

# Scan Aggressively...

You probably don't need much of an imagination to know what this article is about... it's about scanning (not looking) all around you – front-rear, left-right, near-far... looking for anything that might cause you harm in any way. This can range from road debris or road damage, to a smoker flipping his cigarette butt out the window, or to an 18-wheeler blowing a tire. While the specifics are hard to qualify, there are three basic categories that you should be scanning for at all times – these are:

1. other road users,
2. signs, signals and what ifs, and
3. road conditions.



“Other road users” is just about as broad as it can be. Obviously, this includes other vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians – oh, and don't forget about animals, too! Yep... if they're on the road, they're using it. If a deer is on the road or cattle are grazing along the shoulder, there is concern for you and your fellow riders/co-riders. It is the non-human road users, depending on the time of day and the surrounding countryside (rural areas especially), that are a significant hazard as well as being the least predictable.

“Signs, signals and what ifs” are just what they sound like, and it sounds simple enough, but the problem is in the interpretation... not only what the signs and signals say, but how will the other road users interpret and apply these signals. Right lane goes away... where will the vehicles in that lane go and how will it affect you and your group? Bus stop ... what about people running to catch that bus stopped ahead? When the bus pulls out, will it force its way in, driving traffic in its lane towards you? Car pool lane ... do you really think that little sign threatening a big fine will prevent the driver late from lunch from using your lane to pass? These regulatory signs not only warn you what is coming up, they should alert you to the types of situations that might develop “what ifs” as you interact with other road users. How about road construction signs? Signs and signals warn you not only of what is coming up ahead, but given the correct interpretation and forethought, they can also prepare you for potential hazardous interactions with other road users.

“Road conditions”... you should also be scanning the roadway and shoulders to stay apprised of current road conditions. This goes hand-in-hand with the construction warning signs described above. Will the road construction be limited to shoulder work? Even so, the heavy equipment used may damage the roadway or drag a lot of mud and rocks out onto the road. Not only are the road conditions a concern, but what about our reactions to the road surface? If road damage forces you to change your lane position, do you have the space cushion necessary to do it safely? What about road damage or debris in another lane? The other road users may dodge the damage and come into your lane. Alternatively, they may not successfully dodge the debris, but hit it and throw it into your lane. By making the roadway itself one of the points of your constant scanning, you will reduce your risk of being surprised. How about when there is new pavement being put down? There could be a bit of grooved pavement, the infamous 'abrupt edge', or something as severe as the entire road bed being removed (whoops – “Pavement Ends”) – frequently, engineers do not allow for motorcycles when they start repairing/rebuilding a road. Or, our personal favorite... “tar snakes”. These are tar repairs of cracks in the pavement that can be really dangerous, especially in the summertime when temperatures are high and the tar softens. By scanning the road condition near and far as well as interpreting others' and our own reactions to these changes, we can reduce our riding risk and ride safer.

So, you see, the combination of a regular scanning/observation procedure, together with knowing where to scan and what to scan for, can work for you to reduce risks while riding. By scanning (not looking) the road ahead, as well as to the sides and the rear for possible hazards/risks caused by other road users, signs and signals, and changes in road conditions, our rides can continue to be safe and fun.

As always, we welcome and encourage your questions and comments. Please don't ever hesitate to contact us if we can be of help.

**Ride safe, have fun and always take the long way home.**

**Gene and Carolyn Tice**

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