

CHAPTER 5
DEFENSIVE RIDING PRACTICES
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CHAPTER 5
DEFENSIVE RIDING PRACTICES

1. RIDING TECHNIQUES.

a. General.

(1) Headlights on all departmental motorcycles should be illuminated at all times during operation. This will make the motorcycle more visible during daylight and provide the rider with greater safety from vehicles making unsafe lane changes, right-of-way violators, etc. This section does not preclude the motorcycle headlight from being turned off during an emergency situation or when the light would interfere with law enforcement (Section 25650.5 of the California Vehicle Code).

(2) Riders should not enter an area in which a clear and safe exit is not visible.

(3) Riders should not override their ability or the limits of their motorcycle.

(4) As a rider gains experience and proficiency, they must guard against the tendency to become overconfident.

(5) Safety glasses or impact resistant eyewear and leather gloves should always be worn while riding.

(6) If a motorcycle is stopped and for any reason begins to fall over, riders should not attempt to catch it when it is off-center. Due to its weight, it is better for the motorcycle to sustain minor damage than to risk personal injury.

(7) The wearing of soft body armor may prove beneficial in reducing possible injuries when involved in a crash.

b. Surface.

(1) Constantly scan the roadway for grease, water, oil, sand, and other debris.

(2) Avoid the center of traffic lanes at intersections and left turn pockets for the following reasons:

(a) Oil, fuel, and water accumulations.

(b) No avenue of escape.

(c) Possibility of being rear-ended.

(3) Always travel in the most heavily used portion of the traffic lane where other vehicles' tires generally traverse (the left or right wheel track), and do not ride in the center of the traffic lane.

(4) Do not ride on painted lane divider lines or raised "Botts Dots" because there is a reduced coefficient of friction.

(5) Anticipate the possibility of changing road surface conditions due to weather and/or construction.

(6) Avoid parking where vehicles have left deposits of oil, fuel, grease, or where there is loose material on the road surface.

(7) If an object is encountered on the surface that cannot be avoided (e.g., a hub cap, tire segment, board, ladder), straighten the motorcycle into an upright position and attempt to go over the object at a 90-degree angle while accelerating.

(8) Should striking a small animal be unavoidable, straighten the motorcycle into an upright position and accelerate. **Do not brake or swerve.**

c. Braking.

(1) When following another vehicle, do not center on the rear of the vehicle; instead, ride to the left or right side.

(2) Learn to synchronize the use of the front and rear brakes together to gain maximum stopping efficiency.

(3) Avoid continually activating or relying on the anti-lock feature for stopping power.

(4) Do not brake excessively while making turning movements.

(5) In the event of a flat tire, decelerate gradually and avoid heavy braking. If braking is necessary, apply gradual pressure to the brake on the good tire, maintain a firm hold on the handlebars, and ease over to a safe area to stop.

(6) When braking heavily, always keep the front wheel pointed in the original direction of travel.

(7) Always follow vehicles at a safe distance. There are drivers who instinctively apply their brakes upon merely observing a patrol vehicle in their rear or side mirrors, or when the red light or siren is activated.

d. Stopping in Traffic.

(1) When coming to a stop behind other vehicles, always position at a safe distance favoring the right or left side of the lane.

(2) Do not stop directly behind a vehicle. Consider moving up between vehicles stopped at signals on multi-laned streets, this will prevent being struck from the rear.

(3) Be aware of traffic conditions to the rear when reducing speed and/or stopping.

e. Intersections.

(1) Watch for vehicles preparing to make or making a left turn.

(2) Do not be afraid to give up the right-of-way.

(3) Always proceed into an intersection with reasonable caution.

(4) Gear down prior to entering an intersection if a potential hazard is present.

(5) When a traffic signal changes to GREEN, before entering the intersection, make sure it is clear and all approaching vehicles on the cross street are stopping.

(6) Do not pass vehicles between the curb lane and the curb, as the driver of a vehicle may pull over to park or turn right at an intersection into a driveway or alley.

(7) Do not ride close to parked vehicles.

f. Lane Changes and Passing.

(1) Never change lanes or pass vehicles without first glancing over both shoulders and into the blind spot to determine if the area is free of traffic.

(a) Do not rely solely on mirrors.

(b) Use peripheral vision while riding; do not divert total attention.

(2) When passing a vehicle, watch for the telltale signs of a driver who is about to change lanes or turn. These signs may include a driver's head moving to the right, to the left, or towards their rearview mirror.

(3) Anticipate unexpected movements of vehicles (and pedestrians).

g. Curves.

(1) Slow down prior to entering curves and turns.

(2) Do not over-brake the rear wheel while leaning into a turn or at any time other than when the motorcycle is in an upright position.

(3) When entering curves on the outside, stay within the traffic lane and move toward the inside to allow room for correction if speed is too fast or radius is misjudged. When applying this technique, accurate surface appraisal is essential.

(4) When traveling on unfamiliar roadways, operate at slower speeds.

h. Freeways.

(1) Critically evaluate surface conditions, the radius of off-ramps, connector roads, and avoid the center of the lanes. The low line is generally cleaner; however, it may give the rider reduced visibility.

(2) Once committed to an off-ramp or connector road, devote full attention.

(3) Do not look back to merge with freeway traffic if following a vehicle down an on-ramp or connector road.

(4) Regardless of the line followed in a curve, turn, connector road, or off-ramp, the rider should not travel at a speed greater than that which allows them to perform an accurate surface appraisal.

(5) Conditions may change quickly on both on- and off-ramps. **Do not become overconfident.**

(6) Do not pass utilizing the center divider unless it is absolutely necessary. Emergency lights and siren (low pitch, or "wail") may be used.

(7) When passing on the shoulder or center divider, great care and reduced speed must be exercised.

(8) When traveling in the right lane, be alert for vehicles turning suddenly in an attempt to access an off-ramp.

(9) If splitting of traffic is necessary, use the most appropriate lanes.

(10) Avoid abrupt lane changes and erratic direction changes at high speed.

(11) Be prepared for vehicles to change lanes and take evasive action when traffic suddenly slows down ahead of them.

i. Splitting Traffic.

(1) If a rider is splitting traffic they should operate their motorcycle at a safe speed for the prevailing speed of slower traffic.

(2) Riders should watch for any gaps that a vehicle could move into as they are splitting traffic.

(3) If traffic is stopped, watch for doors opening and be cautious of extended mirrors or projecting loads.

(4) Watch for debris on pavement along lane delineation lines.

(5) Check the side mirror of vehicles to the right to determine if the drivers are looking and appear to be aware of the approach.

(6) The headlights should be illuminated whenever the motorcycle is in motion, including during daylight hours.

(7) Use the horn if necessary; never use the forward-facing emergency lights or siren while splitting traffic.

j. Emergency Lights and Siren.

(1) When utilizing the motorcycle's emergency lights and siren, riders should slow down as they approach intersections, proceed into intersections with extreme caution, and be prepared for the unexpected.

(2) Be sure the siren is up to high pitch ("yelp") before slowing and entering intersections.

(3) While operating with emergency lights and siren, riders shall not pass on the right.

k. Violator Stops.

(1) Use caution when making violator stops and be prepared for the possibility of sudden turning movements and/or stops.

(2) Be aware that violators may slow and/or stop in the traffic lane when signaling them to pull over. If this occurs, pass the violator and attempt to get them moving with traffic until more precise control is gained.

(3) If an enforcement stop is made in front of a violator, keep the motorcycle engine idling and the transmission in gear, and observe the violator's vehicle in the mirror or over the shoulder until they have stopped and they remain stopped. This will allow the rider to quickly ride away if the violator fails to stop behind them.

(4) The rider should dismount and remount from the off-traffic side of the motorcycle. This provides safety from passing traffic and permits a nontraffic-side approach to the violator's vehicle.

I. High-Risk Stops.

(1) A rider should have assistance present prior to making a high-risk stop if at all possible. **A motor officer is at a definite disadvantage, therefore, try to obtain assistance from a car unit.**

(2) Do not park as close to the rear of the suspect vehicle as a rider would on other enforcement stops. Consult Highway Patrol Manual 70.6, Officer Safety Manual, Chapter 8, High-Risk Apprehensions, for recommended distances.

(3) Park in a diagonal position with the motorcycle between the rider and the suspect vehicle, as this may provide some protection.

(4) Use utility poles, mailboxes, parked cars, etc., for protection.

(5) If a car unit has arrived, park behind it to increase the amount of protection.

(6) The rider should determine if they can effectively handle their weapons with gloves on. If not, the rider should develop a technique to remove them prior to making the stop, or as the stop is being made.