



Good Looks

Text by Jon DeVecchio

Street Skills is a regular feature in Motorcycle Times that highlights safety techniques and practices that could save your life! Visit StreetSkills.net to find more ways to access Jon's knowledge and tips.

As you read this page, a motorcyclist somewhere just had a near crash. The mishap could have been with another vehicle or not. It's difficult to say who was at fault, given all the factors that contribute to close calls. Often when a motorist tangles with a rider, they can be heard above all the commotion proclaiming "I never saw him!" The rider likely says the same thing in their helmet: "Where did he come from?" Riders don't realize that when things go bad it might be their own eyes failing them.

Visual perception is vital to safe and enjoyable riding. Up to 90% of all the information used in making riding decisions is gathered visually. Yet many of us overlook the importance of keen vision. Unfortunately, human eyesight has limits. One limitation called "change blindness" occurs when a change in a visual stimulus goes unnoticed by the observer. In other words, you may ride a certain route to work every day and have never seen a deer. So you might stop looking for the deer, which might be present on the next commute.

Many riding circumstances obstruct our vision. Inadequate face shields or eyewear can produce tears. Poor face protection can allow bugs and debris to enter the eyes. Aging has a degrading effect on vision. Riding at night dramatically hinders our ability to see. Add tinted shields and over-driving your headlights to the darkness and you're riding blind. Traffic impedes our sight distance if we don't create a space cushion. Finally, nature plays with our vision by sprinkling into the mix hills, curves, beautiful scenery and sun glare.

Rider education at any level will stress the mantra "look where you want to go". This is an over simplification of a complex technique, but it's a fantastic starting point. Another common phrase used is "You go where you look." This isn't exactly true either. You can glance in different directions and not veer off your intended path. But

in many cases, when people target fixate on an object they head right for it. Therefore, **always point your nose in the direction you want to go.** Do it at any speed and in all riding situations.

The correct "head turn" as it relates to riding a motorcycle will seem a bit unnatural at first. In most riding situations, keeping your chin up with slight head turns is appropriate. Once the maneuvers get tighter, a rider will turn the head along with their shoulders to ride skillfully.

Better vision equals better riding. These are a few techniques to improve your visual skills:

- **Riding straight at any speed:** Keep your chin up and look far ahead. Your chin held up will position your eyes in a better forward viewing position and make it easier to point your nose in the direction of your desired path. Dropping your chin and looking down will only complicate things. Looking ahead shows you the big picture. The sooner you perceive a situation the more time you'll have to deal with it. Take additional cues from your peripheral vision.
- **Braking:** When slowing down, inertia will naturally drop your chin as your head continues to move forward. Work on keeping our chin up at stops for better balance.
- **Cornering:** When you first enter a corner you may not be able to see your exit. So point your nose towards where you expect the exit to be until it comes into full view.
- **Slow Maneuver or Turn:** Look in the direction you want to go. Note that this might be behind you and an exaggerated head turn is effective. As you point your nose and turn your shoulders in the direction of your turn, envision twisting around in the seat to talk to a passenger.
- **Gauges and Mirrors:** Instrument panel glances should be frequent and quick. Often times we forget a turn signal or catch ourselves speeding (oops!). Get in habit of glancing in your mirrors, especially as you come to a stop to protect your tail.
- **Emergencies:** When you get into trouble, look to an escape path. Looking anywhere else is counterproductive as you regain composure. Remember that "target fixation" draws us in the direction we stare. So chose a good target!

While we cannot control the perception of other roadway users, we can keep our vision in tip-top shape. The best riders know when and where to look. On your next ride, try to use one or more of the techniques provided here. You just might see something you have been missing all these miles.

Correction for the November/December 2013 issue's *Street Skills* column: The top photo of Jon on his "Circus Bear" should have been credited to Bryan Finch of [572creations](http://572creations.com).