



## Challenging Maneuvers

by Jon DeVecchio

“It’s not you. It’s all the other people on the

road that make me worry.” At some point, every rider has heard a similar phrase from a family member or friend. What they’re really saying is they’d rather not think about the scenario where you crash with another roadway user. While that may help nervous non-riders accept the idea of loved ones riding, motorcyclists cannot be so dismissive. Not only should riders acknowledge the possibility of a crash, they should take steps necessary to avoid them.

Often times the rider *is* responsible for his or her own crash. Examples of this include crashing in a corner or hitting an obstacle. Overlooking slick roads can result in a mishap. Improper tire maintenance could lead to a loss of control. Of

course, other motorists can be problematic when they suddenly turn in front of a rider. Let’s just say that the blame game is not productive when discussing crash avoidance.

The term “emergency” is commonly used in motorcycle training to describe unexpected riding hazards. The term effectively communicates that certain riding situations require an urgent response. But are they truly emergencies or a lack of skill, preparation and experience?

To call them “emergencies” deflects the responsibility away from the rider. The word “emergency” implies that when bad things happen to us, external factors are the cause. On the other hand, it might be better to call them “challenging maneuvers”. This phrase more positively suggests that we are in control of our machines even when the situation gets more demanding.

All motorcyclists should expect surprises. Ignoring the reality of having to overcome a crisis puts the rider at much higher risk. It’s better to acknowledge the possibilities and improve the skills required to keep the rubber side down when in trouble.

Challenging maneuvers such as quick stops and swerves should be rare if you’re alert and paying attention. Expect the unexpected and be prepared. Ride with plenty of time and space so you won’t have to test the limits of your skill. But if a situation requires quick action, regular practice will keep you sharp to perform well automatically.

The best way to sharpen your crash avoidance skills is through professional motorcycle training. If that is not an option for you, practice these techniques on empty roads or parking lots:

**Quick Stops:** Keep your chin up, square your handlebars and apply both front and rear brakes until the motorcycle comes to a halt. Stop in first gear. Use caution on your first few attempts. Be patient and work towards shortening your stopping distances gradually.

**Swerves:** Practice swerving around potholes or shadows, both left and right. Swerve by pressing the handlebars in one direction to avoid a hazard and then the opposite way after passing it. Look toward your escape path. Avoid braking or throttle changes during the swerve.

**Cornering Problems:** You may find yourself entering a corner too fast or losing traction while leaned over. If this happens, remain calm and focus on your exit. Avoid abrupt inputs. If traction is good, pressing the bar to increase lean angle may be effective. For handling a corner obstruction, you should develop skills for changing direction and stopping quickly from a

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leaned position. Changing direction and braking while leaned are techniques best acquired under the watchful eye of an instructor before using on the street. Quick stops in a curve may require straightening the motorcycle upright first and then stopping quickly in a straight line.

**Obstacles:** Railroad tracks and speed bumps are good places to practice riding over things. To effectively ride over objects, first keep your chin up, look to your escape path and break contact with your seat. Roll on the throttle just prior to striking the obstacle and upon contact roll off.

**Slippery Surfaces:** Slippery surfaces can be considered anything but dry and grippy pavement. If necessary to change speed or direction, it must be done gently. Be prepared for the tires to gain sudden traction once the slippery surface has been passed.

**Other Riding Scenarios:** There are often obvious clues to potential challenging maneuvers. Warning signs such as "deer crossing" or "curve ahead" can prevent emergency situations in the first place. Riders should also think about their riding environment and anticipate possible hazards. If it's windy, expect scattered debris. Riding down a city street, expect a door to open on a parked car. In hindsight, crashes and close calls usually could have been foreseen had the rider simply considered the risks.

**Maintenance:** A properly maintained motorcycle will respond with better precision. While few riders crash due to a catastrophic mechanical failure, it does happen. The number of mishaps resulting from low tire pressure or an electrical glitch is unclear. Still, make sure your motorcycle is in tip-top condition to put the odds in your favor.

On any given ride, challenging maneuvers are few. Yet the best riders among us are prepared for the unexpected by playing out the possibilities ahead of time. Accept that the roads will be filled with surprises. Will you be able to rise to the challenge next time you're faced with one?

Riding a motorcycle is exciting. And there is no better triumph than conquering a challenging situation, knowing it was *you* that made the difference between success and failure. "The other people on the road" had nothing to do with it.

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