

Words:
Karel Pavich
Photos:
Paul

CORE COMPETENCIES

HAZARD AWARENESS AND AVOIDANCE

Last month, we talked about the things that you need to be doing as a habit while riding that, incidentally, will help you to pass your CBTA assessments...

It follows on perfectly from the observations in the Hazard Awareness article. If you aren't looking around, you aren't going to see the hazard – and if you don't see it, how can you avoid it?

Chances are, you are riding on luck and that's not good enough when we are talking about things that could change your life, both dramatically and painfully.

There's a process which we are looking for when we do the assessments which goes like this

- you are looking all around you for hazards, (there are plenty all the time)
- you are responding to the hazards you see (by taking some action).

This requires you to be thinking about them.

People who are new to riding are especially bad at working with hazards, as they are so busy with controlling the bike, changing gear, steering, remembering to indicate and to cancel the indicators,

slowing down and so on. That's why they simply don't have the headspace to be focussing on hazards. We see them riding blindly into danger and it's really scary to watch. You have to be able to push some of the functions of riding into automatic mode, which gives you headspace for the other really important stuff. Obviously, this takes time, and there really isn't any better way to move through the process than time on the bike. This is why we recommend a lot of time spent riding around reasonably safe areas, away from busy roads, especially ones with lots of traffic.

So, back to hazard awareness.

Make sure you look and focus on the things around and ahead of you that could be a danger – if you look, you'll find them. That could be the dog not on a leash, the kids with the ball, the car waiting to turn, the truck backing out, the rubbish truck guy

running across the road, the road works, the pothole, the smell of diesel, the wet slippery patch and the wet white line... the list is endless. The situation that you are in is very dynamic and complex, which changes by the second and there are multiple things developing at the same time.

Luckily, there are really only two simple reactions that you need to consider to deal with all of them:

Reduce speed Change position

When we do CBTA assessments, we are looking for those reactions, which tell us that you are reading the situation ahead, you are thinking about what you are seeing and you are reacting appropriately.

So, if you are approaching a blind crest, (a road that goes over the top of a hill and you can't see what's on the other side), what do you do?

If you move towards the left, away from the centre line, that tells us that you saw the potential hazard (such as a car coming over the crest over the centre line and hitting you), you thought about it and you reacted.

If you just maintain your line about a metre from the centre line, we see that as a fault and put it down on the assessment sheet.

Why? Because you aren't looking after your safety.

This process of looking, thinking and reacting is critically important for you and is something that you must have working as a habit – it's not just for passing the test, it's for life. In fact, we often talk about it becoming an automatic part of our riding, as, sometimes, we are reacting before we are consciously aware of what the hazard is. Some people talk about developing a sixth sense. I see it as having the process so strongly built into my riding that it happens automatically. Perhaps, that's why I'm still out there riding, with all limbs functioning, unlike some others that I know.

I always ask three questions when someone says, "that idiot just pulled out in front of me, so I didn't have a chance."



First, what speed were you doing?

If you're going faster than the speed limit, the driver's judgment of how much time he or she had can be affected.

Second, had you seen the potential hazard and, if so, had you done enough to manage it?

Finally, have you ever done a training course to better prepare yourself for dangerous situations? That includes optimising your braking to reduce speed, counter steering for quick avoidance, all so you can control your bike in awkward situations.

If the person can say "yes" to all three of these, I will agree that it was all the

driver's fault, but that hasn't happened yet. All accidents are the fault of all the participants, which is why it is our job to look after ourselves.

Although, what I don't want you taking from this is that you need to be in a state of constant fear when riding, as I would rather you just think about the hazards out there, which we can't change. There are very poor drivers, poor roads and plenty of situations that we have no control over. Let's not be a victim, but think of ourselves as empowered by the knowledge and skills that we have and use them to control what we do and how we ride and thereby keep ourselves safe. ■■■



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