

13) Emergencies

No matter how good your perception and predictions are, there will be times when you find yourself in a tight spot. Your chances of getting out safely depend upon your ability to react quickly and precisely. Some riders panic and freeze, doing nothing at all. Expert riders have a number of ways to get out of emergencies, and they keep trying until they find one that works.

Quick stops

The front brake supplies about three quarters of your braking power, so you must use both brakes to stop quickly. Apply both brakes as hard as you can without locking the wheels. Pull in the clutch.

If the rear wheel does lock, release the brake to the point just prior to locking and hold it there until you've come to a complete stop.

Emergency steering

Even a quick stop may not be enough to keep you from hitting something in your path. A vehicle ahead might stop suddenly or pull out and partly block the lane. You may be able to steer around an obstacle quicker than you can stop. The only way to avoid a collision could be with a quick turn.

The key to making a quick turn is to get the motorcycle to lean quickly in the direction you wish to turn. The sharper the turn, the more you must lean.

Stay in your own lane in an emergency. The moment you change lanes, you risk being hit by another vehicle. You should be able to squeeze by most obstacles without leaving your lane. This is one time when the size of the motorcycle is in your favour. To avoid being hit, you can go into spaces too small for a car.

Going into a turn too fast

A major cause of serious motorcycle collisions is running off the road in a turn or a curve. One of two things seems to happen:

- 1) The rider badly misjudges a safe speed and goes into the turn much too fast, slides off the road and crashes into something.
- 2) Inexperienced riders think they can't turn sharply enough to make a turn, then brake too hard, lock the wheel, slide off the road and crash.

Inexperienced riders sometimes crash at speeds at which a more experienced rider could handle and make the turn.

Until you learn the cornering limits of your motorcycle, be especially careful to slow down enough for turns. If possible, do all your braking before you get into your turn.

When making a turn, you might find that you can't make it at the speed and lean angle you started with. Don't panic. You can probably lean the bike over more and turn tighter. The key to tightening up a turn safely is to do it smoothly and gently.

Riding over objects

Sometimes you have no choice but to ride over an object in your path. A length of tailpipe may be too close to steer around. Handling objects is a lot like riding over uneven surfaces.

Here is what to do:

- 1) Hold the handgrips tightly so that you don't lose your grip when the front wheel hits.
- 2) Keep a straight course. This keeps the motorcycle upright and reduces the chance of falling on impact.
- 3) Rise slightly on the footrests. This allows your legs and arms to absorb the shock and helps keep you from being bounced off as the rear wheel hits.
- 4) Do not brake while going over the object.

Following these four steps lets you ride safely over most obstacles found on the highway. It's a good idea to stop and check your tires and rims for damage after riding over an object.

Flying objects

From time to time you may be struck by insects, cigarette butts thrown from windows or stones kicked up by the tires of the vehicle ahead. If you do not have face protection, you could be struck in the eye or the face. If you are wearing face protection,

it could become smeared or cracked, making it difficult to see. Whatever happens, **don't let it affect your control of the motorcycle.** Keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the handlebars. As soon as it's safe, pull off the road and repair the damage.

Animals

Naturally, you should do everything you can to avoid hitting an animal. However, if you are in traffic, don't swerve out of your lane to avoid hitting a small animal. You have a better chance of surviving an impact with a small animal than a collision with another vehicle.

Motorcycles are often chased by dogs. To avoid this, slow down a bit and down shift as you approach the animal. As you reach it, speed up. You will leave the dog behind so quickly that it will usually lose interest. If you find yourself being chased, don't kick at the animal. It's too easy to lose control of the motorcycle.

Mechanical problems

Things that go wrong with the motorcycle itself can also cause emergencies. Three critical emergencies are a **tire blowout**, **stuck throttle** and **wobble**.

Tire blowouts

If you have a tire blowout, you will need to react quickly to keep your balance.

You cannot always hear a tire blow. You have to be able to detect a flat tire from the way the motorcycle reacts. If the front tire goes flat, the steering will feel "heavy." If the rear tire goes flat, the back of the motorcycle will tend to slide from side to side.

Here is what to do if you have a blowout while riding:

- 1) Hold the handlegrips tightly and concentrate on steering. Try to maintain a straight course.
- 2) Stay off the brake. Gradually close the throttle and let the motorcycle coast.
- 3) If it is the front tire that has blown, shift your weight as far back as you can. If it is the rear tire, stay where you are.
- 4) Wait until the motorcycle is going very slowly, then edge toward the side of the road and stop.

Stuck throttle

When you try to close the throttle, you might find that it won't turn or the engine won't slow down. If there's traffic ahead or you're making a turn, you must react quickly to prevent a collision.

Here's what to do if you have a stuck throttle while riding:

- 1) Turn off the engine with the kill switch and pull in the clutch.
- 2) If the motorcycle does not have a kill switch:
 - a) you may be able to leave the clutch out and stop the engine with the brakes; or
 - b) you could pull in the clutch and let the engine race until you can stop and turn it off with the key. This method could result in damage to the engine.
- 3) Park the bike until you can get it fixed.

Wobble

Sometimes when going at a fairly high speed, the front wheel can suddenly begin to wobble (shake from side to side). Some things that can cause a wobble include:

- a windshield or fairing that is improperly mounted or not designed for the motorcycle
- loose steering-head bearings
- worn steering parts
- a wheel that is bent or out of alignment
- loose wheel bearings
- loose spokes
- improper tread design
- road surface

Excessive speed will increase the likelihood and severity of these problems.

The only thing you can do in a wobble is to ride it out:

- 1) Firmly grip the handlebars and put your weight forward. Don't try to fight the wobble.
- 2) Gradually close the throttle and let the motorcycle slow down. Don't apply the brakes; it could make the wobble worse. Never accelerate.

Pull off the road as soon as you can. If you are carrying a heavy load, distribute it more evenly. If you are at a gas station or have a tire gauge, check your tire inflation.

Chain breakage

Chain failure usually is caused by a worn or stretched chain which doesn't fit the sprockets properly, or by worn sprockets. When the chain breaks, you'll notice it because you'll instantly lose power to the rear wheel and the engine will speed up. If the chain locks the rear wheel, you won't be able to disengage it and it could cause your cycle to skid.

Engine seizure

Engine seizure means that the engine locks or freezes, and it has the same result as a locked rear wheel. However, there is usually some advance warning, giving you time to respond.

Engine seizure is caused by overheating or lack of lubrication. Without oil, the engine's moving parts will no longer move smoothly against each other, and the engine will overheat. The first symptom may be a loss of engine power. You may also notice a change in the engine's sound.

If your engine starts to seize, squeeze the clutch lever, disengaging the engine from the rear wheel. Pull off the road to the shoulder and stop. Let the engine cool. While you may be able to add oil and restart the engine, it should be thoroughly checked for damage.

Getting off the road

If you have to leave the roadway to check the motorcycle or to rest for a while, here are two important things to do:

1) Check the roadside

Make sure the surface of the roadside is firm enough to ride on. If it is soft grass, loose sand or if you are not sure about it, slow down before you turn onto it. Since drivers behind might not expect you to slow down, make sure you check your mirror, give a clear signal and shoulder check before moving.

2) Pull well off the road

Get as far off the road as you can. A motorcycle by the side of the road can be very hard to spot. You don't want someone else pulling off at the same place.