

BRAKING HABITS

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Have you ever been riding along on a beautiful day with the wind in your helmet, enjoying the ride when all of a sudden, a cage pulls out in front of you and you have to brake hard or risk hitting the cage? This scenario has probably happened to all of us at one time or another. Emergency braking is something most of us learned how to do when we were learning how to ride but probably have not given a lot of thought to since then.

We are creatures of habit and I can prove it to you. The next time you brush your teeth, if you use your right hand, use your left instead and vice versa. About the second time you jam the brush into your gums, you will say to yourself, "by gosh, Mark was right! We are creatures of habit." I have talked to a lot of motorcyclists who say that they always use only the rear brake to stop under normal circumstances. They usually say they want to save the wear and tear on their front brake pads and if they have to make an emergency stop, then they would use the front brake in conjunction with the rear brake. El Toro poo-poo, if you will pardon my Spanish. In an emergency situation, when panic is close by, they will stop the way they always do by using only the rear brake which may not be enough to avoid the hazard.

The majority of the braking capacity of your motorcycle comes from the front brake. In fact, the front brake accounts for more than 70% of the braking ability of a motorcycle. So using the front brake every time you stop is crucial. Then when the fecal matter hits the rotating thin, rigid vanes, you will brake the way you have always braked, applying both brakes at the same time.

The total stopping distance includes three parts, perception time, reaction time, and stopping distance. Perception time is the time it takes to recognize a threat, usually around ¼ of a second under normal circumstances. Fa-

tigue, alcohol, emotions, etc. will slow down your perception time. But that is another topic for another time. The national average reaction time is also about ¼ of a second. (Some stopping distance charts combine perception time and reaction time.) A motorcycle traveling at 60 miles per hour will travel over 131 feet in a 1.5 seconds. That is how far you go before the brakes begin to slow your motorcycle and does not include the third component, stopping distance. So practicing your emergency stopping skills is important!

You don't have to be on a race track or traveling at high speeds to practice. You can do it in a parking lot at about 15-18 miles per hour. Keep your handlebars square and begin braking. As the motorcycle begins to slow, apply more pressure on the brake lever and pedal until the motorcycle stops.

The more you slow down, the more pressure you apply to the brakes. You should also be looking straight ahead to keep the motorcycle from leaning to the left or right at the end of the stop.

Stopping in a curve can be accomplished with two methods. The first method is to begin braking while in the curve. As the lean angle of the motorcycle decreases, increase the

pressure on the brakes until you have stopped. The handlebars should be square at the end of the stop. The second method is to straighten the motorcycle, then stop. You can use your emergency braking skills to stop after the handlebars are squared. The first method will require more stopping distance than the second method.

Remember, if you are two up, the extra weight will require a slightly longer stopping distance. But emergency braking when you are two up is more fun! ;)

Head and eyes!

Mark.

