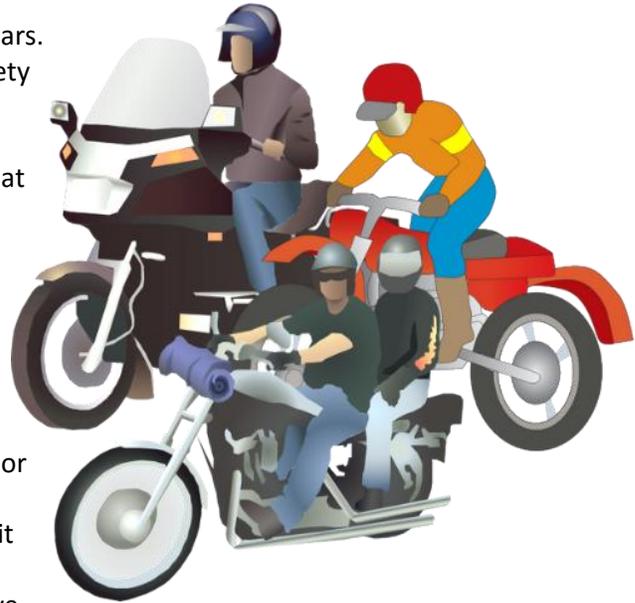


Enhance Your Defensive Riding Skills

Tips on how to subconsciously become a better motorcycle rider

By Robert "Trip" Hilliard

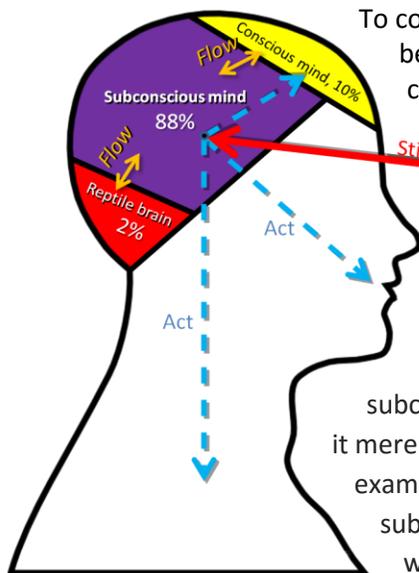
So, you've been riding motorcycles for a number of years. And you've more than likely taken the motorcycle safety course and read all the articles on becoming a better rider. You also wear a helmet, the proper riding gear and you do your best to follow all the rules and tips that you've read about proper motorcycle speed, turning and handling while riding on roads alone as well as in traffic. That's great! But, have you committed everything to your subconscious?



Utilizing the Subconscious

Let's face it, it doesn't matter how long you've ridden or how much you've read and educated yourself concerning motorcycle riding, unless you can commit it to your subconscious and practice without really thinking about it, chances are you won't be an effective defensive rider.

New drivers entering our streets today are not nearly as trained in driving and handling their vehicle. Add the fact that more and more drivers are added to our streets everyday as well as distractions such as cell phones and you can quickly deduct that the road atmosphere for you and me on a motorcycle is getting crowded with less trained, distracted drivers that really don't watch out for other vehicles.



To combat this, we as motorcycle riders learn a number of skills to help us become more defensive riders. But more importantly, have we committed these practices to our subconscious?

It's no secret that the subconscious is a huge memory bank. Its capacity is virtually unlimited and rarely used. The function of your subconscious mind is to **store and retrieve data**. Its job is to ensure that you respond exactly the way you are programmed as a motorcycle rider. Your subconscious mind makes everything you say and do fit a pattern consistent with your self-concept. Your subconscious mind is subjective. It doesn't think or reason independently; it merely obeys the commands it receives from your conscious mind. As an example, your conscious mind can be thought of as the gardener and your subconscious mind can be thought of as the garden, or fertile soil, in which seeds germinate and grow.

What better way to store and use riding skills than with the subconscious? However, in order to store our motorcycle skills into our subconscious, we must use these skills over and over. That is the key!

Enhance Your Skills

I'd like to go over some additional riding skills that I've used over the years that have helped me develop an edge while riding in traffic that may not be written elsewhere. These tips have proved themselves over and over. Some are somewhat untraditional, but if practiced, will help you navigate effectively in traffic.

1. Have the attitude that ALL vehicles are out to get you

This is not meant to be a negative statement but a paradigm that we might want to live by while riding. Every vehicle on the road has the potential of hurting you and sometimes we must go into riding with the attitude that everyone is out to get us. It's the only way that we, as motorcycle riders can heighten our mind and senses to the possible negative actions of others.

It also keeps us from becoming complacent when we ride. It can give us that touch of fear that might keep us alert and possibly alive. Realize that when you ride, ALL vehicles around you are possible enemies. Increasing your "paranoia" in this area can help in burning this into your subconscious.

2. Get ahead or get behind

You've always known about the blind spot, right? Well, let's take this a step further. The blind spot seems to have widened for many people and that's because they don't really look before they make a move.

When you're riding in traffic, if you can help it, don't ride in the next lane anywhere near a car or truck. Don't ever assume they know you're there. I have always

practiced the technique of getting ahead or behind. In other words, speed up and get ahead so that they can see you and know you are there or slow down and get behind them so that if they cut into your lane you won't be hit.

This is especially true for 18 wheelers. Commercial truck drivers are usually well trained and have a lot of hours behind the wheel. Trying to keep up with the location of where an 800 pound motorcycle is, in and around a huge trailer can be daunting. Best practice dictates that a rider stay as far away from an 18



wheeler as possible. Do not ride anywhere beside an 18 wheeler. Pass them rather quickly and get ahead of them or slow down and get farther behind.

If you find that you are forced to ride in the next lane to a car or truck, keep an eye on the front tire and fender comparing the distance they have to the center strip. If that distance shortens and they come close to the center strip, it's time to take action.

3. Learn to scan... Always have an out

When you ride, do you scan all around with your eyes? Learn to scan not only ahead of you, but behind and to both sides as well. Know what's going on around you... at all times. When you come up on an intersection, don't assume that because you have the green light that no one will pull out in front of you. Pre-scan the intersection before you get there. Quickly look at the movements of all the vehicles. Slow down in speed and realize that some of the vehicles may not be watching or be aware of your presence.

Always have an out. Try to plan a way out or a path that you can take to get out of a situation. You might choose to get in a median if someone cuts you off or you may see that a quick shift into the next lane might be the best move if someone pulls out in front of you. Try to find some extra real estate that you can utilize to get yourself into a safe place. Never assume that anyone sees you. Try to have a plan in case you have to take evasive action.

4. Learn to Countersteer



Chances are you don't live in an area where there are switchbacks or sharp turns in the roads and learning the art of countersteering hasn't been a priority. My advice is to learn countersteering anyway. Why?

Countersteering affords the rider a quick and decisive way to turn. Deliberately countersteering a motorcycle is a much more efficient and effective way to steer than just by leaning. Even if you live in an area where the roads are all straight, learn as much as you can about countersteering and practice it.

There are numerous resources that can teach you how to countersteer, so I won't go over them here, but learn the mechanics of countersteering and practice it. It will come in handy one day when you need to make a quick and effective turn.

5. Passing traffic with a group

Let's say you're leading a small group of motorcyclists. As a group, you come upon a slow vehicle that you want to pass. As the leader of the pack, you check and find that there's plenty of road ahead with no traffic. The road ahead is level and there's no double stripe in your lane. Since everything looks good to pass, do the following to help your riders behind you.

Turn on your blinker and start your pass. Once you get past the slow moving vehicle, stay in the left lane (all the while keeping an eye for oncoming traffic and watching your group in your rear view mirror), until all of your group gets around the vehicle and safely in the right lane, then move into the right lane yourself.

This technique gives the riders in the pack an opportunity to pass vehicles quickly and not have to concentrate on oncoming traffic since you're doing that for them. If you've chosen an area to pass that's got plenty of room and no oncoming traffic, it won't be a risk for you, the leader, to stay in the left lane. This shows the group that you're keeping a watchful eye on traffic for them. It helps in camaraderie. If you move into the right lane before all of your group passes the vehicle, this is a sign that the remaining group should not pass. If this technique is done correctly and safely a group of motorcyclists can pass vehicles very quick and effectively.

Make it automatic

Adding these tips to the protocol you already exercise as a skilled rider will enhance your skill set. Committing everything to your subconscious might ensure that these skills are utilized all the time while riding. Yes, it's a lot to digest, but that's the beauty of your subconscious. If you practice these skills over and over, you're subconscious can help in remembering and implementing these skills. It's almost as if it will become automatic.