

Head and Eyes,

By Michael "Motorcycle" Bradbury

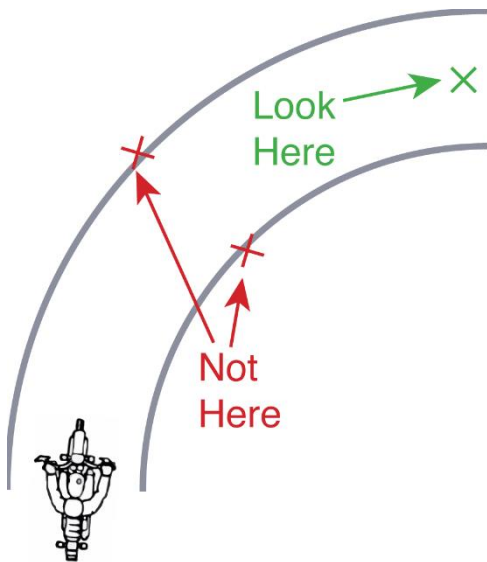


Avoiding the many obstacles to your paths of travel is such a big part of safely riding your motorcycle. How to do this seems so simply answered as just steer your motorcycle appropriately on roadways as you experience changes to orientations, encountering the usual traffic stops, varieties of traffic patterns navigating through high volumes of traffic and doing this all in a dynamic, changing way. But there is a lot more to this than is apparent.

Your head and eyes are the tools that dictate your path of travel. Our hands follow our eyes and your motorcycle will follow where you look. Your eyes follow your head and vice versa. If I look too long at scenery, especially when the scenery is outstanding and overwhelming like mountain passes in the Colorado Rocky Mountains or the Mackinac Bridge that connects Michigan to the Upper Peninsula, my motorcycle will drift in the directions of my gaze. My eyes are staring and my head is following my gaze. I am very afraid of heights so I don't spend more than a few moments looking at mountain scenery to avoid freaking myself out. One way I stay in the right path and mitigate my fear of heights is to stare 10 -15 feet ahead of my front tire. I adjust this distance as my fear grows or subsides.

I usually don't have problems with this for long. The effect is small and I compensate quickly and keep motoring ahead properly on the road. The point is head and eye directions can influence your bike's path of travel.

Gazing too long at things outside your path of travel allows distractions to take your attention away from staying in your lane and to keep following the road. This effect is called target fixation. At the very least, we all must fight this effect to be safe. Imagine if you and your motorcycle start following the target you are fixating on? Enough said!



When a rider looks in a particular direction, their body naturally leans slightly in that direction, causing a very subtle counter steering input. This input, even if unconscious, can cause the motorcycle to lean in the desired direction. Additionally, the rider's focus on a specific point can influence their body's natural movements, contributing to the motorcycle's response to their gaze.

Our road captains teach their riders not to point at scenery, planes, animals or other potential distractions. First you are not sure they are passing an appropriate signal from the RC. The RC should be doing their own hand signals on their ride. But germane to this topic, large gestures and pointing at scenery can be a distraction that take your focus off managing your motorcycle's path of travel.

The use of head, hands and eyes to manage your bike's path is very evident when managing curves and cornering. The proper motorcycle balance and lean follows the angled position your head. How you position your head is a direct result of where you are looking. Your direction of gaze shifts your balance and automatically gives your bike the right lean for your travel direction. My rider early on asked how do you lean in corners. I told her I don't think about it because it should be a natural thing. If you think too hard on how to lean in a corner and instead look ahead in the curve, you will have a proper lean leading to a good balance and leaning in the best way.

Consider how your head and eyes affect your path of travel. Being conscious of these physical dynamics, practicing head and eye placement with low-speed tight cornering in a local, empty parking lot will help complement your riding capabilities and will add another tool in your toolbox to ride your motorcycle safely.

