

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

EDMUND G. BROWN JR., GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF TRAFFIC SAFETY

2208 KAUSEN DRIVE, SUITE 300
ELK GROVE, CA 95758

www.ots.ca.gov

(916) 509-3030

(800) 735-2929 (TT/TDD-Referral)

(916) 509-3055 (FAX)



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Chris Cochran

(916) 509-3063

chris.cochran@ots.ca.gov

Survey Shows What Riders and Drivers Think of Motorcycle ‘Lane Splitting’

“Share the Road” is the Message During Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

Sacramento, CA – The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) today released results of the first-ever survey of California motorists and motorcycle riders on the subject of “lane splitting,” where motorcycles travel between two lanes with other vehicles travelling the same direction. At the same time, OTS and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) announced that they are joining with other federal, state and local traffic safety, law enforcement, and motorcycle organizations in proclaiming May as “Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month.” After more than a decade of steady increases, motorcycle fatalities in California began a decline in 2009.

Lane splitting has been a subject for controversy and confusion for years. The OTS survey showed that only 53 percent of vehicle drivers knew that lane splitting is legal in California. Eighty-seven percent of motorcycle riders say they lane split, while seven percent of vehicle drivers admit to having attempted to prevent it.

The key to legal lane splitting for motorcycle riders is doing so in a safe and prudent manner, being cognizant of overall traffic speeds, speed differences, spacing and lane changing patterns of surrounding traffic. Riding too fast is one of the most common things that motorcyclists do to make lane splitting unsafe.

Motorists and other road users are reminded to safely “share the road” with motorcycles during May, and throughout the year, and to be extra alert to help keep motorcyclists safe. Changing the driving habits of motorists and motorcyclists alike will help decrease the numbers of motorcyclists killed and injured in crashes. Motorcyclists are reminded to make sure that they are visible to motorists, and that they follow the rules of the road. All road users are reminded to never drive, ride, walk or bicycle while distracted or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

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“As the weather improves, more and more motorcyclists are enjoying California’s roads,” said Christopher J. Murphy, Director of the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). “And with that in mind, pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers of all vehicles, including SUVs, passenger cars and trucks, need to be extra attentive and make sure they ‘share the road.’ A motorcycle is one of the smallest vehicles on our roads, often hidden in a car or truck’s blind spot. Every driver needs to aggressively look for them before changing lanes or merging with traffic.”

Those traveling the state’s highways will notice the electronic Caltrans signs with the “SHARE THE ROAD. LOOK TWICE FOR MOTORCYCLISTS” message. Motorists and bicyclists should perform visual checks for motorcyclists by checking mirrors and blind spots before they enter or exit a lane of traffic, and at intersections. Pedestrians should also get into the habit of scanning for motorcyclists who might be hidden by other traffic. Motorcycle riders should select lane position to better see the road ahead and to be more visible to other vehicles.

The latest survey results will be incorporated into the California Strategic Highway Safety Plan to help develop additional strategies to reduce motorcycle fatalities and injuries. A motorcyclist is more vulnerable than a passenger vehicle occupant in the event of a crash. Research from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that per vehicle mile traveled, motorcyclists are about 39 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in traffic crashes.

Remember, a motorcycle is a vehicle with all of the rights and privileges of any other motor vehicle. OTS and CHP offer the following tips for drivers to help keep motorcyclists safe on our roadways.

- Perform a visual check for motorcycles by checking mirrors and blind spots before entering or exiting a lane of traffic, and at intersections.
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic.
- Don’t be fooled by a flashing turn signal on a motorcycle – motorcycle signals are often not self-canceling and riders sometimes forget to turn them off. Wait to be sure the motorcycle is going to turn before you proceed.
- Allow more following distance – three or four seconds – when behind a motorcycle so the motorcyclist has enough time to maneuver or stop in an emergency.
- Never tailgate. In dry conditions, motorcycles can stop more quickly than cars.
- Never drive while distracted or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Motorcyclists can increase their safety by:

- Avoiding riding in poor weather conditions;
- Wearing brightly colored protective gear and a DOT-compliant helmet;
- Using turn signals for every turn or lane change, even if the rider thinks no one will see it;
- Combining hand signals and turn signals to draw more attention to themselves;
- Using reflective tape and stickers to increase conspicuity;
- Positioning themselves in the lane where they will be most visible to other drivers; and
- Never driving while impaired.

The message to all drivers and motorcyclists is: share in the responsibility of keeping all road users safe, and do your part by safely “sharing the road.”