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Command Respect

Command the Road!

By Roger Wiles 32797

As a rider, how would you define respect from your fellow highway-users? Do they see you? Do they even look for you? Do they modify their driving behavior to accommodate you, a vulnerable motorcyclist? Do they give you your space? Space! That's what we really want, isn't it? We need space and time to see what's going on around us and ahead of us - 'seeing' with both the eyes and the brain, and using that time and space to think, plan and act, so as to avoid running into things - or running off the roadway needlessly, with equally painful results.

Generally, would you agree that most highway-users afford motorcyclists very little respect - when they bother to notice us at all? Are we merely helplessly adrift in a sea of cars and trucks, with little control over our outcomes? Or, can we, as responsible riders, earn and *command* some respect from those driving around us? That would be nice, wouldn't it? Perhaps we can adopt riding behaviors that can often command and earn the respect we need, deserve and desire from others on the road. Let's think about it...

Responsible Basic Riding Behavior: Eschew obvious riding offenses like offensively and painfully loud exhaust, lane-splitting in those states where it is not legal, and particularly lane-splitting at excessive speed-differentials, unnecessary lane changing and weaving, stunt riding, et al. As we avoid these offensive riding sins, we are, at the very least, a little higher up on the food-chain in the eyes of other drivers. Leave the track stuff at the track. Your message: "I'm a professional, responsible rider worthy of your respect!" begins here, as we demonstrate to others, by our responsible riding behavior, that we value our lives, our health and property, and that we are averse to unnecessary risks.

Others driving near us can generally be expected to hold the same beliefs and values, and can become sympathetic to our special situation in traffic. They see us as a vulnerable fellow human being who must be ever-vigilant to survive.

Conspicuity

What we wear while riding begins to augment our command for respect from other drivers. Responsible riders who wear pro-



tective gear that is clearly designed to be seen by others can be roadway users of a higher order in the minds of your highway neighbors, and thus, deserving of their respect. Space. They are inclined to give you more of it. After all, they see that you are not hiding, that you intend that others see you on the road. The finding



from the aged Hurt Study says: "Conspicuity of the motorcycle is a critical factor in multiple vehicle accidents. Accident involvement is significantly reduced by use of motorcycle headlamps on in daylight and the wearing of high visibility yellow, orange or bright red jackets." (i)

Compare the image of a rider wearing casual street clothing while riding to that of a rider clad in gear clearly designed to prevent or minimize painful injury in the event of a crash. One is apparently oblivious to risks to which they are exposed, or willfully ignorant of matters that can be life or death. Who can respect such a fool? Others make a clear statement to those around us by what we wear; "I don't intend to suffer needlessly, or take any unnecessary risks." Such a determined,

focused and motivated person is not to be trifled with, and it might be best, other drivers may consider, to give this gal or guy some extra space – they've earned it.

David Hough offers; "This is a message typically lost on younger people—who feel that others should be able to judge us by our actions rather than our appearance." Perhaps others *should* base their opinions of us on our behavior instead of how we look, but that's often not reality, whether it's right or not. Ignoring that reality while standing on principle can get us hurt, and the wiser we become, the more we realize that reality, and accommodate it.

Even one's helmet color may command the kind of respect usually afforded only to law enforcement authorities. Many motor-officers wear white helmets. Interestingly, a recent study from the UK found that "Compared with wearing a black helmet, use of a white helmet was associated with a 24% lower risk." (ii) I know of no data that actually makes this link, but one may hypothesize. Nevertheless, white appears to be the 'safest' helmet-color, according to this study.

Another UK study found "...drivers respond more quickly and accept longer safety gaps in the traffic when motorcycle riders wear red and/or fluorescent jackets than when they see low beam headlamps, larger fairings or no extra conspicuity equipment. However, coloured helmets have no effect."(iii) Interestingly, this study finds that riders clad in conspicuity garments received more respect while in traffic. How we choose to dress, when riding, can have the effect of 'commanding respect' from our highway neighbors.

A number of riders, over the years, have shared an experience each observed; they purchased an 'Authority' motorcycle, either new or used, or rode a bike very similar in appearance to the motor officers' ride. In traffic, they immediately noticed that they were afforded much,

(i) *Motorcycle Accident Cause Factors and Identification of Countermeasures, Volume 1: Technical Report*, Hurt, H.H., Ouellet, J.V. and Thom, D.R., Traffic Safety Center, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

(ii) *Motorcycle rider conspicuity and crash related injury: case-control study* Susan Wells, Bernadette Mullin, Robyn Norton, John Langley, Jennie Connot, Roy Lay-Yee, Rod Jackson. *British Medical Journal* — Released: Tuesday, April 6, 2004

(iii) *A Literature Review on Motorcycle Collisions, Final Report*, B. Huang and J. Preston, Transport Studies Unit Oxford University, April 2005

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much more respect. Motorists probably assumed they were motor officers, and those motorists improved their driving behaviors substantially, and all at once. What can we learn from this? Respect can be commanded, both by the motor-officer with a full pad of blank citations, and by the responsible citizenry that emulates professional riding behavior.

Communicate

Basics include using the bike's turn signals for all turns and lane-changes, at least three seconds before making the maneuver and using brakes while decelerating. Engine braking alone slows your bike more suddenly than autos behind you (you're much lighter), but brake use is necessary to show your brake lights when slowing. A driver who is suddenly startled by your abrupt (from their perspective) and unannounced deceleration is likely to become irritated if not angry (I do!), and is less inclined to offer you any consideration or respect.

So far, we've discussed passive demands for respect. Now, let's become proactive. Truly communicate your presence and requests. Who is that obnoxious Hollywood celebrity that you just love to hate? Sadly, this may be one time in life when it might be good to consider their tactics; "Look at me! Check me out! See what I'm doing! It's all about ME! I want you to know I'm here!" Consider habitually using basic traffic hand signals along with your bike's electric turn signals. Why?

In the eyes of others, you astride your motorcycle may be viewed as just another inanimate, possibly irritating, object cluttering up the roadway. When we employ basic traffic hand signals (left turn, right turn, slow or stop) in conjunction with the bike's turn signals and brake-lights, we are communicating not only our upcoming intentions, but also our special

circumstances – our humanity and vulnerability – to those around us.

How about dealing with tailgating drivers? Try this technique; in addition to slowing gradually to create more space in front of your motorcycle, display the 'slow or stop' hand signal for about five seconds. From my long-time use of this technique, I find in 80%-90% of such events, the offending tailgater will back off and give me the space I've requested. Not only does the hand signal communicate our request for 'respect,' and also our exposed circumstance, but also the substantial following distance ahead of us, clearly visible to the tailgater, demonstrates our responsible traffic behavior.

"Hey, you're threatening my life and



"Note the right turn signal is used with the hand signal"

health by following too closely! You wouldn't like it, either! I wouldn't do that to you!"

Let's assume that nearly all of us humans like to think of ourselves as 'good people' who have no wish to harm another. We then can speculate that most who follow too closely do so as a result of inattention, habit or carelessness. Most do not deliberately threaten our space and time safety-cushion. Your hand signal will often wake such an offender up, and once alert, they very frequently will improve their roadway practices to afford you the respect and space you require. Try it! When they back off, give them a 'thumbs-up' to acknowledge and thank them for the respect they have given you. It will keep them back where they belong. ➤

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Merging onto a limited-access highway or changing lanes on multi-lane roadways can also be a challenge. Try a modified hand signal (along with the blinkers); if changing position to the left, give an animated 'left-turn' hand signal, pointing up and down at the space you want. "Hey, look! I'm calling dibs on that space - please give me my space."

A rider may use the same signal with the right arm, if a cruise-control or throttle-lock is engaged, for position changes to the right. Drivers will usually defer to your clear request. Remember, your mission is to politely demand that others see you, recognize and appreciate your exposed situation, become consciously aware of your intentions, and change their behavior to avoid harming you. But remember, such demands are not optional. You and I must continually, politely and consistently demand and command the respect we need to survive. Anything less is irresponsible on our part.

As riders, our only available action steps in traffic are to change our position on the roadway, adjust our speed, and/or communicate our upcoming intentions and demands to others. Be deliberate - but not abrupt - in moving from side to side, or moving up or back in traffic.

"Hey, I know what I'm doing here; I have a plan! I clearly know what I want to happen around me. I'm not wandering around aimlessly on the pavement. Help me keep the space I'm creating and managing as I move myself around!"

A determined person is much more likely to get what they want, so display deliberate, thoughtful determination as you position your motorcycle around other traffic. Also actively orchestrate - by your movements and signals - the choreography of your roadway neighbors. Think about using your deliberate and clear position and speed changes as a means of communicating to others. We are one of only 250 roadway users, on average, and car and truck drivers are generally unaccustomed to the unique needs of motorcyclists. They need our help to help us stay safe. Communicating and orchestrating the roadway dance can help them understand us and our needs a bit more.

But what to do when our demands for traffic respect are ignored, or even worse, blatantly and willfully violated by

cretinous car and truck operators? Yes, many of us can be tempted to display our disappointment graphically, maybe with the ubiquitous single-digit salute. Don't do it! Such bold-faced and obvious threats against us can be indications of irresponsible, sociopathic personalities who may grip those steering-wheels; they can easily defeat us, very painfully, in a 'fair fight' every time. So, leave! Go somewhere else. Maybe you can settle up with such a fool in another lifetime.

Sounds like we motorcyclists are self-centered, egotistical roadway-users, right? Yup, that we are, to a degree and of necessity. No rider can survive long without a strong sense of self-preservation, self-reliance, iron determination and independence. We must believe that we are in control of our outcomes and results; we know that we are responsible for the consequences of our decisions and actions. Such a competent rider continually commands respect from those nearby by how such a rider behaves, how the rider is clad and how we make our requests and demands known. So, when you're out there among them, earn and command respect, and command the actions of roadway-users nearby! Your competence will increase, your confidence will improve and you will begin receiving the respect - the recognition of your humanity, your vulnerable situation, and the space and time you require. Give it a try!

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