

# Passed your test? Now learn to ride!

There are so many key skills that the motorcycle test doesn't cover. Rapid Training's Rich Evans explains what every new rider needs to know

If you've recently passed your test then congratulations and welcome to the exhilarating world of large capacity motorcycles – you've a lifetime of freedom, joy and camaraderie ahead of you. But, as any experienced rider will tell you, you've also got a lot more to learn about riding.

The good news is you can shortcut the route to becoming a fast, safe rider by concentrating on a few key skills that the test doesn't cover. Master these and you'll be safer, faster, more confident... and enjoy every ride more than ever before.

#### Vision on

This is usually where new riders most transform their riding. The idea is to look as far ahead as possible, which is usually dramatically further than most new riders do. This gives you the

maximum time to react to hazards and make a continually evolving plan.

The next challenge is updating your plan when you see a hazard rather than staring in horror at it – often called target fixation. So, for example, if you're going round a right-hander and you see a wet manhole cover, what do you do? Look at it, obviously, but the trick is to quickly register the danger, change your plan, then raise your vision and look where you want to go. The ultimate aim is to be aware of everything around you (behind as well) without fixating on any of it. If this sounds tricky, it is, and takes a lot of practice. But, more than any other technique, it's worth learning.

#### Get your position right

The number one thing I see with riders who have just passed their test – and a good few experienced riders

– is sticking to the middle of their lane. It's understandable – it's what you're taught to ride as a learner – but inappropriate unless you're going down a straight road with no hazards. For almost everywhere else, moving to the left or right of your lane will improve your vision and therefore your safety. It can also improve the bike's stability, if for example, you move to avoid a band of gravel or a manhole cover.

A simple way to think of it is that your lane has three positions. Clearly there are an infinite number really, but for simplicity you can use these: 1) At the nearside, by the edge of the road; 2) In the middle of the lane; 3) Out towards the centre of the road. You just vary which position you take up depending on what you're approaching. If you're approaching a

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**'Moving to the left or right of your lane will improve your vision'**



#### Meet the expert

Rich Evans is a hugely experienced road and track rider who splits his time between coaching for Rapid Training – Britain's leading advanced training company – and captaining a Boeing 787 Dreamliner



Tricks of the trade imparted



Look as far ahead as possible



Lane position is key to safe – and rapid – progress

PICS ADAM SHIRBROCK



Overtaking is easier if you hang back

# 'Instead of unpicking bad habits, you'll create good ones'



Poor positioning or steering input can put you in harm's way



**Thanks to...**

Rich Evans at Rapid Training. For more information on Rapid's market-leading range of courses, go to [www.rapidtraining.co.uk](http://www.rapidtraining.co.uk)

left-hand bend, you need to move to the middle of the road (Position 3) so you can see further round the corner. This lets you see hazards earlier, and whether the bend is opening up or not. Approaching right-hand bends you move to Position 1. In real life it's more complicated than that because there might be a pothole, a driveway or oncoming traffic to consider, but that's the underlying principle.

## Practice overtaking

As a new rider you won't have much experience of this. The bike you learned on wasn't fast enough to do much overtaking so it's understandable that you might be nervous. All you need is to understand a couple of principles and you'll soon get the hang of it.

The first thing to bear in mind is there are two types of overtake. The most straightforward is called a momentum overtake, where you have a clear road and do the overtake in one beautiful sweeping motion, adjusting your speed with throttle alone. The other type is the staged overtake where you're behind a queue of traffic and are looking to overtake one, two, three or more vehicles. That requires more patience and planning.

The first stage is getting into the correct position to see the road ahead, which is often a lot further back from the vehicle than most new

riders think – never, ever ride close to the back of a vehicle. The great thing about larger capacity motorcycles is that they can accelerate fast, so the fact you're further back makes little difference to the time the overtake will take, but it will make a massive difference to what you can see.

A dropped-back position also gives you more options. So, for example, if the car in front suddenly brakes, you have the option to brake, rather than ending up in their boot. Then, when it's safe, you can pull out – without accelerating – and get an even better view of the road ahead. If there's something you don't like the look of – a driveway for example – you then have the option to pull smoothly back in. But if it looks good, you can hit the afterburners. When you've passed the first car you might have to pull smoothly in, or if it's safe you can stay out there because the view might be better, either assessing the road ahead if you're not sure, or continuing to pass cars if you are.

## Push left to go left

Most new riders have heard of countersteering but often get confused by all the explanations of how it works. Ultimately you don't need to understand the physics of it, you just have to know that to steer effectively above walking pace, you need to push on the left bar to go left,

and on the right bar to go right. One single, precise push – with your forearms parallel to the road – is enough to tip the bike onto the right line. Then – crucially – you can relax your grip and let the bike carve round.

## Beware of junctions

Along with bends, these are an accident hotspot for bikes so be hyper-vigilant whenever you see one. Pilots use the acronym NUTA – Notice, Understand, Think Ahead – which is useful for junctions. So if you see one ahead on the left with no car in, you notice it, then understand that as you approach a car may appear, then think something like: 'I'll move towards the centre of the road so if a car appears they'll see me better.'

And then if a car does appear, you go through the process again, and maybe think: 'I'll roll off the throttle just in case they pull out'. The point is that you can't just see a hazard, you have to think what the implications are and act accordingly.

## Get training!

Just one day with a good riding coach can set you on a path to a lifetime of safe, confident and enjoyable motorcycling. In my experience, if you do it soon after passing your test, you'll benefit massively because instead of unpicking bad habits you'll create good ones. And it'll be a laugh!

## I TRIED IT!

### 'I'm feeling a lot smoother'

Joseph Wright, 22, passed his test six months ago and spent a day with Rapid Training's Rich Evans



loads of unnecessary lifesaver checks... and I was stressed.

Now, just by positioning myself better for corners, I'm braking less, going faster and feeling a

"That was a fantastic day. I learned so much it's hard to put it all into words, and it was more like riding with a knowledgeable mate than a lesson. To start with I was riding in the centre of the lane all the time, braking hard and going slowly round corners, doing

lot smoother. I was nervous about overtaking, so I used to get close to cars so that I had less distance to travel while on the wrong side of the road. But by staying further back I'm far more relaxed and confident. Also, at the start of the day I was looking about 20m ahead, when Rich was looking a mile ahead and spotting the tops of vans over hedges!

Most people make their big mistakes in the first couple of years, but with this knowledge I've a better chance of enjoying riding safely. I honestly can't recommend it enough."

'More like riding with a knowledgeable mate'

