahead of you and when that car clears, don't give the appearance that you are moving off too briskly if you are only edging forward to the Give Way line. The guy behind may assume you have moved away completely and may look away to his right thinking you have gone. This can be one reason to consider NOT replacing your foot on the peg if moving a few yards forward. Consider showing a brake light in these circumstances with a light touch on the front brake to reinforce the fact that you are not going far!
10. Keep your head moving - checking junctions on approach, shoulder checks, etc as this will encourage viewing. Don't get the fixed head syndrome - it may look cool but it's limiting your information collection.
11. Slow U turns can be made neater by working the engine against the rear brake - effectively the brake becomes an instant accelerator when you release it. Turn your head fully to face the end of the U turn from the start. Full lock can be maintained with this method. Stay off the front brake.
12. Do a shoulder check prior to turning at junctions. Do it early enough for the information to be useful to you, early enough not to distract you from the turning manoeuvre, but not so early that the information might change again before you turn.

## Observation links

1. Oncoming cyclist? - move to the left to allow for a car that might overtake the cyclist.
2. Breaks in building line often mean a hidden junction.
3. More paint on the road equals more danger.
4. If one car exits a pub or driveway, there is often a second car behind it.
5. Nothing oncoming for some minutes? Oncoming traffic is probably stacked up behind something big and slow that is around the next bend.

## Speed Limits

1. Pick a low gear in restricted areas and get used to how 30mph "sounds". Don't roll along in 30 and 40 zones in a higher gear as speed can increase more easily.
2. Consider opening the visor in 30s as a reminder.
3. If you stop, remember the limit you are in - often you re-start after a stop and cannot remember if its 30 or 40. If stuck, look into residential roads as you pass to see if there is a 30 sign - if there is one, it means you are not in 30 at least!

4. Covering the brake all the way through a 30 or 40 limit will reduce the temptation to increase speed as the throttle hand is more fixed.
5. Radical positioning is not as necessary in 30 limits - and can annoy following traffic. Take a steady commanding line, and position only when such positioning gives you a clear benefit.
6. Shoulder checks are essential at lower speeds before altering position in your lane - cars can easily come alongside - deter this by a suitable commanding position in the first place.

### Gears

1. In twisty sections, hold a lower gear; you gain flexibility, more engine braking, and control.
2. Don't change down to get more engine braking - roll off and only drop down when road speed matches the lower gear. Brakes are fitted for slowing down. Good anticipation and throttle control will avoid undue use of the brakes anyway.

### Indicators/Horn

1. Don't give unnecessary indicator signals. Consider whether someone will benefit from your signal - if nobody will benefit, then don't bother. Less to think about that way and maintains manual thinking, and avoids the danger of an un-cancelled signal.
2. Don't be afraid to use the horn - practice on quiet roads to remember where the button is!
3. A hand signal is often useful to reinforce an indicator or a brake light. Make hand signals with deliberation to capture the attention of the following vehicle.

### Approaching Hazards

1. Cover the brakes to reduce reaction time.
2. Don't stay hidden by a car you are following through a crossroads - change position to be seen as well as to see - drop back if necessary.
3. Can the driver of the car waiting to cross your path see you? Just because you can see a piece of his car, doesn't mean that he can see any part of you or your bike.

### Positioning

1. Always give up the ideal view position for safety and stability. Not much point in being in the perfect position for a view if you are unsafe or unstable! Remember that safety and stability take priority over view.

## Riding in the rain

1. More important than ever to remain relaxed and arms loose - tensing up reduces confidence. Change the mindset from being nervous and “ready to eject” to a relaxed attitude with the bike.
2. Get out deliberately on rainy days and learn to enjoy the extra challenge. Don’t just get caught out in the rain - go and make friends with it.
3. Riding in the rain enforces smooth usage of the controls - carry that technique into your dry weather riding so that you have one consistent style of riding for all conditions.

**Hugh Curran** RoSPA

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