

Learn How To Ride:

A Beginner's Guide To Motorcycles



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Chapter 1: First Things First

So you want to learn how to ride a motorcycle. Just be aware that riding a motorcycle isn't for everyone.



Riding a motorcycle is quite different than driving a car; so before you go and spend thousands of dollars on a motorcycle you may want to take a [MSF Riders Course](#) first, and see if it is something you really want to do.



This is a course offered by many states where the riders obtain valuable classroom knowledge as well as live riding lessons.

At the end of the MSF course many states will allow riders to obtain their motorcycle license without taking the actual DMV tests.

FYI - The problem with the MSF courses is they are extremely hard to get into in some states. If you do not register right when registration begins for the year, you will find it extremely difficult to get into a class.

Chapter 2: The Basics

Before you can actually ride a motorcycle for the first time you have to understand how the controls work, where they are located, and some basic safety knowledge:

Riding Gear:

There is basic motorcycle riding gear that every rider should wear before they ever jump on a motorcycle:

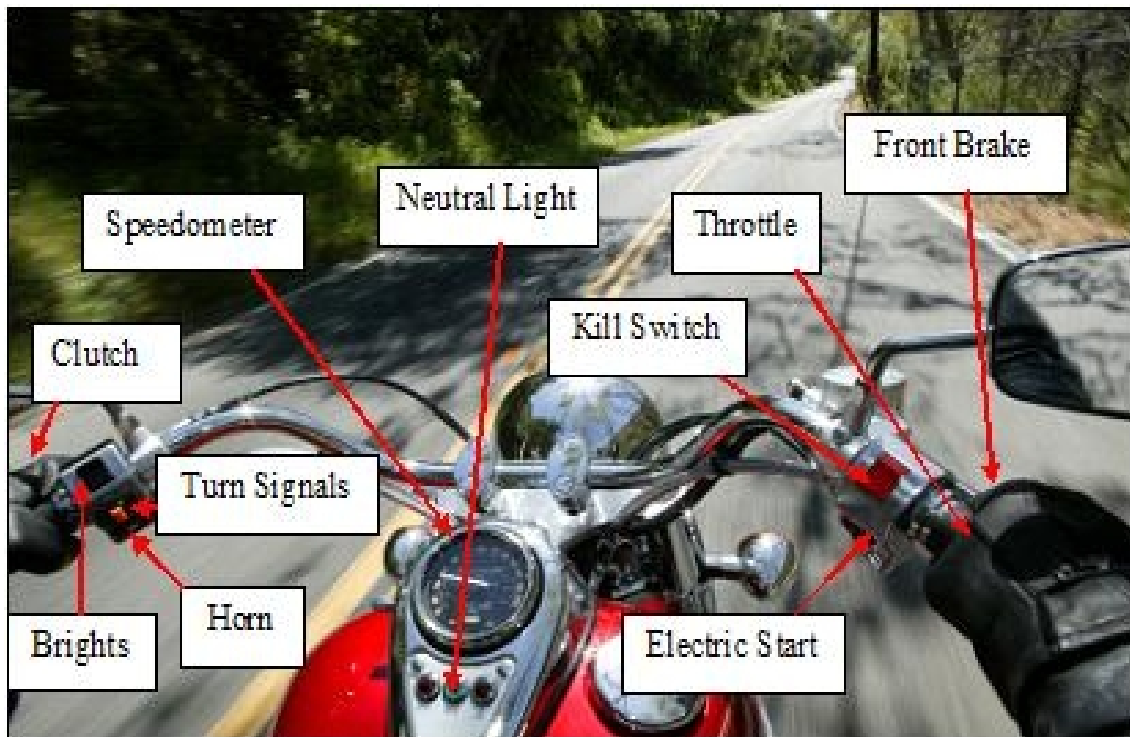


1. **Helmet** - This is without a doubt the most important piece of gear for a motorcycle rider. Riders who choose to wear helmets have a much better chance of surviving an accident. **When buying a motorcycle helmet make sure it has the DOT symbol!**
2. **Eye Protection** - This can be in the form of a face shield on your helmet or at the very least shatterproof glasses. Bugs, rocks, and other debris will eventually hit your eyes so make sure they are covered properly.
3. **Jacket** - A motorcycle jacket will keep your skin from scraping the pavement in case of an accident. Road rash on your arms is not pleasant.

4. **Long Pants** - Just as a jacket protects your upper body long pants protect your legs. Once again uncovered skin and pavement are not a good combination.
5. **Gloves** - Gloves will protect you from rocks bouncing up and hitting your knuckles. You need both hands to ride your motorcycle so protect them.
6. **Footwear** - Make sure you are wearing footwear that will actually protect your feet in case of an accident. Do NOT go riding around in your flip-flops.

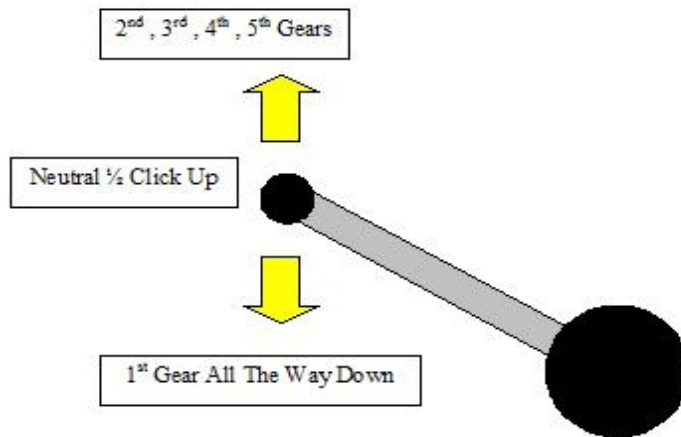
Wearing the above gear may seem like too much especially on a hot summer day. However, you can find quality motorcycle protective gear that breathes and lets air flow through to keep you cool as well as safe.

Basic Controls:



Shifting Gears:

Learning how to shift gears on a motorcycle can be one of the more tricky things to pick up for new riders. The diagram below shows the basic layout for most motorcycles:



Shifting the gears of a motorcycle is similar to shifting a manual transmission in a car. The faster you go the higher the gear you will need to be in.



You shift a motorcycle by following these simple steps:

Step 1: Close the throttle.

Step 2: Pull in the clutch.

Step 3: Click up on the gear shift to go into a higher gear, or click down on the gear shift to go into a lower gear.

Step 4: Then slowly release the clutch while adding throttle.

FYI – The hardest part for new riders is learning proper clutch control especially when starting from a stopped position in 1st gear. You have to find what is called the “friction zone” of the clutch; which is where the clutch goes from being disengaged to engaged thus moving the motorcycle forward. At the end of this ebook I will direct you to one of my videos that explains this in detail.

Standard Braking:

One of the most important motorcycle braking tips for new riders is that the **front brake on a motorcycle provides about 70 percent of the motorcycles braking power; while the rear brake provides only about 30 percent.**



Many new riders are afraid to use the front brake in fear of locking it up and flipping the motorcycle. Therefore, they rely on the less powerful rear brake which can get them in trouble in emergency braking situations.

It is best to learn how to use both the front and rear brakes together so that it becomes a habit.

Emergency Braking:

The following are a set of motorcycle emergency braking tips:

1. Apply both brakes to their maximum without actually locking the brakes up.
2. Keep the bike upright and moving in a straight line.
3. If you lock the front brake simply release it for a split second then reapply it without locking it up again.
4. If you lock the rear brake it is OK because you can still remain in control of the bike if your handlebars are kept in a straight line.

It is best to practice your emergency braking in a wide open empty parking lot.

Chapter 3: Legal Requirements

Most states do require a separate license to operate a motorcycle. To obtain this license you must usually pass a written exam as well as a road test.



Class L: *Any motor-driven cycle with less than 150cc displacement.*

Class M: *Any motorcycle or motor-driven cycle.*

(These are Illinois Classes as of 2008)

Many states will waive these exams if you take and pass a [MSF Rider Course](#).

Also, remember you will need to have some form of motorcycle insurance as well.

A word to the wise about shopping for motorcycle insurance. That word is shop around, because motorcycle insurance rates vary greatly from company to company. Motorcycle insurance requirements also vary greatly between states.

One thing to keep in mind is that many insurance companies do offer discounts to riders who complete a [MSF Rider Course](#).

Chapter 4: Pre-ride Checklist

Before you take your motorcycle out on the road you should be performing the following pre-ride checklist:

1. Check the tires.
2. Check the controls.
3. Check the lights.
4. Check the oil and fuel levels.
5. Check the chain for proper tension.
6. Ensure your kickstand is up and remains up.
7. Check the brakes.



Chapter 5: SIPDE Strategy

The motorcycle SIPDE strategy consist of following 5 basic steps:

Step 1: *Scan* - Constantly be scanning ahead for hazards.

Step 2: *Identify* - Identify potential hazards quickly.

Step 3: *Predict* - Predict what may happen with the potential hazard.

Step 4: *Decide* - Decide your best course of action to avoid hazard.

Step 5: *Execute* - Execute your plan to avoid hazard.

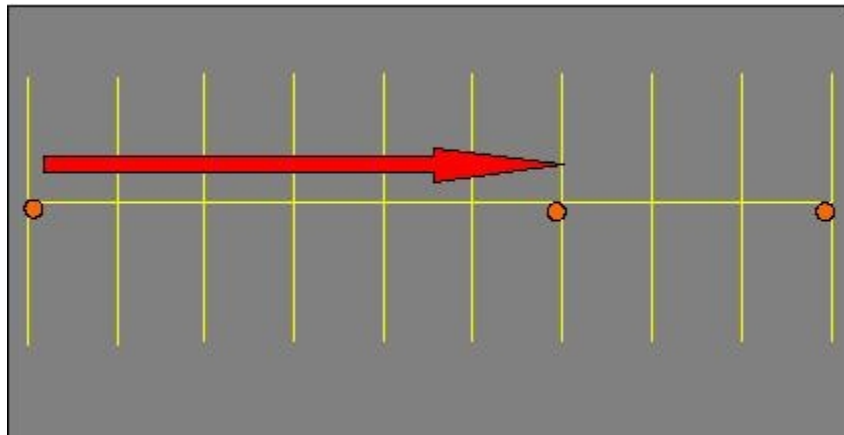


Chapter 6: Practice Exercises

The following motorcycle practice exercises are meant to help beginners learn the skills they need to operate a motorcycle safely.

These exercises can be set up in any standard open parking lot using the lines of the parking spaces and a few plastic cones.

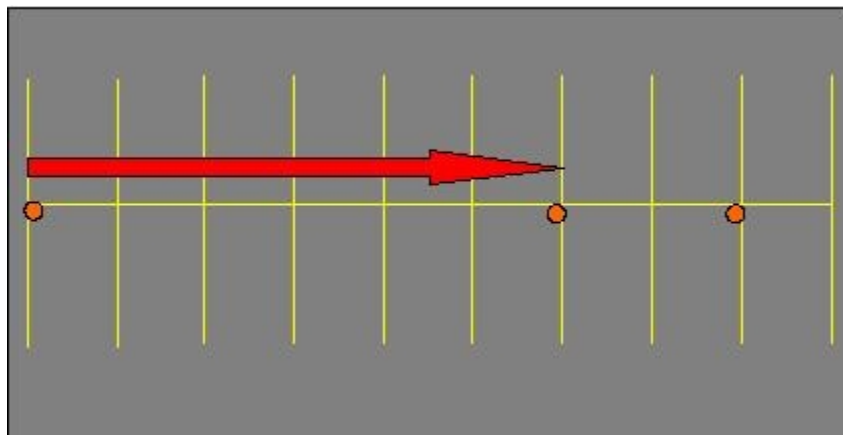
Exercise 1: Normal Stop In A Straight Line



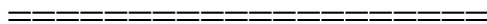
Accelerate to 15 MPH and then stop when your front wheel crosses the cone by the arrow tip. Try to keep the motorcycle controlled and in a straight line.
Stop before crossing the last cone.

=====

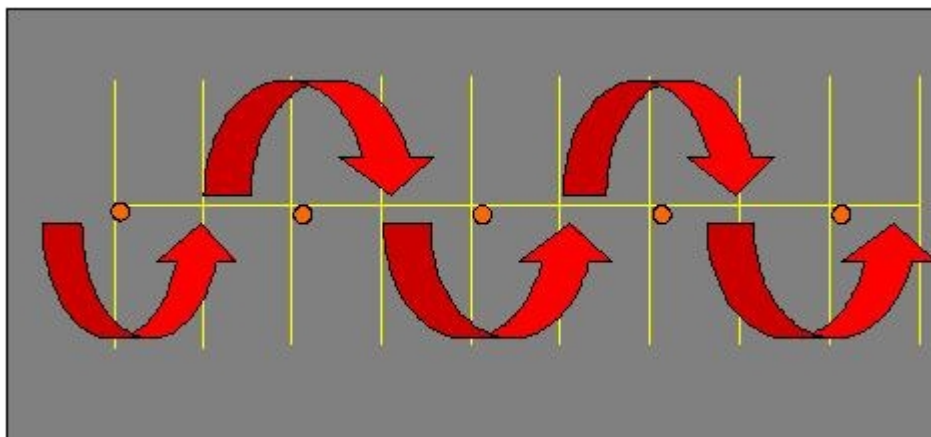
Exercise 2: Quick Stop In A Straight Line



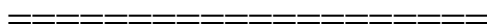
Accelerate to 15 MPH and then stop when your front wheel crosses the cone by the arrow tip. Try to keep the motorcycle controlled and in a straight line. Stop before crossing the last cone which is now one space closer.



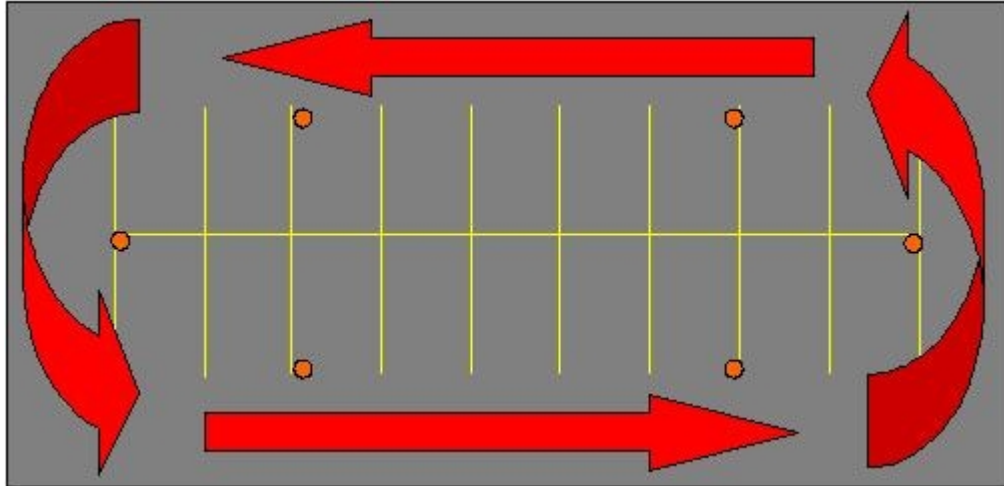
Exercise 3: Weaves



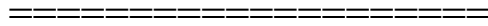
Simply practice weaving through the cones at 15 MPH. This exercise will help you learn how to pass obstacles or other vehicles on the road.



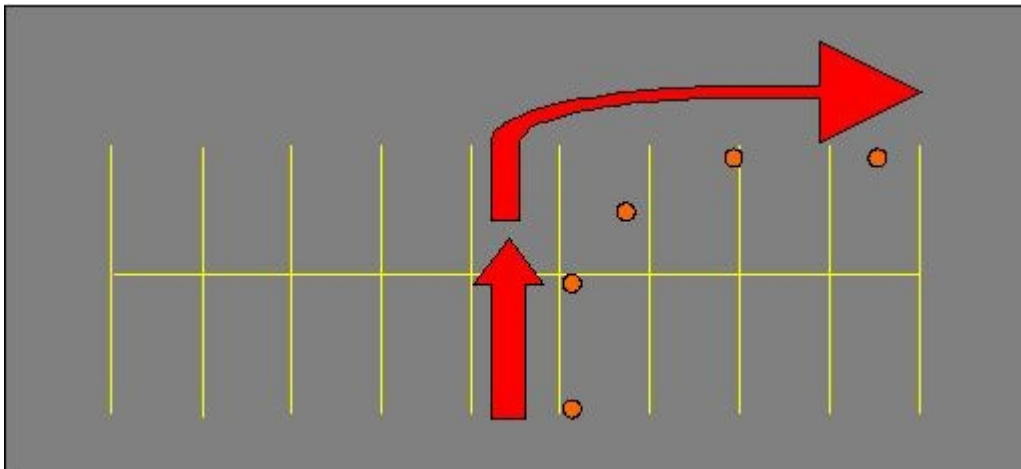
Exercise 4: Basic Turns



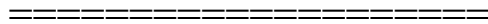
This exercise will help you get used to turning on curved roads. Do the exercise in both directions at about 10-15 MPH.



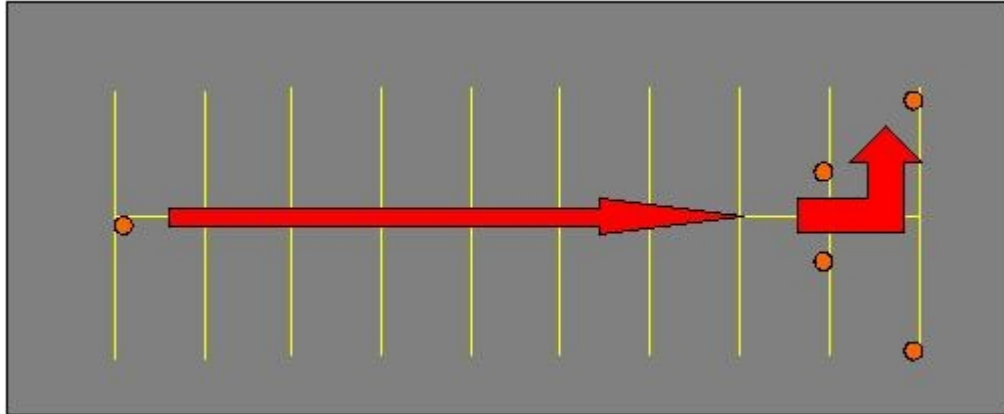
Exercise 5: Normal Turns



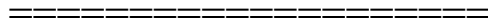
Practice making 90 degree turns at about 15 MPH. Practice this exercise in both directions.



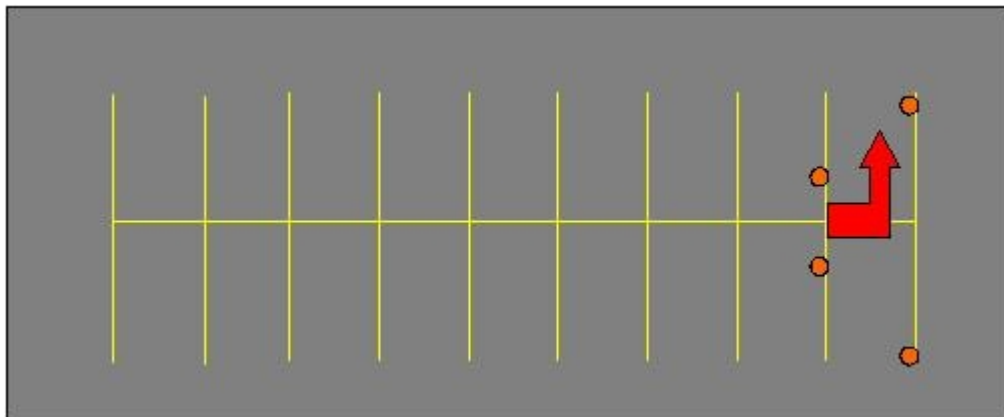
Exercise 6: Sharp Turns Without Stopping



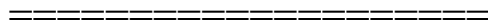
Practice making sharp turns without stopping at about 10 MPH. Do this exercise in both directions.



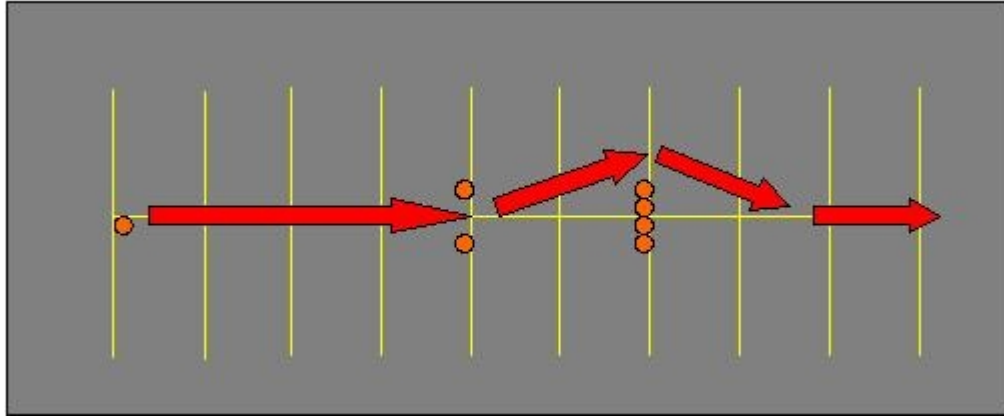
Exercise 7: Sharp Turns From A Stop



This exercise will help you when you need to make a sharp turn from a stopped position. Many new riders have problems making sharp right turns especially from the stopped position. Practice this exercise in both directions.



Exercise 8: Obstacle Swerve



Accelerate to the first set of cones at about 15 MPH, then swerve around the 8 foot wide obstacle, then return going straight. Do this exercise to the right and left of the obstacle.

Chapter 7: Turning and Cornering

The following motorcycle turning tips are meant to help new riders learn the basics of operating a motorcycle safely through turns and corners.



Motorcycle Turning Tips:

1. Slow down before entering a turn and look through the turn NOT down at the ground.
2. Keep your feet up on the pegs with your knees against the gas tank.
3. Lean your body with your motorcycle.
4. Keep an even smooth throttle through the turn.

The above tips are meant for a normal standard turn. If you are performing a slow turn or a U-turn you must learn how to use your rear brake and lean your body in the opposite direction of the turn to counterbalance your motorcycle.

Performing slow speed turns and U-turns are two of the trickier things to learn for new riders.

Motorcycle cornering is also tricky for many new riders. It is the primary cause for single-vehicle motorcycle crashes.

What usually occurs is a motorcyclist runs wide in a curve causing them to either enter the opposite lane or simply run off the road.

While all curves and corners are different; as a basic rule of thumb you should start at the outside of a curve to increase your line of sight and the effective radius of the turn. As you turn, move toward the inside of the curve, and as you pass the center, move to the outside to exit.

Chapter 8: Swerve or Brake

Learning when it is better to swerve or brake a motorcycle in an emergency situation is very important. Many accidents are caused by a motorcyclist trying to brake when they needed to swerve to avoid an obstacle.

There will be times when stopping a motorcycle in time to avoid an obstacle simply can not be done. So learning how to swerve around obstacles is a must for all motorcycle riders.

FYI - It is important NOT to brake while you are swerving. Braking should only be done before or after the swerve.

Chapter 9: Dangers While Riding

Fatigue:

While riding a motorcycle is fun, it also takes a lot more concentration and energy than driving a car. **You will find as you begin riding that you will tire and become fatigued much more quickly when riding a motorcycle.**



This means trips need to be planned with more frequent breaks, and you need to protect yourself from the elements such as wind and rain. Exposure to the elements will make you fatigue at a much quicker rate.

Flat Tires:

Motorcycle flat tires that occur while riding can be dealt with by following the steps below:

Step 1: Hold handle grips firmly.

Step 2: Ease off throttle.

Step 3: Keep a straight course.

Step 4: If braking is needed, apply the brake **gradually** to the tire that is NOT flat.

Step 5: As the motorcycle slows ease off the road, squeeze the clutch, and stop.



Wobbling:

If your motorcycle is loaded improperly or the tire pressure is incorrect a wobbling problem may arise with your motorcycle. When a wobble occurs the front wheel and handlebars suddenly start to shake from side to side at any speed.



The following motorcycle wobble tips should help you control the problem:

Step 1: Grip the handlebars firmly, but do not fight the wobble.

Step 2: Close the throttle gradually to slow down. Do not apply the brakes; braking could make the wobble worse.

Step 3: Move your weight as far forward and down as possible.

Step 4: Pull off the road as soon as you can to fix the problem.

Many riders will tend to fight the wobble which usually results in the front wheel being turned to sharply back and forth. This results in the rider dumping the motorcycle when he or she over-steers the motorcycle.

Intersections:

Motorcycle intersection safety is a must when riding a motorcycle. **A majority of motorcycle accidents occur at intersections because of a vehicle turning left in front of a motorcycle.**



This is because drivers of cars simply are not looking for motorcycles they are looking for other cars.

Lane Sharing:

Motorcycle lane sharing should NOT be done by either the motorcycle or the automobile driver. Automobiles and motorcycles should both be considered vehicles that need a full lane to be operated safely.

Lane sharing is prohibited in most states. Trying to ride between moving cars is simply asking for trouble. A hand out the window, a door opening, or a car suddenly changing lanes could spell disaster.



On the flip-side many automobile drivers will try to squeeze around motorcycles. As a motorcyclist you can discourage this by remaining in the center of the lane when being followed by another vehicle.

Bridges and Rain Grooves:



Bridge grates and rain grooves on the roadway cause a unique sensation as you cross over them on a motorcycle.

As you ride on these surfaces your motorcycle will feel like it is wobbling left and right. **However, this is natural so do NOT try to fight the wobble.** Simply ride straight and keep a steady speed and you will be fine.

Animals:

Motorcycles and animals are not a good combination. For whatever reason though dogs especially have a tendency to chase motorcycles.



If you are confronted by a dog in your riding path follow these tips:

1. Approach the dog slowly.
2. As the dog nears accelerate by him quickly.

FYI - Do NOT try kicking at the dog as this will more than likely cause you to lose control of your motorcycle.

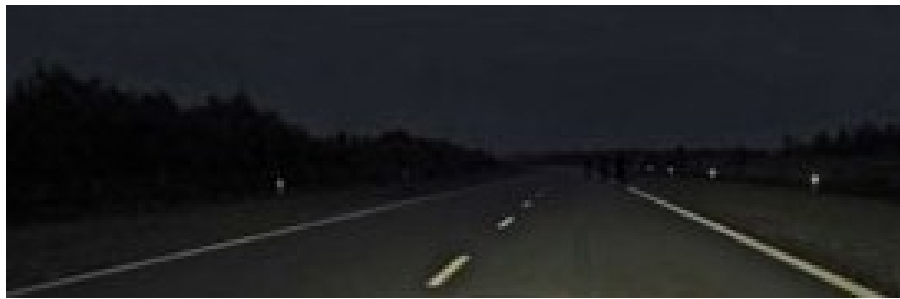
The biggest worry for motorcyclist though isn't the family neighborhood dog; instead it is larger animals such as deers. Everyone knows how horrifying it can be hitting a deer with a car now imagine hitting one with your motorcycle.

For these larger unpredictable animals it is best to try to swerve or stop to avoid the animal.

If you are confronted with the choice of hitting a smaller animal (*i.e. squirrel or rabbit*) or swerving into another car your best choice of course is to keep the bike straight. Hitting a small animal is much better than striking a large object such as a car.

Chapter 10: Night Riding

Riding a motorcycle at night is much more difficult than riding during the day. One of the most difficult night riding obstacles to overcome on a motorcycle is the glare from oncoming traffic. It is different from the glare you receive while riding in your car and may take sometime to get comfortable with.



The following **motorcycle night riding tips** should offer you some insight on how to ride safely at night:

Tip 1: Reduce your speed.

Tip 2: Increase distance.

Tip 3: Use the lights on the car ahead of you.

Tip 4: Use your high beam when there is no other traffic.

Tip 5: Be flexible about lane position.

Tip 6: Be visible.

Chapter 11: Carrying Loads

Carrying loads on a motorcycle changes the balance of the motorcycle; so make sure you follow these tips if you plan on carrying anything on your motorcycle other than yourself.

Tip 1: *Keep the load low* - Use saddlebags if possible.

Tip 2: *Keep the load forward* - Place load on or in front of the rear axle. Placing items behind the rear axle may cause wobbling.

Tip 3: *Distribute load evenly* - Keep weight in saddlebags about even on both sides. Otherwise, your motorcycle may drift to the heavier side.

Tip 4: *Secure the load properly* - Use bungee cords or nets instead of ropes. Ropes may stretch and come loose while riding.



Chapter 12: Carrying Passengers

Carrying passengers on motorcycles should only be done by experienced riders. **Everything about your motorcycles balance, handling, starting, and stopping changes when you have a passenger.**



Passenger Should Be Told The Following:

1. Get on the motorcycle only after you have started the engine.
2. Sit as far forward as possible without crowding you.
3. Hold on firmly to your waist or hips.
4. Keep both feet on the foot pegs, even when stopped.
5. Keep legs away from the muffler, chains, or moving parts.
6. Stay directly behind you.
7. Lean as you lean.
8. Avoid unnecessary talk.
9. Avoid unnecessary motion.

Warn Passengers When You:

1. Approach surface problems.
2. Are about to start from a stopped position.
3. Will be making any sudden moves.

Chapter 13: Group Riding

Group riding on motorcycles is the reason why many people like to ride motorcycles in the first place. Of course riding motorcycles in groups provides its own set of challenges.



The following are some group riding guidelines to follow:

1. Ride in small groups of no more than 4.
2. Plan a route.
3. Keep beginners up front right behind the leader.
4. Let the last rider set the pace. The leader should keep the last rider in his or her mirrors.
5. **Do NOT ride side by side.** This leaves no room to maneuver if needed. The group should be staggered.

Chapter 14: Motorcycles and Stoplights

Unfortunately motorcycles and stoplights have somewhat of a bad relationship. Stoplights in the United States generally come in 3 styles:

1. **Timed** - The lights simply change based on timers.
2. **Video** - Similar to a motion detector when it senses movement the light gets triggered.
3. **Metal Detectors** (*Inductive Loop*) - Sensors in the ground pick up the metal of vehicles crossing over them thus triggering the light.



Now stoplights using option 1 or 2 are no problem for motorcycles. However, a majority of lights are of the metal detector type. This is a problem for many motorcycles simply because they do not have enough metal to trigger the light.

Therefore, if you are the only vehicle at the red-light you may be stuck for quite awhile waiting for it to change to a green-light.

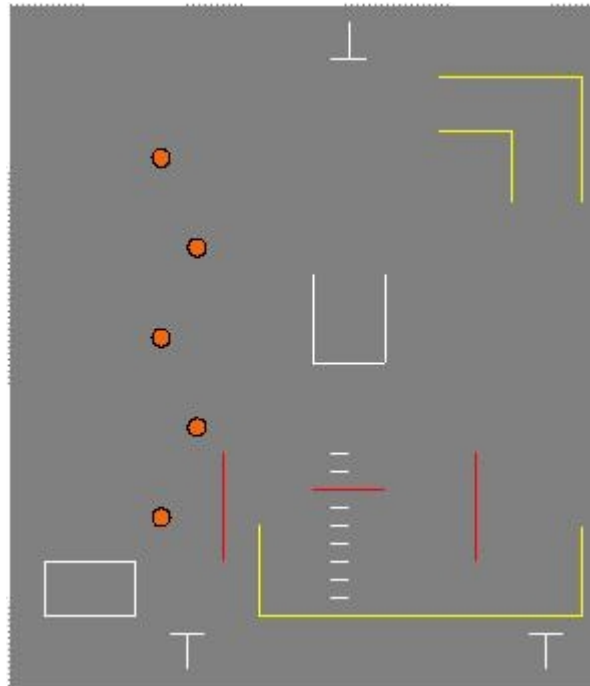
So what is the solution?

Well honestly right now there are not many solutions other than making a right turn and then making a legal U-turn. Some states have made it legal for motorcyclist to proceed through a red-light if they have waited for a certain length of time. Of course this just opens up a whole other can of worms and potential problems.

Some people say putting strong magnets on the bottom of your motorcycle, and then stopping directly on the metal detector strips in the road will trigger the lights. However, this is also disputed by others as well including myself as I have tried it without success.

Chapter 15: Alternate M.O.S.T. Road Test

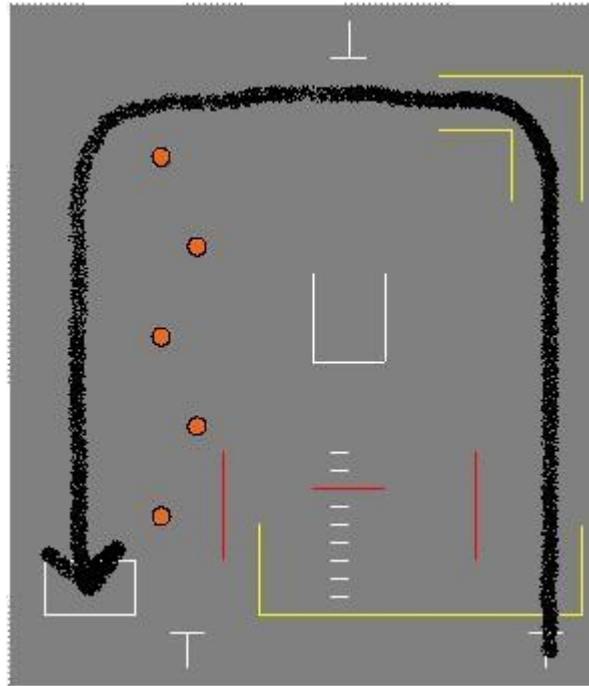
The Entire Course Is Approximately 30' Wide x 75' Long



All tests must be done without knocking down any cones, putting your feet down, or touching any red or yellow lines. Otherwise, points will be deducted.

FYI - This was the test used in the State of Illinois as of 2008. Check with your local DMV to see what your actual test requirements may be currently.

Test 1:

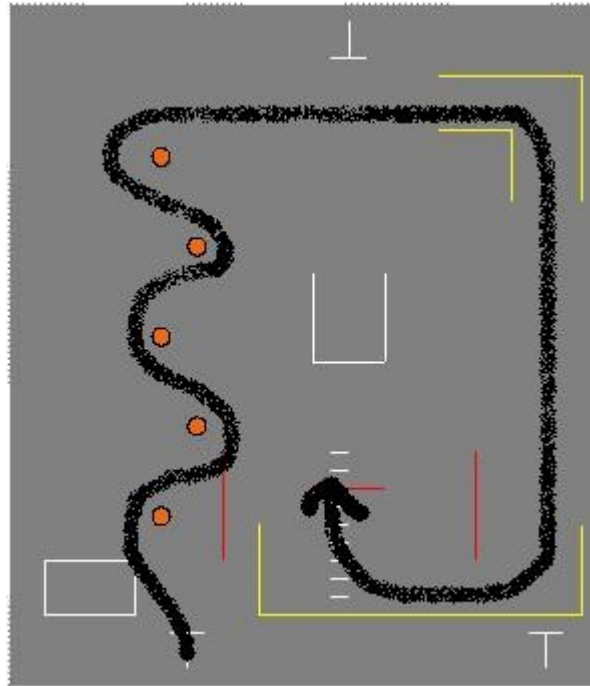


You begin on the **white T** at the bottom right-hand side of the course.

You proceed toward the top of the course where you make a sharp left turn through the **yellow box**.

You then proceed around the outside of the orange cones, and must make a complete stop with your front tire in the **white 3'x5' box** located on the bottom left-side of the course.

Test 2:

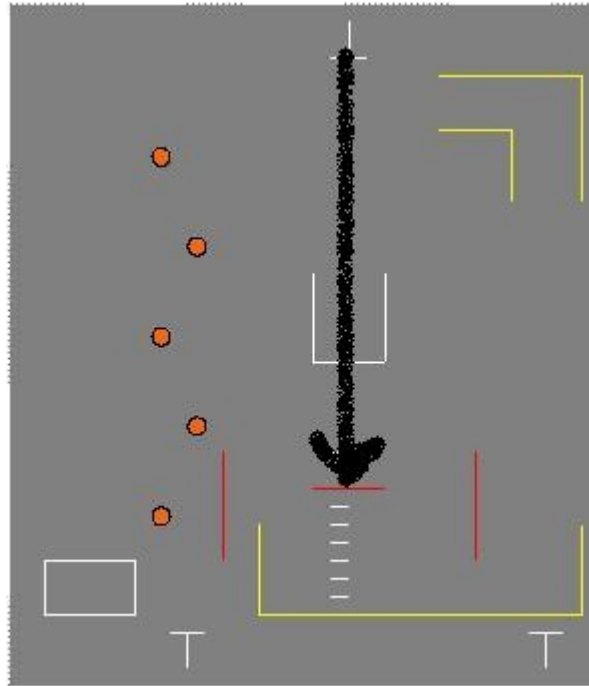


You begin on the **white T** located at the bottom left-hand side of the course. You must first weave in and out of the **orange cones that are set 12' apart and 2' off center from each other.**

You weave around the left of the first cone to begin. After you weave around the last cone you then make a right turn towards the yellow turn at the top right hand corner, then you proceed straight down the far right side of the course.

Once you near the **yellow line on the bottom right-hand side of the course** you must make a complete **right-hand U-turn** within 20' for a motorcycle 500cc's or less or 24' if your motorcycle is more than 500cc's.

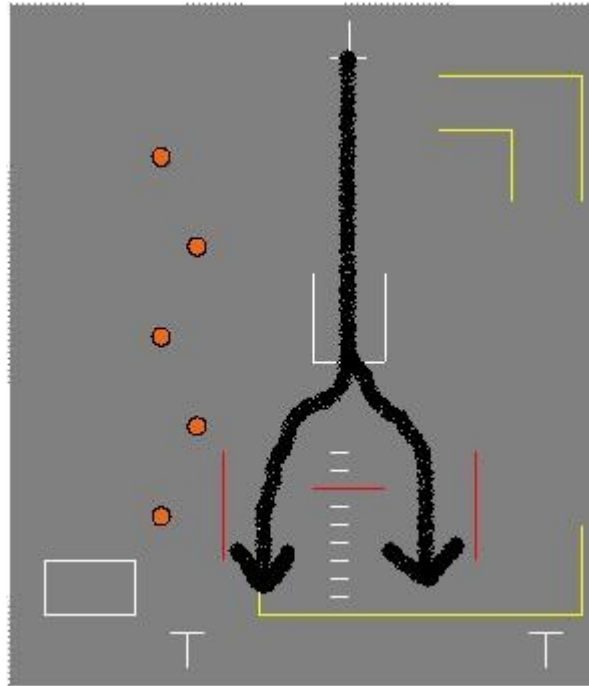
Test 3:



You begin on the **white T** at the top middle of the course. You then accelerate to approximately 15 MPH through the **U-shaped white chute** in the middle of the course.

As soon as your **front tire touches the white line of the U-shaped chute** you **apply your brakes and stop as quickly as possible in a straight line under control**. At 15 MPH you should be able to stop within 13 feet.

Test 4:



You begin on the **white T** at the top middle of the course. You then accelerate to approximately 15 MPH through the **U-shaped white chute** in the middle of the course.

As soon as your **front tire touches the white line of the U-shaped chute** you must swerve to the **left or right of the red line 13 feet in front of you, which is 7' wide**, without going outside of the red lines to the sides of you.

Chapter 16: Motorcycle Buying Tips

So you are ready to buy your first motorcycle. Well just be aware that buying a motorcycle at a good and fair price takes some shopping around.



Motorcycle Buying Tips:

1. **Shop Around** - Find 3-5 motorcycle dealers close to your home and ask them to give you the **out-the-door price**. You will be very surprised at some of the additional fees some dealers will charge you. (i.e. **Freight Charges, Set-Up Fees**) If you shop around you may be able to save yourself a lot of money.
2. **Look For Dealers That Are NOT Located In Large Metropolitan Areas** - This is because many dealers located in large metropolitan areas get a lot of foot traffic. Therefore, they can get away with charging higher set-up fees. You will probably receive much better deals from rural motorcycle dealers.
3. **Buy What You Can Handle** - Many dealers will try to talk beginners into buying larger more expensive motorcycles. If you are a new rider it may be more wise to start with a smaller 250cc bike until you become comfortable with handling a motorcycle.

4. **Ask What They Charge For The First 600 Mile Service** - Most motorcycles have to be serviced by a qualified dealer after the first 600 miles in order to be covered by the manufacturer's warranty. Dealers will vary greatly in what they charge for this service.

About the Author

Chad Surges is a motorcycling enthusiasts who lives in Chicago, Illinois. He has designed several websites related to motorcycling.

He has also published many motorcycling videos designed to help beginners understand the basics of riding motorcycles.

He encourages all riders to always:

RIDE SAFE!

Recommended Additional Resources

Free How To Ride Videos:

MotorcycleAssistant.com

Riding Gear Resources:

MotorcycleSuperstore.com

BikeBandit.com

Jafrum.com

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A Beginner's Guide To Motorcycles

By: Chad Surges

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