

THE OUTSIDE EDGE

PERCEPTION

By: George Tranos



You're on your way home from work and are approaching an intersection when you sense something ahead. You can't quite see the hazard but you know it's there. As you get closer, you see debris on the roadway and immediately slow down and prepare to stop. Two hundred feet further, you notice cars off to the side of the road and a car bumper blocking the street. You pull over and stop, get out your cell phone and call 911. What was it that alerted you to the initial danger? Was it some sixth sense or something else?

Webster's dictionary defines perception as awareness of the elements of environment through physical sensation; physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience; quick, acute, and intuitive cognition; or a capacity for comprehension.

Through the use of perception, a motorcyclist can ascertain much about their riding environment and use it to reduce risk. The quicker hazards can be seen, identified and analyzed, the more time and space there is to avoid them.

Much has been written about safe riding strategies. SIPDE – search, identify, predict, decide, execute – is one such technique used by motorcycle safety professionals. The most important aspect of this is the search and identify portion. Most licensed driving schools stress the need to look far ahead and get the big picture of what's happening down the road. Scan aggressively for hazards to recognize them sooner. But how does a rider do this?

As riders and drivers, we are a product of our training, experience and practice. Time in the saddle and years on the road provide us with many learning experiences. We obtain knowledge and wisdom through seeing situations and reacting to them. A good rider can recognize possible sources of danger early and discern and prioritize multiple factors. The more quickly we can mentally process all of our visual clues, the easier it'll be for us to deal with a given situation. The more often we practice this skill, the better we will become.

You probably have a friend who is good at riding in traffic. You know the type of rider that I'm talking about – someone who senses a gap and smoothly and effortlessly moves to the next lane to pass. They measure the relative speed of each car and decide quickly when and where to move. Their skills of perception are high. They can easily see and evaluate a situation rapidly. Their senses are heightened but yet they are still relaxed. How does one develop this skill?

Two motorcyclists may react differently to the same clues. Whether it's a bystander crossing the road, a car turning left at an intersection or a decreasing radius curve, awareness of the situation varies from rider to rider. Each person perceives things uniquely. Visual acuity, mental sharpness, fatigue, riding experience, age, drug and alcohol use and other factors contribute or detract from perception and reaction time. What can we do as riders to increase our sense of perception?

We can better our chances of identifying and avoiding objects by riding sober, being rested, having the right attitude and continuously scanning for hazards by looking far ahead. We can improve our reaction time through practicing braking and swerving skills in a parking lot. The use of a learned, trained response will become automatic through repetition. These skills can improve all aspects of your riding, from corner entry to braking to accident avoidance. Perceive, react, execute – you can do it!

2009 Trends gleaned from the International Motorcycle Show

One of the biggest changes in sportbike design is the new Showa Big Piston Front (BPF) Fork. Now available on the Suzuki GSX-R1000 and Kawasaki ZX-6R, the BPF utilizes a large-diameter internal piston. According to Kawasaki, this permits a reduction in damping pressure, for smoother action and better front end feedback – especially under braking and initial corner turn-in. Suzuki claims that BPF forks produce more effective valving, with more controlled compression delivering better feedback to the rider. The BPF design puts the fork springs at the bottom of each fork leg, submerged in fork oil, reducing fork oil foaming and contributing to more stable damping. Both rebound and compression valve adjustment screws are on top of the fork caps. Spring preload is adjusted at the bottom of the fork leg assembly. BPF forks are also claimed to be lighter in weight than conventional forks. It will be interesting to see if BPF forks live up to these claims and if this trend in suspension design carries over to other manufacturers and models.



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George on a BMW K1300S

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