

Les Hadfield CSO asks... PREPARING FOR THE GREEN BADGE..?

Our Observer team strongly recommend that you study [Roadcraft](#) and [Be a better rider](#)...

But to make things easier, below is a condensed take on the basics of the SYSTEM.

Information

Most important part of the system. Proper use of our forward obs, rear obs, shoulder checks, life savers, mirror checks, cross views and, when it comes to diesel spillages, smell, gives us as much information as possible. Road signs and road markings, other vehicles signals, every conceivable bit of information helps us to plan our ride.

Less obvious things such as reflections in windows or hoardings can warn us of vehicle brake lights, and reflections from flashing beacons can inform us of hazards before they are actually in view, especially round left hand bends.

Your average driver is at the most looking only two cars in front and only occasionally checks the rear view mirror. How many potential hazards have you seen and reacted to well before the driver in front? This is one of many benefits of scanning as far ahead as possible allowing vital time to react to any situation..

Positioning basics

A very important part of the system. Our safety depends on our riding positions right from getting on our machines to getting off. If we adopt the wrong position on the road sooner or later we are going to have to test our 'safety bubble'. (The safety margin 360 degrees around us) The larger it is the safer we are; when it starts to reduce we have to think fast to get out of impending trouble - travelling too close to a vehicle reduces available reaction time and if its a large vehicle, it can seriously reduce our view ahead. The ideal position is one which doesn't impair our view any more than necessary. With large vehicles, on the Woodhead for example, our forward view can be improved by moving over to its rear left side at a safe distance, scanning down its near side and same to its offside. Also very effective when approaching bends. If the centre line is broken, there's nothing to stop us moving out further to the offside to get an even longer view but watch out for any approaching traffic and always have a safe gap to get back in if necessary.

Bends (left hand)

Approach the corner just left of centre line depending on approaching traffic. Look for the limit or vanishing point, this tells us whether our corner is tightening or opening up. This in turn helps determine when and whether any speed adjustments are appropriate and when we can start to accelerate out.

Bends (right hand)

Approach kerbside depending on surface. Remain out to the left until we see our limit point opening up then power out towards the centre line just ahead of the apex . I see so many riders holding the left position too long throughout the corner to finish up riding it out near the kerb which means they can't power out as early, reduces their potential cornering speed, and puts them in the wrong position behind any vehicle immediately in front. There could be an easy overtake at this point.

Open plan bends, (single or in series)

Straight line them to a sensible extent, but only when you have 100 percent view and the road signs, markings, and lack of imminent junctions allow.

Roundabouts

Dependent on your view across... your intended exit determines your approach position.

Exiting left

Requires us to stay in the left hand lane.

Exiting straight ahead

Allows either lane depending on traffic volume. The lane with the least traffic allows you the safest and smoothest exit. Last minute lane changes on the approach are a sign of poor planning.

Exiting Right

Normally we would be in the right lane on multi lane approaches. Depending on traffic, better approach opportunities sometimes arise. How many times do you see drivers delaying their entry until even the exits are clear before they decide to move.

Straight lining a roundabout..?

If traffic and road conditions allow, there's nothing to stop you doing this, especially beneficial on wet slippery roads. Filtering at the approach to roundabouts and road junctions can bring useful benefits but needs careful consideration and is only to be done if it is safe.

Basics of Filtering

If it is safe to filter and make progress then consider it, Always be aware of vehicles changing lane, doors opening and pedestrians crossing. If you have to paddle between lanes, it's not on. Your examiner will be looking to see if you are confident and in control with both feet on the pegs and the progress made by doing it is worth the effort.

Overtaking

Probably one of the hardest manoeuvres to master. There is only one time to overtake and that when it's absolutely safe and we gain some progress by doing it.

Imagine you're the white cue ball on a snooker table. You know you can overtake or pot, but where are you going to finish up..? This is where observation and forward planning comes in. It's no good overtaking vehicles and then finishing up with white lines or oncoming traffic against us. Same with side roads, gateways, parked vehicles, 30 mph signs and dead ground. Plan the ending as carefully as the beginning. If you can't get a clear view of the road of any adjoining exits, it's not on. If you need to shoulder check, do it early, not as you commit to the manoeuvre. By the time your eyes have refocused, the road conditions can have changed, especially on nationals and motorways. This is where your safety bubble counts, always try to have a plan B, i.e. abort or find a safe gap

Speed, Gear and Acceleration

As you know, our speed range in any selected gear is controlled by the throttle. To execute a manoeuvre correctly, we need to be in the most responsive gear for the speed range best suited to the

manner in which we intend to complete it. This allows us to accelerate or engine brake effectively as needed. On the entry to a corner for example, we need to have finished braking before initiating the turn, and already in the correct gear for the acceleration phase of the exit. We also need the throttle to be very slightly open as we enter the turn. Entering and negotiating a bend on a closed throttle causes understeer, makes the machine harder to turn and encourages the machine to run wide on exit. Opening the throttle slightly improves or tightens up your line but overdoing it causes oversteer which in turn causes imbalance making the machine unstable.

The main reason for unwanted issues and running wide on a bend is due to going in too fast, typically in the incorrect gear, and the inappropriate use of brakes. So many poorly trained drivers and riders automatically brake in a corner when it is neither necessary nor advisable.

To gauge what is the ideal gear for a given corner speed, try riding at 30, 40, 50 and 60 mph to discover which gear provides the most responsive characteristics; usually the rev counter will show a mid- range readout.

Most of you will know what counter steer is. Consciously or not, we all use counter steer to enter and exit a corner; we can improve the effect by applying light pressure on the appropriate bar grip. For left hand bends, on entry, push the left bar slightly down or forward (or, pull on the right.. same effect) and for right hand bends visa versa. (On some bikes, adding foot pressure to the inside peg can also have a beneficial effect.) Doing the opposite on exiting the bend will help the bike stand back up again. Next time you ride, see how it can more effortlessly assist your cornering - you'll be surprised.

Practice

Take the advice of your Observer and practice as much as possible between your Observed runs. When practising anything new, do it incrementally, and when the road conditions allow maximum safety. Every rider progresses their skills in stages. Think about what you are trying to do, in good time, and think it through again afterwards. Did you get it right..? Is more thought or practice needed..?



Whatever you do, Ride safe.

Les Hadfield

CSO, Sheffield Advanced Motorcyclists.