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STREET

FROM MOTORCYCLE

BY DAVID L HOUGH • AUTHOR OF

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR MOTORCYCLISTS

Part 2

Excerpts From

STREET STRATEGIES

FROM MOTORCYCLE CONSUMER NEWS

BY DAVID L HOUGH • AUTHOR OF PROFICIENT MOTORCYCLING

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR MOTORCYCLISTS



Tips to improve your riding

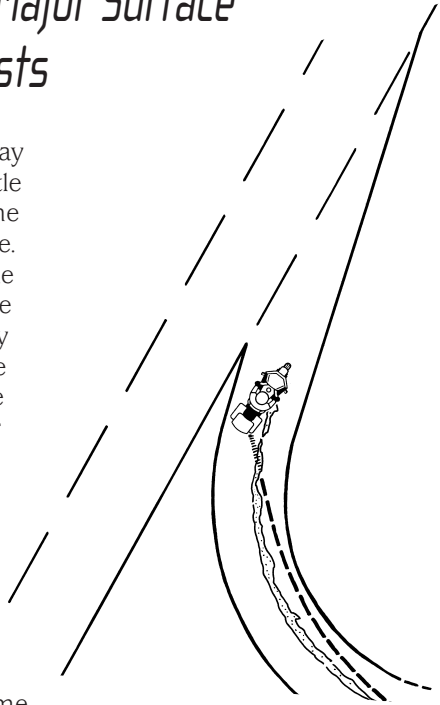
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1 Oily On

Spilled Diesel Oil Is a Major Surface Hazard for Motorcyclists

You're headed for the Sunday breakfast meeting, running a little late, but a quick transit on the freeway will get you there in time. The sun is just starting to warm the air and dry the morning dew off the pavement. Rounding the freeway on-ramp, you lean the bike into the curve, roll on the gas to accelerate to freeway speed, and turn your head to watch for traffic. You catch a brief whiff of petroleum in the air, but your attention is focused on merging onto the freeway. You don't see any traffic, so you continue to accelerate.

Suddenly the big tourer slips sideways. The tires aren't howling, just sliding, as if some invisible hand had shoved the bike sideways. Then, just as suddenly, the tires regain traction, and you fight for control as the bike snaps violently from side to side. Rolling off the gas, you drift over to the shoulder and stop, your hands shaking from the near-disaster. You expect to find a flat tire. But apparently there's nothing wrong with the bike. Then you smell petroleum again, and realize there's a slippery liquid on your tires. Looking back at the on-ramp, you now see the oily sheen of spilled diesel oil seeping downhill from the center of the lane. You had done everything right except scrutinize the road surface.



While it is important to check for traffic before merging, it's also important to maintain your awareness of road surface hazards. On-ramps are notorious for fuel spills because fluids tend to spill from full tanks as vehicles round the tight turns. An odor of petroleum is an important clue you shouldn't ignore. You can usually see a slightly darker color on the road or a rainbow-colored sheen of spilled oil. Since liquids tend to seep downhill, one precaution is to favor the uphill wheel track and avoid the center of the lane whenever you suspect a spill.

Deep Trouble²

Running Wide Is a Clue Your Cornering Skills Need an Upgrade

It's Saturday—a great day for a ride with your friends. You've headed out in a group to “strafe some canyons,” and you're confident your new machine has enough power for you to keep up with your companions. You don't want to be seen as a slow rider. The other guys are pushing fast, however, and you have to struggle to keep up, accelerating hard in the short straights and riding the brakes deep into the tight corners. When your tires twitch nervously in the tighter turns, you're convinced that you're riding about as fast as you can, yet the others are leaving you behind.



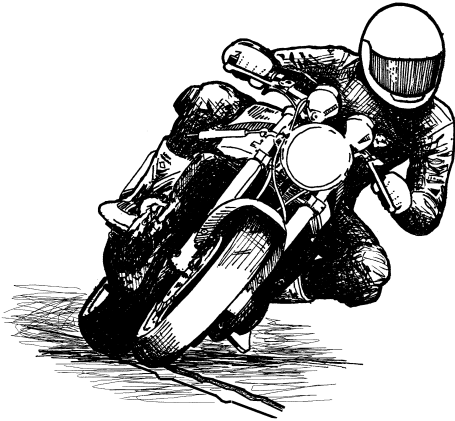
Halfway around a tight right-hander, the bike seems to have a mind of its own, refusing to turn as tightly as it should. You're trying to stay in the middle of your lane, but the front wheel drifts across the centerline. You instinctively roll the

throttle closed and apply the brakes. The bike seems to squat and drift even wider, and you can't avoid running off the pavement into a field. Luckily, there wasn't a car coming around the corner at that moment.

Crossing the centerline may seem to be a result of riding quickly, but the real culprit is your cornering technique. Use the whole lane—not just the center—to maximize traction. Approaching a right-handed turn, get the bike way over toward the centerline, use both brakes to decelerate, then get off the brakes before you lean over. Swivel your head around toward the direction you want to go, push on the right grip to lean right, and roll on a little throttle to pull the machine around the curve. Consider practicing your cornering techniques by yourself before joining the next group ride.

3 Groovy Surprises

A Pavement Groove Can Instantly Wrest Balance Out of Your Control



You're out for a spin on a sunny afternoon. You head for your favorite scenic backroad, eager to get away from traffic and have a spirited ride through the countryside. You know that riding in the city is dangerous for motorcyclists, so you watch the street far ahead to spot potential left-turners, and scrutinize driveways and alleyways for hidden cars about to pull out. It's a relief to finally get faraway and be able to concentrate on the curves.

You discover, however, that the pavement has taken a beating over the winter, and you have to constantly dodge grooves and potholes. You're also surprised to find so many other vehicles on the road. A lot of other sightseers apparently had the same idea you had. There isn't a lot of distance between curves for passing, but by

closing up your following distance at the exits of corners, you can pass the gawkers quickly if there's no oncoming traffic. At the moment, you're anxious to get around the slow-moving minivan ahead, so you move up close, shift down to prepare for a quick pass, and focus on the oncoming lane as it comes into view.

Suddenly, your front wheel swerves to the right, and you instinctively wrestle the handlebars toward the left. Before you can recover balance, the bike smashes onto its left side, and you slam into the pavement. You can't believe that two seconds ago you were in control of the bike, and now you're sliding down the asphalt. Apparently, your front tire locked onto the edge of a pavement groove, and you lost control of balance.

It is smart to watch for traffic and avoid passing until you can see there is no oncoming traffic, but whether in city traffic or on the backroads, you must always maintain your awareness of surface hazards. If you observe that a road is in need of repair, you should keep some distance between you and the car in front of you—even if it's a slow mover—to maintain your view of the road surface.

High Siding⁴

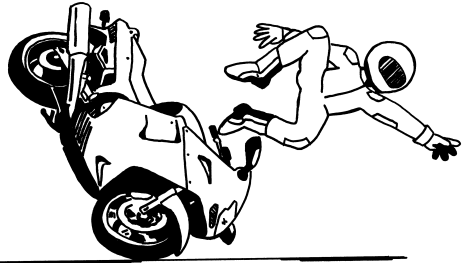
In a Panic Stop, Overcooking Then Popping the Rear Brake Can Send You Flying

You've taken the bike down to the hardware store for a deep socket, and it's only five miles home on the superslab. Saturday morning traffic is heavy but moving along at a good pace, and you're thinking about getting that oil pressure sender replaced now that you've got the right tool. You notice a compact car towing a trailer with a heavy hard tractor. The trailer and its load appear too large for the small car, and you watch with alarm as the rig sways ahead of you.

Suddenly, just where the freeway curves, the car snaps left, the trailer jackknifes, and both overturn, spitting out the yard tractor. An instant later, drivers around you brake and scatter, their tires smoking. You quickly reach for the front brake and squeeze progressively with all four fingers to allow the weight to transfer forward before applying maximum front brake. Simultaneously, you step down hard on the rear brake pedal, but in the panic you push down too hard, and the rear end slides sideways in the curve. Your survival reaction takes over, and your right foot lets up on the pedal. In a split second, the rear tire grabs the pavement again, snapping the rear end back toward the center so violently that the bike flips. You're catapulted off the bike, which

tumbles down the pavement behind you. Miraculously, you slide to a stop without getting run over, and your smart decision to wear your leathers even on a short trip pays off.

Deciding to do a quick stop was smart, too, and your technique to brake progressively helped prevent a front-wheel slideout. Overbraking on the rear should not have prevented you from stopping effectively, even with the rear end sliding sideways. It was your survival reaction to let up on the rear brake that caused the violent high side flip.



While freeways are statistically less hazardous than arterial streets, freeway accidents can occur with little warning, and typically involve chain reactions. If you observe a swaying trailer ahead, you should take immediate action to separate yourself from the problem, not simply watch and wait for the problem to turn into a disaster.

5 Road Gorp

A Little Rainwater on the Road Turns the Surface into a Slippery Mess

It's Saturday morning, and you can't wait to get the bike out for a ride. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, and the air is calm and warm. It's a perfect day to go exploring the foothills, before tomorrow's storm front blows in from the west.

By noon, you're miles from home and a little surprised that dark clouds are starting to move in sooner than the forecast had predicted. When you see raindrops starting to dampen the restaurant parking lot, you reluctantly decide to cut the ride short and head home before the streets get really wet.

Taking a more direct route along an urban arterial, you can't believe how slippery the road is in such a light rain. When you stop for a red light, you're shocked when both tires begin to slide,

and you barely manage to keep the bike upright as it finally stops halfway into the crosswalk. By the time you turn into your driveway, the slick streets have you really paranoid.

City streets are extremely slippery during the first few minutes of a fresh rain, as the accumulated "road gorp" emulsifies with water. It takes about a half hour of steady downpour to completely wash the accumulated oil off the pavement. Increasing your speed also demands more traction at a time when traction is poor. Rather than try to hurry home, the safer tactic is to stop for a leisurely lunch and allow time for the rain to wash the road surface.



Bounding Bambis 6

In Deer Country, a Smart Rider Is Prepared For a Quick Stop



You're out for an early ride in the country, away from the hassles of traffic. The narrow backroad on which you travel passes farms and curves through a shady forest. You're aware of the hazards of backroads, such as loose gravel and wet leaves, so for this ride you're wearing your most protective riding gear: leathers, gloves, and full-coverage helmet. And you plan to keep the gear on even when the sun begins to warm the air.

You settle into a comfortably aggressive ride, slowing only for locations where there are narrow bridges and many hidden driveways. When you enter a deer migration area, you maintain speed, but watch carefully for wild deer alongside the road.

Suddenly, as you round a tight turn, you see a brown shape in the left ditch—perhaps a log or a soggy cardboard box. But a second later, the brown shape raises its head, and you instantly recognize the tall ears

of a deer. But the deer just continues to stand there munching, so you assume you can cruise by without any evasive action.

But a second or two before you pass, the deer springs into action, scrambling onto the pavement directly in front of you. You attempt to

brake and swerve, but the deer darts one way and then the other, and you can't avoid a collision that knocks both you and the deer to the pavement. Fortunately, neither of you is seriously hurt. The deer clatters away, leaving you to survey the damage to your bike. You silently congratulate yourself for wearing your leathers today.

The reason for deer signs is that there is a history of numerous deer strikes in that area. So when you enter a deer zone, you should expect to encounter wild deer grazing alongside or leaping across the road. Deer typically spring into action as a vehicle gets close. The best tactic for avoiding a deer strike is to be prepared for a quick stop. If you see a deer next to the road you should immediately brake, especially if the deer is facing the road and, therefore, most likely to leap in your direction.

7 Edgy Attitude

Those Steep Edges of New Pavement Can Be Your Downfall



You're on a quiet two-lane highway in forest country, enjoying a relaxed July ride. There are signs that deer are present, so you continue to watch the sides of the road. You also know that logging trucks come roaring through, so you check your mirrors occasionally. And when you do see an empty logging truck gaining on you rapidly, you move over into a convenient slower-traffic lane to let the trucker by. Suddenly your tires bump down over a steep pavement edge, and you realize the left lane has just been repaved. At the end of that lane, you gradually ease back toward the left, but when your front wheel hits the edge of the new pavement, the handlebars are suddenly yanked from your grasp, and the bike slams over onto its left side in a shower of broken plastic.

Fortunately, your decision to wear your leathers today paid off in limiting your injuries to bruises, and

the bike is still operable, but you can't believe how quickly you lost control of balance.

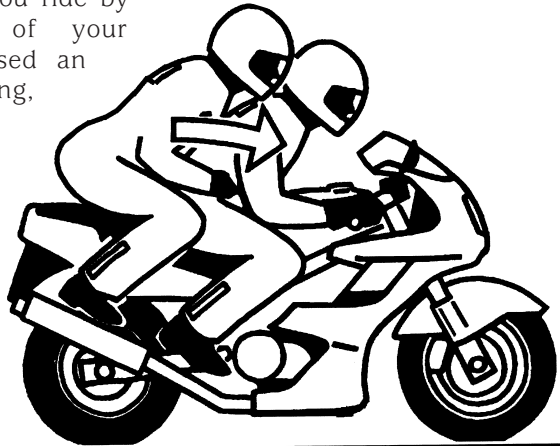
While it is wise to let faster moving traffic go by, you should be more aware of the road surface before changing lanes. Even though there may not be any warning signs of an edge trap, the difference in color and texture of the new and old paving is a clue. You should expect hazardous edge traps wherever highway repaving is in progress. Steep pavement edges can trap the front tire of a two-wheeler and make it very difficult to maintain balance if you approach at a narrow angle. To bounce the front wheel up and over such edge traps without falling, it is essential to move away from the edge and then swing back at a wider angle—preferably at least 45 degrees.

Pushy Passengers ⁸

Change Your Riding Techniques When Carrying a Passenger

Most of the time you ride by yourself, but one of your coworkers has expressed an interest in motorcycling, and you've agreed to take her for a Sunday afternoon ride. You provide the riding gear, including a helmet that fits properly, a riding jacket, and leather gloves. You also explain what to expect on the ride, and take it easy for the first hour to allow her to get comfortable gradually. Now that your passenger has relaxed and is enjoying the ride, you gradually increase speed, carving through the corners on this shady backroad.

Up ahead you observe a deer grazing alongside the road. As you get closer, the deer raises its head and suddenly leaps out of the ditch into your path. You reach for the front brake and attempt a quick stop. But as you brake harder, your passenger slams into your back, and you realize you can't brake as hard as you need to without being pushed up onto the tank. You manage to miss the deer by inches, but the experience still leaves you shaking and your passenger frightened.



Although it is smart to provide proper riding gear and give a new passenger time to adapt to a motorcycle, you also should realize that extra weight affects performance, including your ability to make a quick stop. If you're carrying a new passenger, it's a good idea to ride more conservatively for the entire trip. And if you do spot a deer on your ride, you should immediately apply the brakes instead of waiting until the situation turns into a panic. Remember that with a passenger you can use more rear brake than when riding solo because there's more weight on the rear tire. But you should still plan for longer stopping distances when carrying a passenger.

Macadam Muddles

The Key to Identifying Surface Hazards Is Observing Changes in Color or Texture



You've been out for a Sunday ride with some buddies, cruising the backroads on your sportbikes. It was a great day except for a thunderstorm that blew through an hour ago. Now the ride is over, you said, "See you around," at the last coffee stop, and you're heading home. There's still enough daylight to wash the bike and lube the chain before putting it away.

Two blocks from home, you're braking to make a left turn when the bike suddenly starts to fishtail. The rear end slides out to the right, and then whips left and back again, and while you're still fighting for balance, the bike slams onto its side. You aren't hurt, but your fairing is scuffed and the left-side turn signals are dangling. It's a struggle to pick up your bike, and you realize the surface is coated in slippery clay. As you look around, you see a trail of clay tracked out onto the pavement from a nearby construction site. The thundershower earlier had turned it slippery, especially over the plastic lane markings.

Just because your group ride is over doesn't mean your ride is finished. You need to keep your head in your ride in progress until you get home, rather than allowing yourself to get sidetracked by future issues, such as maintenance. You need to always scrutinize the pavement ahead so you can observe a different color and surface texture, and notice such things as slippery clay tracked over the street's shiny plastic letters and arrow.

Once you are aware of a hazard, you can maintain traction by positioning your tires to the left or right of the white plastic surface markings, braking earlier and more gently, and squeezing the clutch to better control rear-wheel braking.

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