

‘IS YOUR RADAR ON?’

One method to search for objects that may or may not be visible is by the use of radar. On land, radar can track cars and planes. Radar’s companion, sonar, is used for underwater searches. As motorcyclists, we can extend a radar analogy to finding hazards.

Out in the real world, hazards can approach from any direction. For those who have attended the MSF beginner course, the acronym SIPDE was used to describe a strategy for dealing with hazards: Scan, Identify, Predict, Decide, Execute. Now, I don’t know about each and every one of you, but I was glad that in the experienced class, we combine the first two and last two steps and get SPA: Search, Predict, Act. Being over 50, three things are easier to remember than five.

Both of these strategies deal with risk management of hazards in time and space. However, they have one very important feature in common: Where to search. The answer (drum roll please....) is everywhere! We don’t know if the hazard is in front, in back, or to the sides, so we must have two heads and four eyes, or so it seems, to be vigilant.

One important statistic that came out of the Hurt study was the percentage of accidents relative to the position of the rider. Imagine yourself going along in a straight line. Now draw a circle around yourself. Using clock positions, place 12:00 straight ahead, 3:00 to the right, 6:00 behind and 9:00 to the left. Got the picture? Accident data revealed that the 11 o’clock position was the one where most crashes happened. Does that make sense? Doesn’t that describe the most frequent problem of the left turning driver into your path?

OK, so now we know the worst potential position. The others are also important. How do we guard against the other possibilities? I like to answer this by considering the aircraft controller screen. The circular screen has a line, which is the radius, sweeping in a counterclockwise direction. The important point is that it doesn’t miss a thing. We can mimic this by looking ahead, to the right and left, and in both the right and left mirrors. Of course, I’m going to pay special attention to that 11 o’clock position, but I’m not going to forget about the others. So, my radar is on.

Now, take that circle you’ve drawn around yourself. Let’s go for a ride. 1st gear (its alright), 2nd gear (lean right), 3rd gear (hold on tight)....faster...OK, 4th & 5th[this is your captain; we have attained cruising speed...]. We’re still searching using the radar analogy. Is that circle around you still appropriate? Not really...threats from behind are much less likely. What I want you to do is to think of a teardrop shape. Place the teardrop around you and point the ‘tail’ behind you. Place yourself about one-third from the tail, with the large rounded part of the drop in front. Congratulations! This is your new shape, or ‘bubble’ against which you will search with your radar. OK, stop sign ahead; slow using both brakes and downshift to first gear before stopping. What happened to your teardrop? Did it slowly become a circle, then reverse with the tail in front and the large rounded drop to the rear? I hope so, because now your biggest problem is, “Did the guy behind me stop?” The radar is focused more to the rear.

If that truck didn't stop, hey, you're in first gear right? Did you include an escape route in your radar search? I hope so...OK, ease out the clutch and go there!

Finally, after the hazard is off your radar screen, what do you do? Hint: Do they ever turn off the aircraft controller screen?

OK, what have we learned?

Hazards are everywhere.

Search continuously to find them!

Use the radar screen analogy to help you perform the search.

Change your 'circle' to the teardrop as your riding situation changes.

The 11 o'clock position is potentially the most dangerous.

Most important: Never turn off your radar!

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