

# Keep away from trouble



*Keep a survival space between you and the traffic around you.*

*It might sound simple, but what can't get at you can't hurt you. So it makes sense to stay as far away as possible from the things that can hurt you on the road.*

## Survival space

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The consequences of an error, yours or someone else's, can be very serious for you as a rider.

Survival space is the best protection you can have.

The more space you have around you, the more time you have to see trouble and work out a way of avoiding it. Of course, that only works if you keep your eyes open and your mind alert.

### In front

This is the distance between your bike and the vehicle you are following, and you have control over it. As an inexperienced rider, you should try to keep a 3 second gap between you and the vehicle in front, so you:

- have more time to stop in an emergency
- are able to see much better over the top of and around the vehicle in front of you
- can see traffic signals, road signs and hazards well ahead

- be able to avoid potholes and other road surface hazards
- have more time to plan your response.

You are also increasing the safety margin of the traffic behind you.

If you are too close, you may pay too much attention to the vehicle in front of you instead of thinking for yourself.

There are times when you will want to be even further than 3 seconds away. They include:

- poor riding conditions with reduced visibility, perhaps at night or in rain and fog
- on a wet or otherwise slippery road
- on gravel or other unpredictable road surfaces
- on a high speed road such as a main highway – almost 40% of road fatalities involving motorcyclists have occurred where the speed limit is 100 km/h
- being behind a big vehicle like a truck or bus, which is hard to see around.

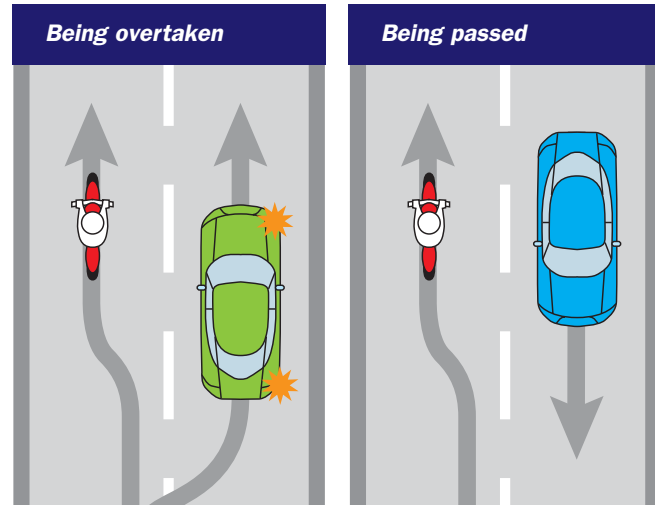
Whatever you do, don't tailgate (ride too close behind another vehicle). No matter how good your brakes are, in the real world a car can almost always out-brake an inexperienced rider in an emergency. More importantly tailgating does not allow for sufficient reaction time regardless of how good your brakes are. If you tailgate it is also harder to see obstacles or hazards on the road ahead.

## To the side

Motorcyclists have an advantage over car drivers. You can move from one side of your lane to the other to increase distance from other vehicles. Experienced riders move lane position depending on traffic – but they always check their mirrors and do a headcheck before they do!

Consider changing your lane position when:

- You are being overtaken or passed by another vehicle. There is no point in being closer to another vehicle than you need to be. Nearly a quarter of all collisions between bikes and other vehicles involve vehicles coming from the opposite or adjacent direction.

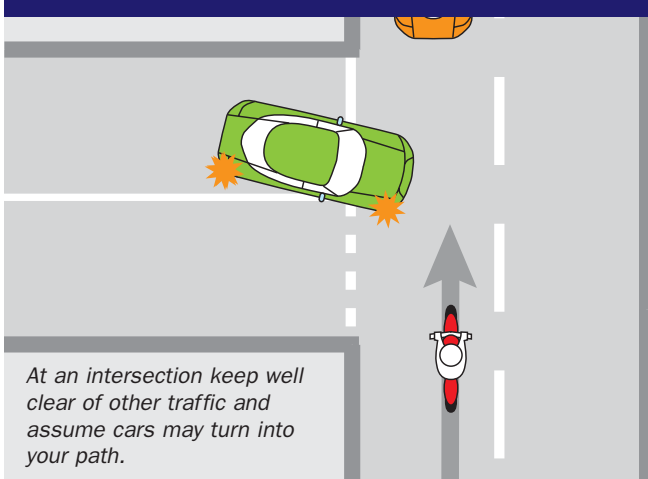


*Move towards the left of your lane when being overtaken or passed.*



- You are near a large truck or bus. They can cause wind blasts that affect your control.
- You are approaching an intersection. Place yourself where you have the best possible vision and are well clear of other traffic. About half of all collisions between bikes and cars happen at intersections. If you see a car that could turn into your path, or pull out on you, assume that it will and be ready for it.

### Beware at intersections



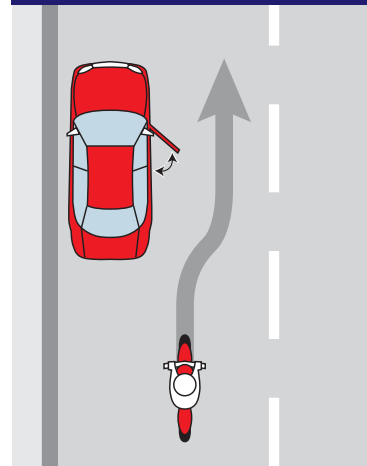
- You are passing parked cars, or vehicles waiting to turn left. Keep to the right part of the lane, away from the possibility of doors opening or pedestrians stepping out from between cars.

- A driver is pulling out from the kerb. Some people don't check properly if there is traffic coming up, and bikes can be hard to see.

- A driver is pulling out from the kerb. The car might do a U-turn instead of just going straight ahead, so approach carefully. Be ready to swerve or stop and to sound your horn as a warning.

- You find yourself sharing a lane. You need a full lane to yourself to be able to move safely if a problem comes up, instead of being trapped in a small space that could disappear. It is unsafe to ride between rows of cars even when one or both rows are stopped. A car door could open, a pedestrian might suddenly appear or a car might move over and close the space you need. To stop cars from sharing your lane, position yourself so you are not riding at the extreme edge of your lane.

### Watch for parked cars



*Keep clear of parked cars.*

- There is another vehicle alongside, in the next lane. Don't ride next to other vehicles if you don't have to – they restrict the space you have to move, and they may move over on you at any time. Move forward or drop back until you are in a free space.
- Vehicles are merging. At places such as freeway entrance ramps, make room for entering traffic by changing speed or changing lanes.

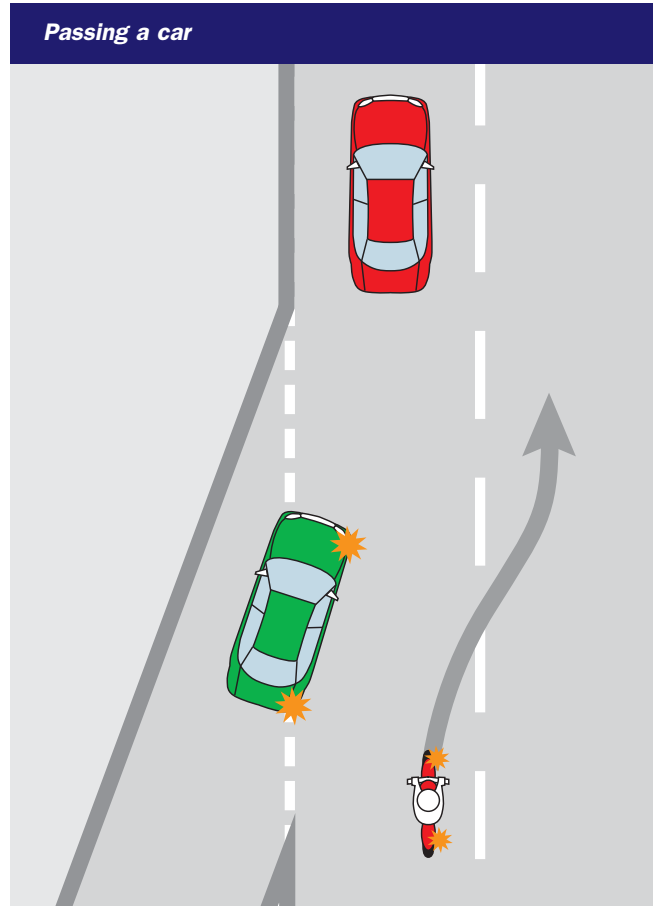
## Behind

Unfortunately the driver behind you has more control over the space between you than you do. If someone is too close (tailgating), drop back yourself to increase the survival space between you and the car in front. Then let the tailgater overtake you. Such drivers are better in front of you, where you can keep an eye on them.

## Scanning

This is a vital part of being safe. Experienced riders not only ride smoothly, they also continuously take in their environment. Watch someone who has been riding for a few years and you will see that they scan – their heads and eyes move constantly. Instead of focusing on any one part of the road they are looking up close, then far away, then to the right and the left – they are taking in the entire road environment without ever losing sight of the vital stretch right in front of them.

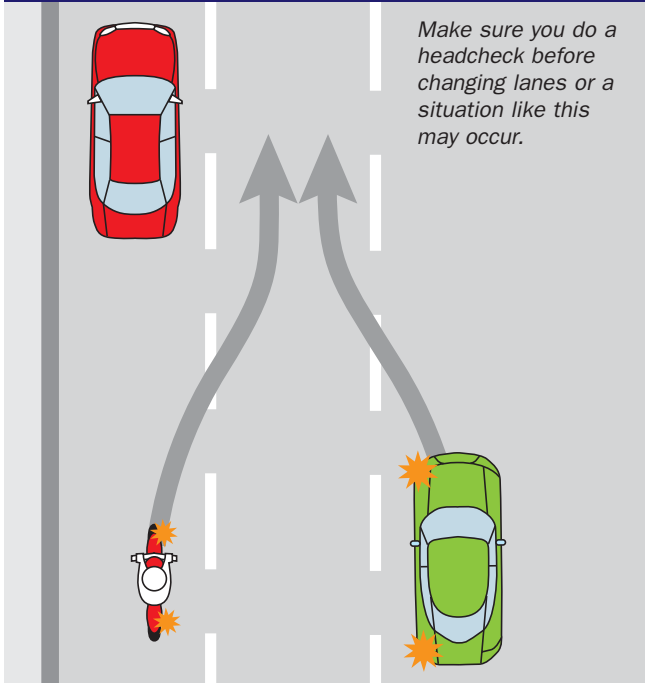
Scanning does not necessarily mean looking directly at everything. You can see out of the corner of your eye and as your eyes pass over things. You can be aware of the footpath, of the behaviour of someone in a parked car nearby and of



*Increase the distance between your motorcycle and the merging vehicle.*



## Beware of other traffic



*A headcheck involves looking over your shoulder to see things behind and to the side. But remember, don't take your eyes off the road ahead for more than a second.*

the driver of a car four vehicles in front of you, and you can do it all without being distracted. Sort the information in order of its importance to you. It takes practice, but it's worth learning.

Use the height advantage you have on a motorcycle and look over cars in front of you. Use that advantage to see what you're getting into. Scanning also gives you a chance to check the road surface well ahead for potholes, loose gravel and other potential hazards.

Combine a glance in the mirrors and headchecks to give you a picture of what's happening behind you. Do this often and quickly, because what's behind you is part of your environment too, but always get your eyes back to the front quickly. Check the mirrors even when you are stopped, because you may need to get out of someone's way.

When merging, changing lanes or leaving the kerb always do a headcheck of the lane next to you and your own lane, before you move. Another vehicle may be headed for your space, and it may not be visible in your mirrors.

## Planning

There are two kinds of planning you can do – tactical and strategic.

Tactical planning involves looking ahead as you ride to see potential trouble, and deciding what to do about it before you get there. It can help you to avoid emergency stops and wild swerves. Experienced riders know that other road users make mistakes and try to plan their reaction before it happens. It is also good planning to be sure how you will get back into your lane before overtaking, and how you will complete complicated turns.

Strategic planning is done before you leave on your ride. Consider the alternative ways of getting to where you want to go, and pick the safest and easiest. If you are on a small, low capacity bike avoid freeways; if you are on a big tourer, stay out of heavy and congested traffic; and so on.

Another really good plan to stay out of trouble is to not ride with other riders who have no respect for their own safety. If someone rides irresponsibly on a bike, you don't want to be there (or even be in the way) when something goes wrong.

## The 3 second gap

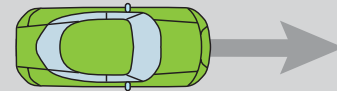
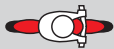
Measuring a safe following distance is simple.

When the vehicle ahead of you passes a tree, a power pole or something similar, use that as a reference point and start counting – "one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three".

If you get to the tree or other reference point before you finish counting, you are too close. After a while you will get good at estimating this gap, although you should still check yourself every now and then.

### The 3 second gap

3 seconds



*Try to keep a 3 second gap between you and the vehicle ahead.*



## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of the next page.

### 1. The gap between your motorcycle and the vehicle ahead, in good conditions, should be at least:

- A 2 seconds
- B 3 seconds
- C 4 seconds

### 2. Peter is riding along a freeway in the left lane. Cars are moving on to the freeway from the entrance ramp. He should:

- A accelerate to get ahead of them
- B continue to travel at the same pace and position as it is their responsibility to merge into the traffic safely
- C adjust his speed to increase the distance between his bike and the merging traffic

### 3. When you are being followed too closely you should:

- A travel faster to increase the distance between you and the tailgater
- B brake several times to let the driver know that you think he is driving dangerously
- C increase the space in front of your motorcycle so you have more time to react, if you need to

### 4. Scanning involves:

- A studying the movements of the car ahead of you
- B looking at the road just ahead of you
- C moving your eyes from side to side to look at the whole road scene

### 5. Before changing lanes always do a final:

- A sound of your horn
- B headcheck
- C flash of your brake lights



**6. To prevent other drivers sharing your lane you should:**

- A ride to the right of your lane
- B ride to the left of your lane
- C not ride at the extreme sides of your lane



ANSWERS 1B 2C 3C 4C 5B 6C



*A pothole or other problems with the road surface can cause you to lose control.*

*Consider that the two patches of rubber connecting you to the road surface are about the same size as the palm of your hand. Make sure they can do their job. There are several things that will make it harder for them.*

*The risk of losing control of a bike can increase because of deterioration in the road surface, such as potholes, wheel ruts or grooves, slippery surfaces and loose gravel.*

*Just under half of bike casualty crashes involve loss of control.*

*Always try to be aware of the road surface conditions, and if necessary adjust your riding technique and speed to suit the conditions.*



*Loose dirt and gravel collect at the edge of the road, so try to stay away from there.*

## Slippery roads

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Many things can make the road surface slippery, and you need to keep these in mind. This will become automatic as you gather experience. Here are some common slippery situations you may find.

- Sealed roads when they're wet, especially just after it starts to rain and before the oil and muck on the road are washed away.
- Painted lane and other markings, as well as steel and other naturally smooth surfaces – including manhole covers, tram lines, bridge expansion joints and even smooth bitumen used to repair roads – at any time, and even worse when they are wet.
- Unmade and gravel roads, and patches of sand or gravel that have collected on sealed roads.
- Mud, snow and ice, including black ice.
- Grease deposited in the middle of lanes, and oil or diesel spills.

Try to avoid slippery patches. If you can't, reduce speed before you get to them, ride as upright as you can once you reach them and try to avoid changing gear, turning or using the throttle or the brakes. If you need to brake, use both brakes evenly. The important thing is to be smooth.



*Ride over bumps by raising yourself a little on the footpegs.*

## Bumpy roads and potholes

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On rough roads, keep your speed down. That does three things – it gives you time to avoid the worst bumps or holes, reduces road shocks and gives your bike's suspension time to work. Remember that bumps can affect your steering as well as the suspension, so take it easy. To give yourself as much control as possible, raise yourself a little on the footpegs so you can absorb road shocks with your knees and elbows.

## Grooved roads

Every now and then you will come to a road that has had grooves cut into it. This is usually to help make it less slippery in the wet – there's a warning already! Grooves are rarely a problem if you stay relaxed, maintain your speed and direction and just keep riding. Try to slow down as much as is safe before you get to the grooving.

## Sloping roads

On a high crowned road, where the centre is much higher than the sides, the slope of the road will try to push you to the edge. This can be a worry especially in right-hand curves. Be aware of it, slow down and maintain your position on the road.

## Tram tracks and railway lines

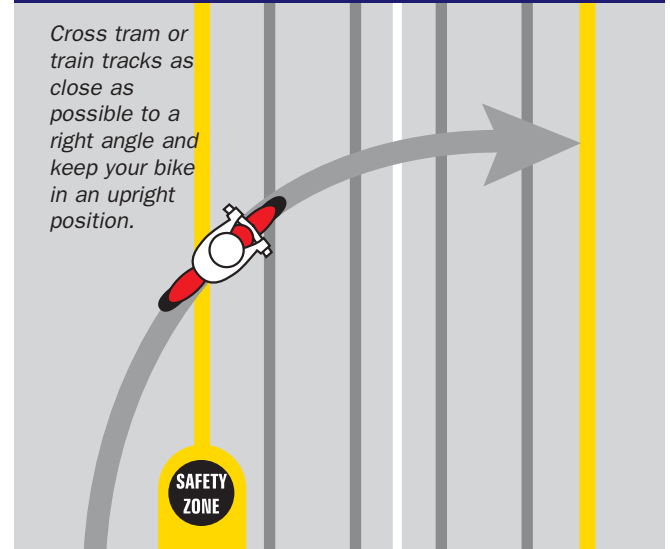
Avoid riding on or across tram or railway tracks. They are steel, and therefore slippery, and they can also have deep ridges of road material alongside them. Don't follow the rails because your bike's tyres could become trapped in these grooves.

When you cross tracks, remember these things:

- look where you want to go, not where the tracks are going
- avoid places where tracks cross each other
- cross the tracks as close to a right angle as possible, but make sure you don't risk running into other traffic
- keep your bike upright

### Crossing tram tracks

*Cross tram or train tracks as close as possible to a right angle and keep your bike in an upright position.*



- maintain your speed and cross smoothly without braking or accelerating
- if possible, complete any turn before you reach the tracks.

## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of this page.

### 1. The best way to handle a slippery surface is to:

- A travel on the left side of the road
- B use the rear brake if you are in trouble
- C reduce your speed

### 2. Con wants to turn into a road but a number of tram tracks cross each other there. He should:

- A if possible, complete the turn before he crosses the tram tracks
- B brake whilst crossing tram tracks
- C ignore the tram tracks as they will not make much difference to the motorcycle

### 3. To ride safely along a bumpy road you should:

- A slow down quickly after the first series of bumps
- B rise slightly on the footpegs to absorb the road shocks
- C sit on the seat and try to steer your way through the bumps

### 4. Grease and oil from cars tends to build up:

- A along the sides of the road
- B in the centre of the lane
- C in the right hand part of the lane



ANSWERS 1C 2A 3B 4B



*There are often fewer vehicles on the road at night, but about one in four casualty bike crashes happen between 6pm and 6am, so take even more care. Your headlight and tail light **must** be on between sunset and sunrise, when street lights are switched on, and in weather conditions with reduced visibility.*

*It is harder to see and to be seen at night. Your headlight will not show you the road as clearly as daylight will. Other road users may also have trouble seeing your headlight or tail light because of other lights.*

## See

Do not wear a dark tinted or scratched visor or tinted glasses, especially at night. You need to be able to see as clearly as possible.

You need to be able to stop within the distance you can see ahead, so slow down to match the distance your headlight shows you.

You can use high beam in built-up areas for extra seeing distance, except when within 200 metres of another vehicle. Make sure you dip your headlight to avoid dazzling other road users. Don't use high beam in fog, because it will just be reflected back at you.

If an oncoming vehicle has not dipped its high beam, or if its light is too bright for you, slow down and look at the side of the road ahead of you instead of at the vehicle, until it has gone past. Often there is a line there that you can use as a guide. That way you can keep track of where the road is going, and your vision won't be affected.

The tail lights of the traffic you are following can show you which way the road goes. If tail lights ahead of you bounce up and down, expect a rough road surface ahead.

## Be seen

Keep in mind the comments about being seen in Chapter 7, and remember that it is more difficult to see anything at night – especially something relatively small like a bike. Because you only have a single headlight, it can also be difficult for drivers to judge how far away you are.

## Take care

Ride more slowly at night to give yourself more time to read the road and react to problems. Ride further away from other traffic; it is difficult to judge distance at night. And always remember: don't ride when you are tired!



*Make sure that any reflectors and all indicators and other lights on your bike are clean, and seriously consider wearing a reflective vest when you ride at night.*



*When riding at night wear clothing that is visible and ensure lights are on and the lenses are clean.*



## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of this page.

### 1. Three things you can do to ride more safely at night are:

- A stay closer to other vehicles, always use the high beam, wear dark, warm clothing
- B reduce your speed, increase the distance between your motorcycle and the car ahead, wear a reflective vest
- C change the type of tyres on your motorcycle, stay closer to other vehicles, keep up with the flow of traffic

### 2. Nicole notices the lights of the oncoming vehicles seem to bounce up and down. She should:

- A use her high beam to get a clearer look at the road ahead
- B reduce her speed and expect a change in road conditions
- C move to the centre of the road





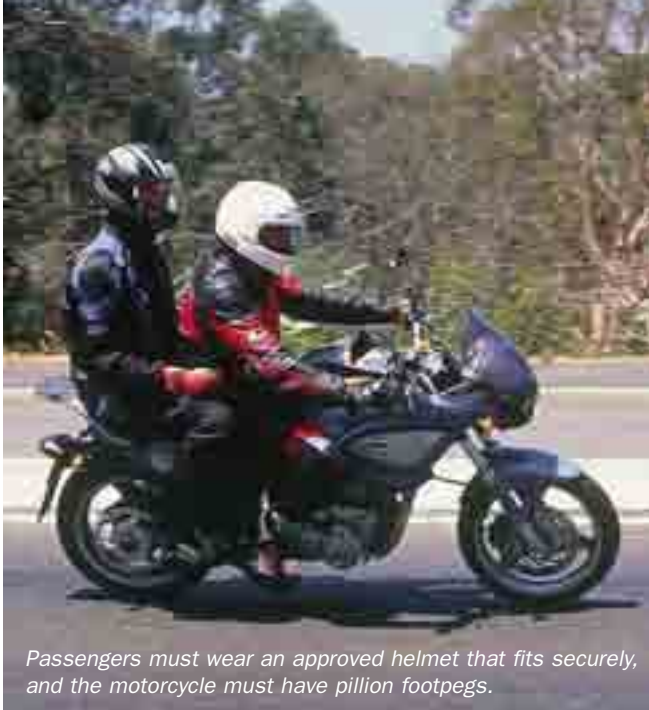


*Remember to expect your bike to act differently when it is carrying a load, whether that is a pillion passenger or luggage.*

### Carrying a pillion passenger

You **must not** carry a pillion until you have held a full motorcycle licence for 12 months. To carry a pillion your bike will need a seat designed to carry a passenger and footpegs for them. The pillion's feet **must** reach the footpegs; keep this in mind if carrying children. See Chapter 2 for the law related to carrying a pillion passenger.

Pillions who are not used to being on a bike may react unpredictably, so ask them to relax, hold onto the bike's 'grab rail' or your waist and follow your lead when leaning. Pillions should wear the same kind of protective clothing and helmet as riders.



*Passengers must wear an approved helmet that fits securely, and the motorcycle must have pillion footpegs.*

## Getting ready

If it's possible, you should adjust the preload of the bike's suspension when you are carrying extra weight. Check your owner's manual for instructions. You may also have to add air to the tyres.

Adjust your mirrors with you and the pillion both sitting on the bike.

## On the ride

It is important to ride very smoothly when carrying a pillion. Don't talk because this will reduce your concentration and take your attention off the road.

Remember that you are carrying a pillion, and ride more slowly and carefully. The bike will not accelerate and brake as quickly and it will handle differently in corners and over bumps.

## Carrying a load

Bikes are not designed to carry large loads, but if you distribute the weight evenly there is no reason why small to medium loads should be a problem. The owner's manual should give you the total amount of weight the bike is designed to carry, including rider and pillion.

There are many different kinds of luggage available for bikes, including panniers or saddlebags, tank bags and seat bags. You may want to use more than one of these to balance the weight when you load your bike.

Keep the load:

- Low – ideally by putting it in the panniers or on the seat. If it is high it may unbalance the bike. Don't carry anything heavy or unwieldy on your back.



- Forward – by placing it above or in front of the rear axle. Anything behind the rear axle can have a serious effect on handling.
- Balanced – by filling panniers evenly or strapping heavy loads onto the seat.
- Secure – by putting it in one or more of the bags mentioned above or strapping it carefully to the bike. A loose load or strap could catch in the rear wheel or chain and cause a crash. Be very careful if you use elastic straps with metal hooks – these are a major cause of eye loss.

Finally, check the load frequently to make sure that it is still secure.



## Sidecars and trailers

Sidecars (sometimes referred to as an ‘outfit’) completely change the way a bike handles. Before you ride a bike fitted with a sidecar it is very important that you practise in a quiet place with plenty of room and no traffic. Accelerating, steering and stopping, among other things, are very different with a sidecar. Get someone who understands sidecars to teach you to ride with one. It can be a very dangerous thing to do unless you are trained properly.

Towing a trailer is less of a change from riding a solo bike, but this also has its peculiarities. It will push the bike when you brake, and affect turning. It can cause serious instability on rough roads. Its weight will also change acceleration and handling. As with sidecars it is best to get someone who has experience to teach you to ride with a trailer. You **must not** ride a bike towing a trailer while you hold a motorcycle learner permit.



*Remember that extra weight will cause the bike to handle differently. So increase your following distance, as well as allowing longer to speed up and slow down.*

## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of this page.

**1. Sam just got his licence and a new motorcycle. He rides his motorcycle around to show his girlfriend. May he take his girlfriend for a ride?**

- A Yes, if he has another approved helmet
- B Yes, if he has footpegs and handgrips on the motorcycle
- C No, because he has not held his licence for 12 months

**2. Melissa is taking her brother to his night class. She should:**

- A give him advice on how to ride as a pillion passenger as they are riding
- B not speak at all because she cannot hear him clearly when riding
- C give her brother instructions about being a pillion passenger before they start

**3. When you are carrying a passenger the motorcycle will:**

- A respond more slowly, taking longer to speed up and slow down
- B respond more quickly, because the weight improves the handling ability of the motorcycle
- C not change the way it handles as long as the weight is spread evenly



ANSWERS 1C 2C 3A



*Riding with a group of friends is one of the most enjoyable things you can do on a bike. But there are some basic safety considerations to remember, including the most important one of all – riding in a group on the road is not, and should never become, a race! That’s one of the main causes of crashes on group rides; the other is inexperienced riders trying to keep up with their more experienced friends.*

### Prepare

If you are organising or leading a group ride, make sure that everyone knows where the ride is going. Then, in case someone gets separated, they won’t feel pressured to hurry to catch up. It also helps to agree on stops beforehand. Plan the timing of the ride according to the least experienced or slowest rider to make sure that you are not putting them under pressure to ride faster. Make sure that the group does not interfere with the flow of traffic. If necessary, allow other road users to pass you.

## Keep the group manageable

Small groups are safer. It is easier to keep an eye on everyone and to make sure that all riders stay together – for instance at traffic controls and when overtaking. A small group is also better if you need to find somewhere with enough room to pull off the road safely. Try to keep the group down to four or five riders, and split it up if it is larger.

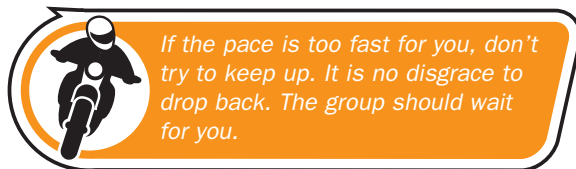
## Positioning

Riders **must not** ride alongside more than one other rider unless overtaking. It is best to ride in one line with, for inexperienced riders, at least 3 seconds between bikes and a safe distance from other traffic. That way any rider will have time to react to emergencies, and room to move out of danger.

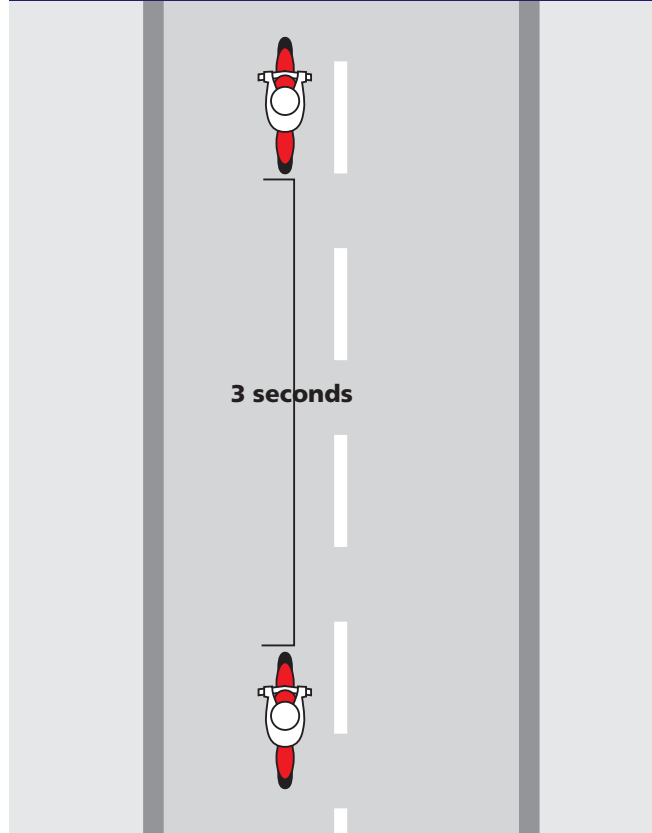
## You are responsible for yourself

Do not follow another bike blindly. Place yourself on the road where you feel it is safe. Do not focus too much on the bike in front of you; it may not be taking a safe line. Pay attention to the entire riding environment at all times; your safety is still your own responsibility whether you are riding in a group or alone.

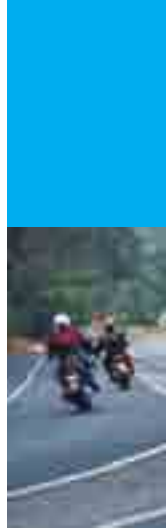
Wait until you have stopped before trying to speak to another rider.



## Riding in a group



Try to keep a three seconds gap when riding in a group.



## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of this page.

### 1. A group of friends decide to go on a ride out to the country. They should:

- A travel in groups of no more than four or five riders
- B travel as a group so that no one gets lost
- C divide into two groups and ride beside one another

### 2. You and your friend have become separated from the others in your group. You think you should take the next turn to the right. You should:

- A accelerate quickly to get ahead and lead the way
- B pull over to the side of the road and stop to discuss which turn to take
- C draw close to your friend and then shout instructions to let your friend know you want to turn

### 3. When riding with inexperienced riders you should:

- A avoid situations which may place them under pressure
- B pair up to ride
- C put the inexperienced riders in the front







*Your life depends on your bike, so take the trouble to run through the checklist in Chapter 6 before you go for a ride. This will also allow you to pick up potential problems early. Any problems should be fixed as soon as possible – by a bike shop, if necessary. There are also some other things you should do regularly.*

## Maintenance

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Modern bikes need far less maintenance than older ones, so this list is much shorter than it would have been a few years ago. That's all the more reason to do some regular maintenance, otherwise, you may not notice trouble developing until it is too late. Consult the owner's manual for guidance, and:

- Keep the bike clean. This counts as maintenance because it will help to stop corrosion and remove dust and grit that can cause wear. It is a good time to check for loose or missing nuts and bolts, loose spokes, cracks or dents in the wheel rims, blown oil seals and signs of rust anywhere on the bike. Pay special attention to cleaning lights and indicators, to make sure they are as bright as possible.

- Keep the chain adjusted properly, clean and lubricated. Follow the instructions in the owner's manual.
- Check the oil level regularly. Make sure the bike is upright and on level ground when you do this.
- Check tyre pressures when the tyres are cold, before you ride. Check tyre wear at the same time.
- Brakes do not usually need to be adjusted between services, but keep an eye on the wear indicators on the brake pads. Your owner's manual will tell you how to do this.

## Servicing

All motor vehicles need regular servicing. Follow the suggested service intervals in your owner's manual. There are some things, such as changing the oil, that you may wish to do yourself. Other work will require specialised knowledge or special tools, and should definitely be left to a bike mechanic. Remember that you may void any warranty if you tackle certain jobs; check with your dealer if you are in doubt.

## Check your understanding

Answers to these review questions are upside down at the bottom of this page.

### 1. Pre-ride checks of your motorcycle should include:

- A petrol, oil and condition of the paint work
- B wheel, tyres and controls
- C none of these, as pre-ride checks are unnecessary

### 2. To help make your motorcycle safe you should clean it each week because:

- A it makes it look better when it is on the road
- B it makes it easier to spot missing parts like nuts and bolts
- C it makes the motorcycle easier to see on the road



ANSWERS 1B 2B

