

This Month's Golden Rule Of Riding

"Look Where You Want To Go"

There are many long and complicated theoretical reasons why a motorcycle goes where it's rider looks but we haven't heard one yet that we can relate to.

However, there is no doubt that one's motorcycle does indeed go where one looks. Consider the situation where, early in your riding career, you saw a deep pothole in the road surface, thought, "Gee, I don't want to hit that", fixed your eyes on the pothole - and promptly ran into it.

Motorcycle safety boffins have a name for this tendency for motorcycles to run into things the rider fixes his/her eyes upon. They call it target fixation.

Perhaps the classic illustration of target fixation lies in the very high number of motorcycle fatalities involving riders who run into lampposts, usually when the rider's motorcycle fails to get round a corner. Think about it. Think how narrow a motorcycle is. Think how very narrow a lamppost is. Yet the motorcycle impacts into the lamppost with deadly accuracy.

The reason is, of course, that the rider looks at the lamppost, thinks "Gee I don't want to hit that", clamps his eyes on the threatening object - and promptly runs into it.

Now it's easy to say: "Drag your eyes away from the object you want to avoid" but doing it isn't as easy as it sounds. After all, one's instinct from one's caveman's beginnings is to keep an eye on a threat to one's life.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the solution to the problem also lies in one's caveman's beginnings - the instinct to look for an escape route. Obviously, the best and least dangerous escape route you can look for is along the road you are (or were) travelling on. So, turn your head and look along the road to where you want to go. Ninety nine percent of the time, this will work. Your bike will prove to have more in reserve than you thought and it will get around the corner and head where you want to go. And even if it doesn't get around the corner, you are more likely to low side (the bike falls down and you slide off it and slide to a shocked stop) than to impact upright into the deadly, unmoving lamppost.

Not too long ago, an NZMSC instructor proved that looking where you want to go works. He was having lots of fun at rather high speeds on one of New Zealand's sealed and winding back roads when he entered a corner a bit too fast and found himself heading off the road on a corner towards an eight wire fence. Behind the fence stood several sheep watching the oncoming motorcycle with some interest, too thick to realise that a large motorcycle was about to enter their paddock without opening the gate whereupon it would promptly run into them.

But, our instructor later told us, not long before he hit the fence he thought to himself "What am I doing?! I tell my pupils to look where they want to go, not at the fence." Whereupon he turned his head to look up the road where he wanted to go. The bike obediently followed his eyes and a shaken instructor got back onto the road surface and rode somewhat more quietly home. Later he showed us his bike. On the fairing were obvious marks made by fence posts as the machine passed so very, very close to the fence. There is now one instructor at least who really believes that every motorcyclist should: