



See the Future

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If you knew exactly what dangers would be present on your next ride, would that help you in any way? Well, you do know what's going to happen.

There are rules of the road to obey. Cars will compete with you for space. Your road surfaces will vary. Riders really have seen the future because they have ridden in the past. True surprises should be few.

The problem occurs when riders assume the best will happen to them, instead of expecting the worst. In other words, bad things always happen to other riders. You probably consider yourself to be a pretty good rider. But how does one really know how good they are related to how good they need to be? Compare yourself to these characteristics of a good rider:

- Attentive
- Reduces risk
- Social skills
- Muscular control
- Decision-making skills
- Accepts responsibility for their safety and enjoyment

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) created the *Search, Evaluate, Execute* (SEE) process for riders to take maximum control of their situation. Without some sort of direction, most riders would be left to randomly assemble bits and pieces of good riding. SEE gives riders better traffic sense; it's our secret to riding well.

So what is SEE? It's an easy to remember riding strategy that places the responsibility of managing risk on the rider. Motorcycling is not a passive activity. It requires visual, thinking, and muscular skills. You must *Search* to gather information about your riding environment, *Evaluate* your potential hazards, and *Execute* a maneuver to decrease crash risk. It sounds easy enough. Just watch what's happening, predict what can go wrong, and fix it.

The following is how to use the SEE technique and potential barriers to its use.

The first step in the ongoing process is to search. Gather information about your riding environment. This includes traffic controls that direct you, road surface, weather considerations, and other roadway users. For example, imagine approaching a green light intersection just after a rainfall and observing people standing on the corner.

The second step is to evaluate and predict potential conflicts with the

things you have identified in your search. The light might turn yellow requiring a stop, a pedestrian could step into the road, and your stopping distance could be affected by the wet surface. These things might not happen, but it's best to play the "what if" game. Expect a problem so you are prepared for it.

The third step as you SEE is to execute a maneuver to decrease crash risk. You can do this by adjusting speed and/or position. It might also be useful to make an effort to communicate with others. In our example, it would be smart to slow, steer away from the curb, and perhaps toot the horn just a bit to alert the bystanders.

If it were only that simple, all riders would use SEE and crashes would be rare. But our human tendencies can make it difficult to apply.

Your vision can be impaired by a variety of things, which complicates the searching action. How well will you be able to gather visual clues if you're tailgating the vehicle in front, riding at night or facing sun glare? Unprotected or under protected eyes could also force you to miss important information. Aging also has a sneaky way of diminishing your sight. Facing forward doesn't necessarily mean you are absorbing important information.

The evaluation process is where many riders make themselves more vulnerable. General distractions such as daydreaming, fiddling with gear, or reading a GPS are the most likely culprit if you overlook an important warning. With cell phones and wireless communicators growing in popularity, it's important to remember that on a motorcycle all it takes is one small mistake to have a large catastrophe. Therefore, conversations while riding should be limited.

A risky choice many riders make that hinders evaluation ability is listening to music when they ride. According to research, music is appropriate for relaxation and routine tasks. Cognitive performance drops with the distracting addition of music. Riding a motorcycle is not routine and we need our brains to be focused. Signing along to music leads to tunnel vision, further impairing your searching ability. Lastly, music may decrease your vigilance to ride properly and communication with other roadway users. Many riders like to roll with the tunes on, but is it worth the risk? That's up to you.

The last action of SEE, execute, comes with its own set of hurdles. Upon recognizing danger, all riders want to defeat the threat. Why then don't all riders prevail? The answers are quite simple. Physical impairments such as alcohol consumption, exhaustion, or hypothermia directly conspire against sharp reflexes. We're human, remember? A rider's indecisiveness and lack of skill are direct consequences of little preparation and practice for handling adversity. To improve your execution abilities, you must confront the possibility that you may have to take invasive action to prevent a crash and sharpen those skills.

Regardless of your experience, now is the time to make SEE part of your riding routine to decrease your risk and increase enjoyment. At first it will take deliberate effort to learn. That is a fact. After that, commitment to the procedure will improve your riding experience. Soon it will be automatic and you won't even know you're doing it.

If you properly use the *Search, Evaluate, Execute* technique and overcome barriers to its use, I see many happy miles in your future.