



What Would You Do?



Oregon is a spectacular state to enjoy motorcycling, but danger awaits those who are unprepared. Riders in the Pacific Northwest face hazards similar to other regions – wild animals, slippery surfaces, changing weather – but also hazards unique to the area.

Unfortunately, a few fatal crash scenarios repeat themselves year after year:

- Running wide in a corner
- Passing/overtaking
- Rear-ending stopped traffic
- Group riding

While each of these situations are very different, they all involve one or more of the same basic rider errors: **Not looking far enough ahead** (both literally and figuratively), **failing to recognize clues** to developing situations and failing to maintain an **escape route**.

It doesn't matter if you are a beginner, experienced rider or expert, Oregon resident or out-of-state visitor – if you are going to be involved in a fatal crash in Oregon, it is likely to be a scenario similar to one of these. Turn the page to read up on the four most common fatal crash scenarios and ask yourself: "What would you do?"



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CORNERING

You are riding on a curving, two-lane road. You are traveling just below the speed limit. You round a right-hand curve and feel your bike begin to drift outward, with your wheels almost touching the centerline.

Suddenly, an oncoming car appears, straddling the centerline. You feel like a deer caught in the headlights. What would you do?

The Wrong Response

Many riders freeze up in this situation. They roll off the throttle and stare at the oncoming vehicle ... and do little else. Also known as *target fixation*, it can easily lead to disaster: The bike tends to go where you look.

Incorrect

- Freeze
- Stare

The Right Response

The best response is to hold the throttle steady, focus your head and eyes where you *want* to go – the turn's exit is your target, not the oncoming vehicle! – and lean the bike harder by *countersteering* (pressing forward on the inside handgrip) and tightening your line.

Correct

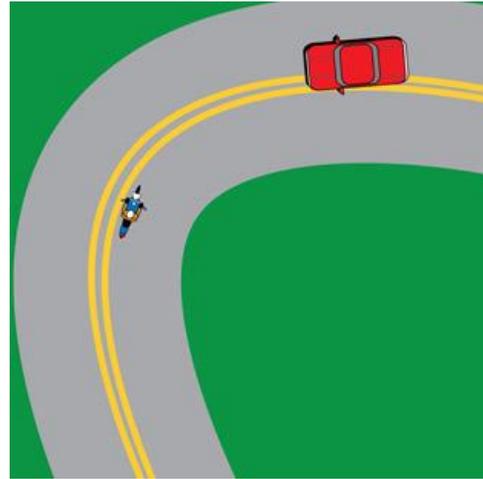
- Hold throttle steady
- Look through the turn
- Countersteer

The Reality

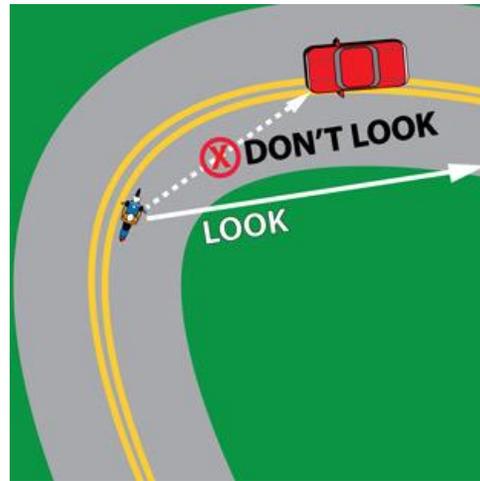
Running wide in a corner is the most common cause of motorcycle fatalities in Oregon. Even experienced riders fall into this trap if they're not looking far enough ahead. It doesn't matter whether it's an oncoming car, a tighter turn than the rider expected or some other obstacle.

When a rider suddenly decides they're not going to make it, they often panic, look down and forget to steer through the turn.

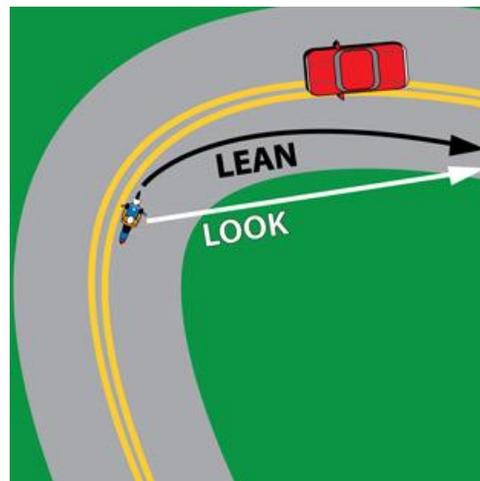
When the road surface is good, a motorcycle should be able to negotiate a curve safely at its advisory speed limit – as long as the rider stays steady on the gas, *looks through the turn* and countersteers to control path of travel.



What should you do in this situation?



Focus where you *want* to go – the turn's exit, and not the oncoming vehicle!



Lean the bike harder by *countersteering* and tightening your line.

OVERTAKING

You are riding in a rural area on a two-lane road. You have been traveling at 55 mph all day but are now stuck behind three cars moving at 35. You are not in a big hurry, but you are annoyed and getting impatient. Finally: a passing zone! There is no oncoming traffic so you signal, check your mirror and blind spot, pull out to pass and accelerate.

As you come alongside the row of cars, your eye catches a turn signal flashing and you suddenly realize there's a driveway coming up on the left. Your heart drops into your stomach, and you watch in slow motion as the lead car turns left in front of you. What would you do?

The Wrong Response

At this point, it is usually too late to avoid a collision. (See "The Reality" below for strategies to avoid this type of situation altogether.) Some riders attempt to slow down, but they are rarely successful because they ignore the front brake, stomp on the rear brake, lay the bike down and slide into – or underneath – the turning car.



Incorrect

- Underuse the front brake
- Overuse the rear brake
- Lay the bike down

The Better Response

Again, it's probably too late to avoid a collision, but you may be able to lessen the impact. The better response is to immediately apply maximum straight-line braking, using both brakes simultaneously, to get your speed down. Remember, in an emergency, 75 percent or more of your stopping power comes from the front brake. Do not lock either wheel or lay the bike down.

Correct

- Apply maximum braking
- Use both brakes
- Keep the bike upright

The Reality

Oregon riders are killed and injured every year falling into this trap. Unfortunately, once the error has been made, there's rarely an escape. The root causes of this crash are the rider's lack of visual lead, observational skills and judgment. When you are stuck behind slow-moving, two-lane traffic, instead of rushing an impatient overtake of multiple vehicles in a row, ask yourself *why* traffic is moving so slowly.

Even when visibility is good, driveways and farm-field entrances are easily hidden. Beginners and experienced riders alike miss the clues that warn them what's ahead -- a break in the trees, a telltale mailbox. Look as far up the road as you can for likely turnouts. Overtake slower vehicles one at a time.

In rural areas, slow-moving traffic will rarely hold you up very long – it's often a local resident traveling a short distance. Remember, riding a motorcycle is about the *journey* and not the *destination*: take your time, enjoy the ride, and don't ever, ever hurry.

Best strategy

- Look well ahead – 10 to 20 seconds
- Assume there is an upcoming turnout
- Be patient

BRAKING



You are riding on an Interstate freeway at 65 mph in traffic. You are positioning yourself to maintain a good space cushion, but are distracted. Drivers keep creeping up too closely before they pass you. Others simply sit in your blind spot and talk on the phone.

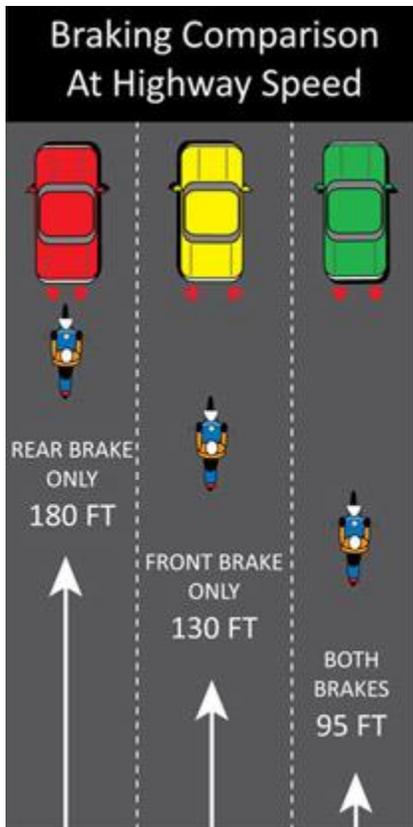
Distracted by what's going on behind you, you glance up and suddenly, traffic is completely stopped in all three lanes in front of you – a barricade of red brake lights and bumpers. And you're about to plow into them at 65 mph. What would you do?

The Wrong Response

Most people in this situation will at least *try* to stop the bike. Unfortunately, riders often ignore the front brake, lock up the rear wheel, lay the bike down and/or crash into another vehicle. Riders also fail to identify an escape path – a gap big enough for a motorcycle, even if that means using the space between cars to avoid a crash.

Incorrect

- Underuse the front brake
- Overuse the rear brake
- Lay the bike down and/or crash



The Right Response

While many riders could not avoid this collision, a rider with good visual and braking skills and a good space cushion should be able to stop safely. The correct response is to immediately apply maximum straight-line braking, using both brakes simultaneously, to get your speed down. Remember, in an emergency, 75 percent or more of your stopping power comes from the front brake. Do not lock either wheel or lay the bike down.

Keep your head and eyes up and try to identify a gap between vehicles you can use if you need to. If you can't get the bike stopped in time (or if you do get it stopped safely, but are in danger of being rear-ended yourself), now is the time to deploy your escape route: Release the brakes, guide the motorcycle into the gap and then stop again.

Correct

- Apply maximum braking
- Keep the bike upright
- Look for an escape path

The Reality

When motorcycles are involved in rear-end crashes on the freeway in Oregon, it's usually the motorcycle that rear ends another vehicle, not the other way around. Every year, far too many riders are injured and killed when fast-moving traffic stops – and they're not prepared.

Maximum braking and a well-timed escape route might keep a rider from plowing into parked traffic, but a good visual lead and space cushioning can prevent this situation from developing in the first place. Freeway traffic rarely just "suddenly stops" without warning. Congestion is predictable and rather easy to spot if you're watching well ahead – 10-20 seconds up the road – and not staring at the vehicles right in front of you. Unfortunately, many riders get caught daydreaming, or are momentarily distracted, and fall into this deadly trap.



GROUP RIDING

You are riding in a group of friends. The morning was fun, but a little stressful – the group rides too fast and too close together for your liking, and you don't know the route you're following. At lunch, you notice a couple of your friends having beers with their food. These are the same riders who organized the ride and the ones setting the pace. They suddenly don't seem like such experts anymore.

You overhear that the afternoon will have even more challenging roads and you're feeling a little tired after a big lunch. What would you do?

The Wrong Response

Many riders in group settings ignore their better judgment and just go with the flow. They ride faster than the speeds at which they are comfortable and tolerate a much smaller space cushion than usual, trying to "stay in formation" or keep the group together. They fail to recognize when another rider may be impaired – or choose not to intervene. Worst, they ignore warning signs like their own fatigue and anxiety that tell them when to quit the ride and go home.

Incorrect

- Let the group decide your speed
- Let the group decide your space cushion
- Ignore the warning signs

When riders choose to go along with a group in an effort to fit in, they often end up getting in over their heads and crashing. Don't underestimate the power of peer pressure – and don't assume it's just for teenagers!

The Right Response

The most commonly issued advice in the riding community is the concept of *ride your own ride*. This simple logic declares that you focus on the road, and not the other riders. Ride only at the speed at which you are comfortable and only in the position you are comfortable. Do not let "keeping the group together" become the priority and do not hesitate to take a break or leave the group when you have had enough.

Correct

- Ride your own ride
- Do not worry about staying together
- Take breaks or leave the group when necessary

The Reality

Oregon loses a half dozen or more riders a year to the same simple mistake: Ignoring common sense when riding in a group. Crashes result when a rider quits watching the road and *target fixates* on the riders around them.



- When someone makes a mistake and runs off on a corner, the next rider follows them right off the same corner.
- When an animal jumps out of the bushes, the rider has no warning because he or she was watching the riders ahead and not the road. And there's nowhere to go anyway because the group is in too tight a formation.
- If traffic suddenly stops, the riders in the back are unprepared and end up taking out riders in front of them.

The list goes on. The common threads in all these crashes are peer pressure and a poor visual lead. Even mature, experienced riders can become distracted trying to stay together, keep up and fit in. You can get so focused on trying to participate and stay in formation, you lose sight of the real priority – having fun, riding your own ride, watching the road and *riding within your limits*. Unfortunately, those other riders won't be able to ride your bike for you when you get in over your head!



Summary

Cornering

If the concepts of target fixation or countersteering are unfamiliar to you, or you have trouble with corners ...

Overtaking

If the concepts of maximum braking or a visual lead are unfamiliar to you, or you are prone to judgment errors ...

Braking

If the concepts of maximum braking, visual lead or space cushioning are unfamiliar to you, or if you have trouble identifying escape routes ...

Group Riding

If the concepts of target fixation or space cushioning are unfamiliar to you, or if you have trouble keeping up on group rides ...

If any of these apply to you, Team Oregon recommends you seek training. Enroll in a one of our courses and get some instruction and practice in these critical skills. Beginners should take a basic course (BRT or IRT). Experienced riders should take an advanced course (RSP or ART).



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