

SAFETY CORNER

By Craig Couturier

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By Guest Contributor: Karen Brunelle

Craig asked that I be the guest Safety Officer this month. I thought I'd build off of what Tom Kelly discussed last month during his guest hosting...visibility. I know we've all heard from others or experienced ourselves that the other people in a crash with a motorcycle often say, "I didn't see them". In fact, there was research conducted back in 1976 that found out the predominating cause of motorcycle crashes was the driver not seeing the motorcycle before the crash or not seeing them in enough time to avoid a collision. With over 9,000 motorcycle crashes and 600 motorcycle fatalities in Florida every year, there are things we can do to help increase our visibility...Hi Viz clothing and lots of lights on your bike are a couple of things. ●

I want to offer a couple of other concepts for consideration...looming, camouflaging, and saccadic masking. Now, I didn't come up with these things. I heard about them recently in the Florida Motorcycle Safety Coalition, a group of safety partners from around the state who share the common goal of reducing fatalities of motorcycle riders and their passengers. You may have heard or seen RideSmart Florida info posted around the state, on social media, or online (<https://ridesmartflorida.com/>).

These concepts all come down to how our brains process information - it's the way we see and perceive things.

LOOMING

This is when object appears smaller at a distance and becomes larger in a short span of time. In reality, the motorcycle never changes sizes; it just appears that they do. "All of a sudden, they were right there!"



CAMOUFLAGE

Camouflage is just what it sounds like – you are blending into your surroundings. As a rider, you can tell when this occurs. When the background of a vehicle approaching you is not moving, the motorcycle is likely camouflaged, and the other driver cannot see you. Think about when you are on a long straight stretch of 2-lane road. You are trying to decide if you can pass the slow moving vehicle ahead of you. You check the other lane and are trying to distinguish – is there something there? You may have to look a couple of times. Well, in these types of situations, the motorcycle, being a narrow vehicle when looking at it head on in comparison to a car, is even harder to see. When making turns at an intersection, the background of the vehicles you are looking at is moving and the motorcycle is likely not camouflaged in those situations, but beware the saccadic masking!

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SACCADIC MASKING

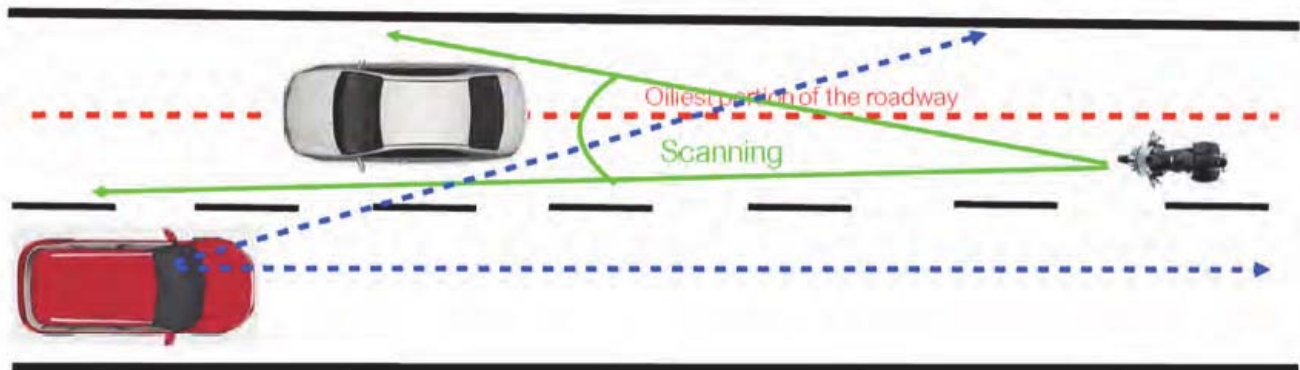
Saccadic masking is where the brain selectively blocks visual processing when the eye is moving. When we turn our head, we think it's a smooth continuous picture. However, in reality, your brain takes snap shots at intervals to make the visual happen. So, depending on how fast your head turns and eyes move, will depend on how fast or slow the interval of those snapshots happen. The faster the head turn and eyes move, the wider the gap of the "blind spots" or "saccades" in between the snap shots. Motorcycles being so narrow, can often be in the blind spot when a person looks.

See what you're missing by checking out this short video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL_NvUHGgi8. As a driver, to prevent saccadic masking from happening, as you are moving your focus around, pause for a fraction of a moment and focus on 3 points – check close, check middle, and check long distance. Then look both ways...twice!

Let's talk about focus for a minute. If we know to look for something, it's easier to see it. However, when we focus on a certain thing, we tend to miss other things besides what we focus on. The Monkey Business Illusion (another short video!) is a great example of this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY So, it's important to be focused while riding, but not fixated on any one thing!

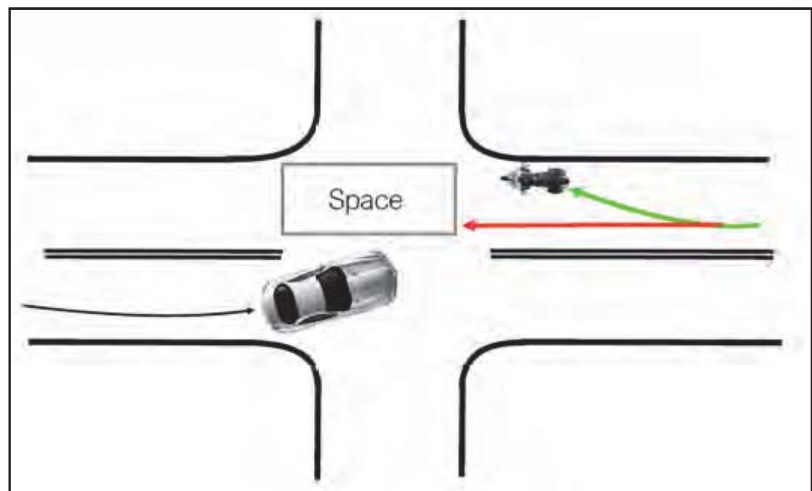
HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF VISIBLE

"Ok, great, now what do I do about all this?" Well, I'm glad you asked! Besides the Hi Viz and lights, if you are riding by yourself or in a small group, you can do what's called the Identification Avoidance Maneuver. Where you deliberately weave to get the attention of drivers who may not see you.



Riding staggered is another way which we can create a space between the rider and perceived or actual hazards and can prevent camouflage as well.

Offsetting when approaching an intersection can also provide space for additional time for the driver to recognize the motorcycle is there and react to avoid the crash.



So, bottom line...give your brain a chance to catch up with what your eyes are taking in! Mark Welch is also a member of the Coalition. Either of us will be glad to talk more about the Coalition and these concepts. Whether you are a driver, passenger, or pedestrian...highway safety depends on YOU. Be observant and be adaptable to be safe.

KAREN