

From your District Educator,

Recently, while I was riding my motorcycle, someone gave me the opportunity to test out a couple of survival skills. It was on the way to a meeting that I had in Cedar Rapids. The weather was a little chilly but not too cold. It was actually a pretty nice ride from Des Moines in the morning. I enjoyed seeing the fall colors and the progress the farmers have had in the field. My return trip that afternoon was going to be a little less nice with the temperature dropping and I would be headed back into the wind, but it still was not too bad and worth getting another longer ride in. I think driving straight into the wind is still better than a side wind.

I was on the north side of town and had turned north, just about a half mile to my destination. Ahead of me was a concrete mixer. This was a very large red truck and I had limited visibility in front of it. It slowed up to make a right hand turn and was over in the right hand lane. I moved over to the left hand lane since I knew the truck would really have to slow down for the turn. Prior to moving over to the left lane I had noticed a car on the side street to the right, where the truck would be turning. As we approached the corner the car would be out of my vision. Of course, if I cannot see him then he cannot see me. Had he seen me? Reasoning that he was more concerned about the concrete truck, I thought there was a good chance he had not looked at what was also coming down the street.

I slowed as I approached the intersection. The concrete truck was making his turn as I was on the left side of him. All of a sudden I saw the car making a left turn right in front of me. I came to a quick stop. It seemed to be well executed and I don't believe I activate the ABS. The car stopped as well. After looking at each other in the eye - I am sure he did not see my glare behind my sunglasses and face shield - he waved me on. I shook my head, not trusting this guy. So he took off.

Seek - Analyze - Act. If I had not been looking well ahead to search for hazards, if I had not analyzed the situation and considered the "what if he didn't see me"; if I had not set up a plan, which was to slow down, get ready to brake if needed, and watch to see if he did pull out, I would not have been as ready to act. If I had over-reacted and jammed on my brakes I am not sure what would have happened. My motorcycle is new this year, which now comes standard with ABS. My previous bike did not have ABS and it was a feature that I was really looking forward to having. So, I am not sure if how quickly I came to a stop was from the practice I get from teaching motorcycling or if I actually activated the ABS and didn't feel it. Although I like to think it was the practice, I just won't know for sure. It most definitely had to do with being prepared.

Total stopping distance is made of three parts. First you have to see something and realize there is a hazard, then it takes some time for our brains to react and tell our hands and feet what to do, then there is the actually braking distance. The first part is called perception. The second part is reaction. They both take time, which means I am traveling down the road during that time. Time multiplied by speed equals distance. So, if I had not been looking for this car then I would have taken a longer time to see and perceive the car. If it took an extra second to perceive the hazard then, assuming a speed of 30 MPH, then my total stopping distance would have been lengthened by 45 feet. My hands were ready to react, so I had reduced my reaction time as well. I had already slowed so my braking distance was also

reduced. When I did brake I had used a progressive squeeze and did not stomp on my brake pedal. So, I maximized the effectiveness of my brakes. I say that but it also seems that if you do not activate the ABS that you might not be braking as hard as you can. But, I like using the technique that is taught in the MSF and GWRRA riding courses - use a progressive squeeze on the front brake lever and don't stomp on the rear brake pedal.

I am sure most of you who have had similar experiences and can relate to this incident. This article was certainly meant to brag about me avoiding an accident. That is not really something to brag about since this is probably the norm and is what we expect should happen. We should be and typically are using the proper skills to avoid accidents. There are a lot more near accidents than actual accidents. This means good training and having a lot of experience can give us the skills we need when an emergency maneuver is required. This is not the only near-incident I had this year. I occasionally get people coming into my lane on the highway because they fail to check their blind spots when doing a lane change and I happen to be right next to them at the time. I just had time to contemplate how what happened in this particular incident corresponds to what we have been taught. It brought together the concepts of 1) other motorists don't always see motorcycles, 2) blind spots are not only the ones we have behind us but can be caused by many things, including concrete trucks, 2) we must never stop using Seek-Analyze-Act (or Search-Evaluate-Execute) anytime we are on the motorcycle, 3) that total stopping distance includes the time and distance to perceive the hazard and our mind-body to react, as well as the time it takes to stop once the brakes are activated, so we need to apply strategies to minimize each part, 4) slowing reduces braking distance, and 5) we must practice the proper braking techniques used in stopping quickly.

Wishing you safe travels,

Greg Hayes