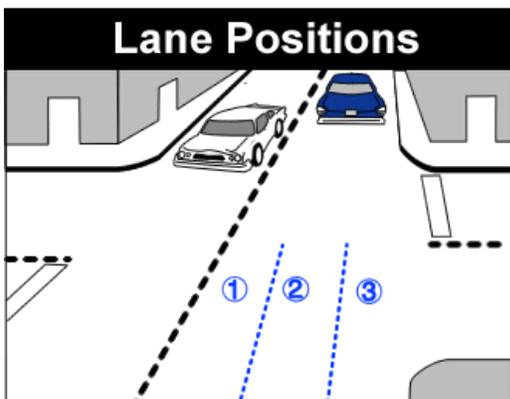


STRATEGIC LANE POSITIONING

This article is the fourth in a series discussing rider conspicuity strategies. We introduced the topic and have published articles as follows:

- (1) More about the why and what of HighViz
- (2) Described our top 20 HighViz strategies
- (3) The use of a HighViz vest, a bright or light colored helmet and a HighViz jacket.



This article provides more detail about strategy number 4, the use of strategic lane positioning.

Where Do Hazards Come From?

If you're involved in a multi-vehicle crash in which another driver didn't see you, it's probably going to happen in an intersection. In 1981, the Hurt Study found that 77 percent of all crash hazards came from the 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock - right in front of the rider - which is exactly where hazards lie in an intersection. Remember: intersections are not just for cities and towns. A lone driveway in the middle of nowhere is just as risky as a busy, urban four-laner at rush hour.

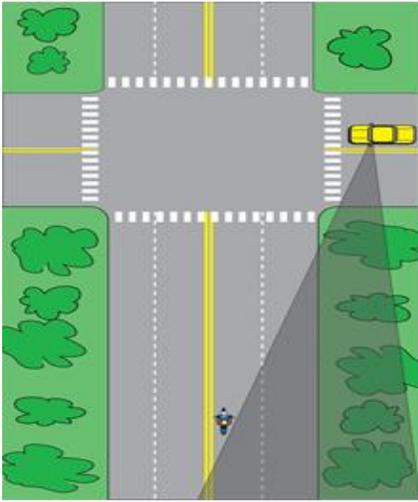


Strategic Lane Positioning

Careful positioning in traffic is a critical component of a conspicuity strategy. Motorcyclists often disappear in traffic because they're smaller and harder to spot among other, larger vehicles. A clear view of a motorcyclist can also be obstructed by environmental features such as hills, trees, and buildings.

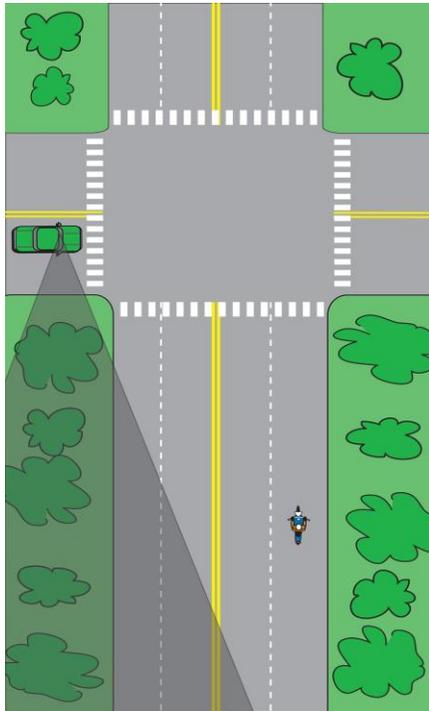
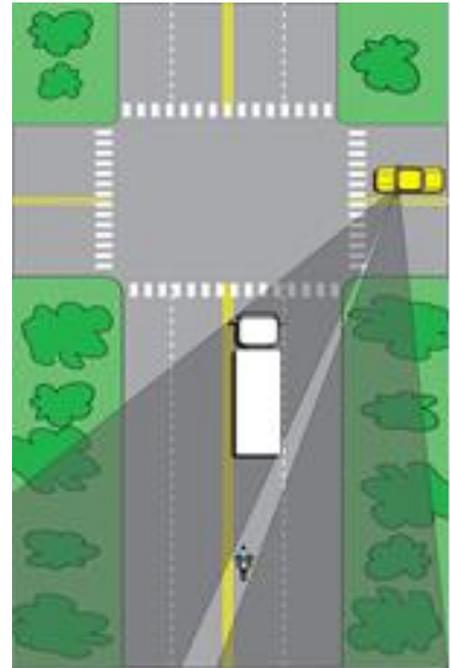
Positioning for Intersections

You have more than one lane position to choose from when approaching an intersection, and sometimes, multiple lanes from which to choose. Pick a spot that will make you the most visible.

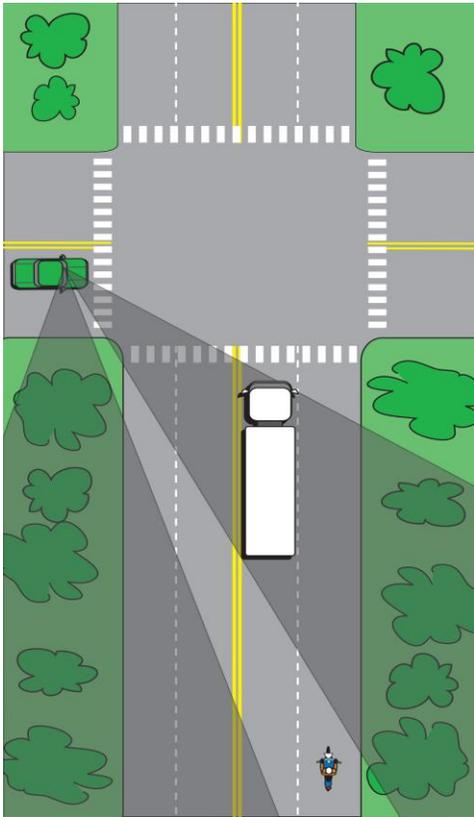


In the case of the diagram to the left, a left-turning vehicle in your one o'clock position is the highest priority hazard. Note that the driver's view of the motorcycle rider is blocked by roadside features, as shown by the darker areas in the diagram. In this case, it is smartest to position yourself as far to the left of your lane as possible, so the other driver sees you earlier and has a clearer view of you and your motorcycle.

In the next diagram (right), the 11 o'clock-driver's view (your 1 o'clock view) is now blocked by roadside features as well as a large tractor-trailer. This new obstacle on the road creates major gaps in the other driver's ability to see you. As a motorcycle rider trying to maintain visibility to the driver, you can see your positioning options have become quite limited.

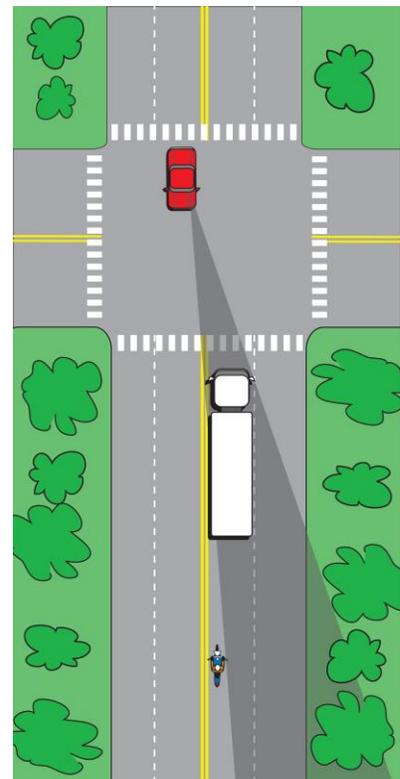


Now take a look at the same intersection (diagram to the left) with a left-turning vehicle in your 11 o'clock position. The driver's view is also blocked by roadside features, but because of the different viewing angle, your positioning strategy needs to change. For a vehicle in your 11 o'clock position, it is best to maintain a lane position as far to the right as possible to maximize your visibility.

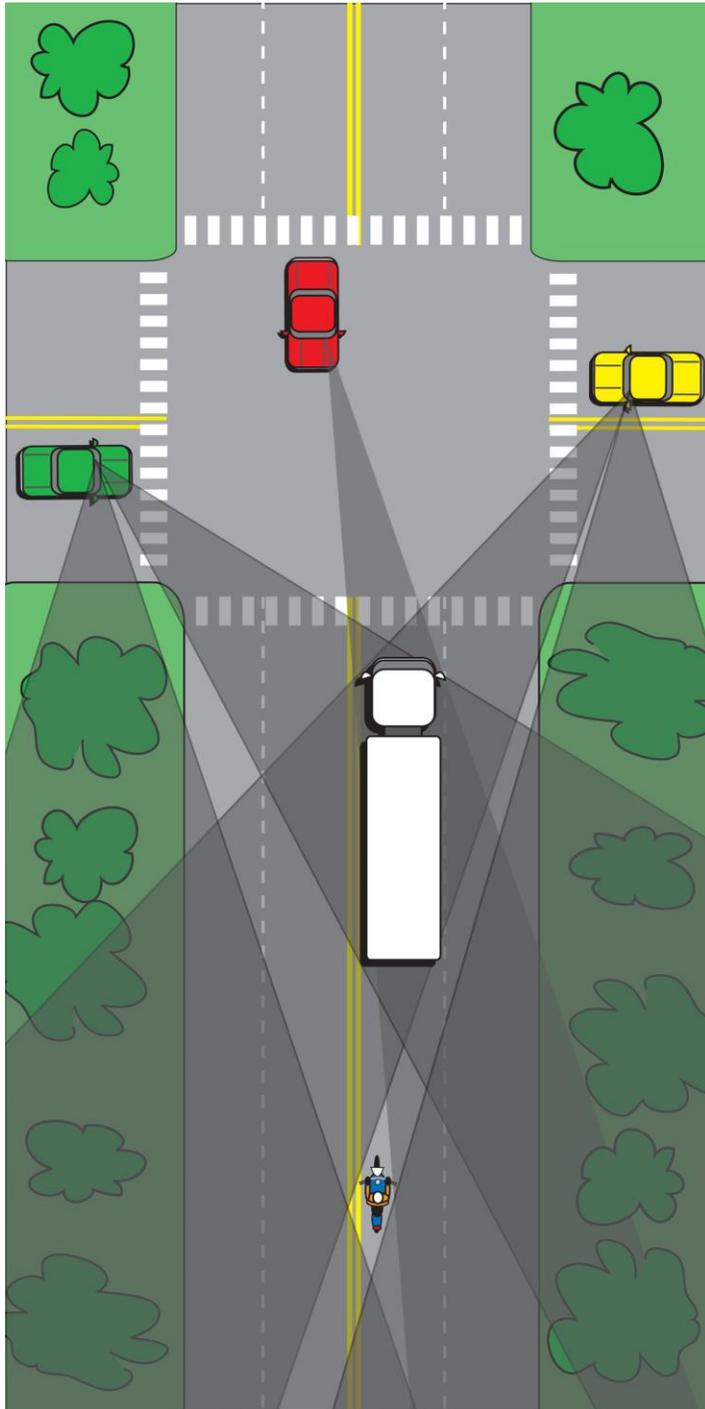


Change the situation so now the driver also has a major obstruction to contend with - the tractor-trailer (diagram left). The area in which you can ride and remain visible to the driver in your 11 o'clock position has changed significantly. It is still smart to use a right-hand lane position, but be careful of your following distance so you don't disappear behind the truck or behind the roadside obstructions.

A driver in your 12 o'clock position (below right) has an even smaller viewing area when dealing with a large obstruction like an oncoming tractor-trailer. To be seen by the driver, a rider would need to stay as far left as possible. This can create problems when also trying to be seen by the 11 o'clock and 1 o'clock drivers!



Worst-Case Scenario



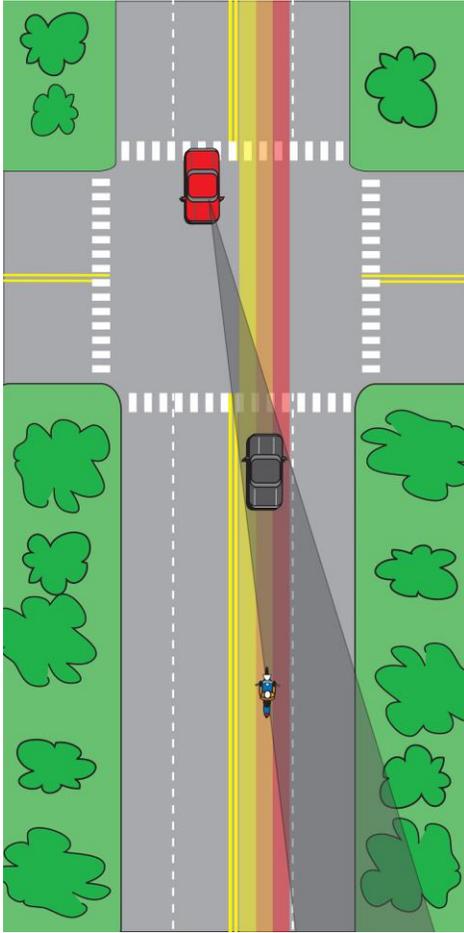
As you can see, the whole thing comes to a critical situation when faced with multiple left-turners from 11, 12, and 1 o'clock, roadside obstructions that block their view of you and your motorcycle, and an oncoming tractor-trailer that blots out most if not all of their viewing area (left). As the drivers of these vehicles contend with each other, it is easy for a motorcyclist to slip through the cracks and disappear from view.

In this situation, the rider has very little choice in lane position. *It is best to never let yourself get into this situation in the first place.* But if you do, make sure each driver can see you (if you can't see their heads, they can't see you) and be ready for the worst.

Riders should avoid changing lanes very close to intersections, which can surprise other drivers who have already made a decision based on your position.

The trick is to think ahead and have a plan for each intersection as you approach. Don't ever enter an intersection without a plan.

Blind Spots -Theirs

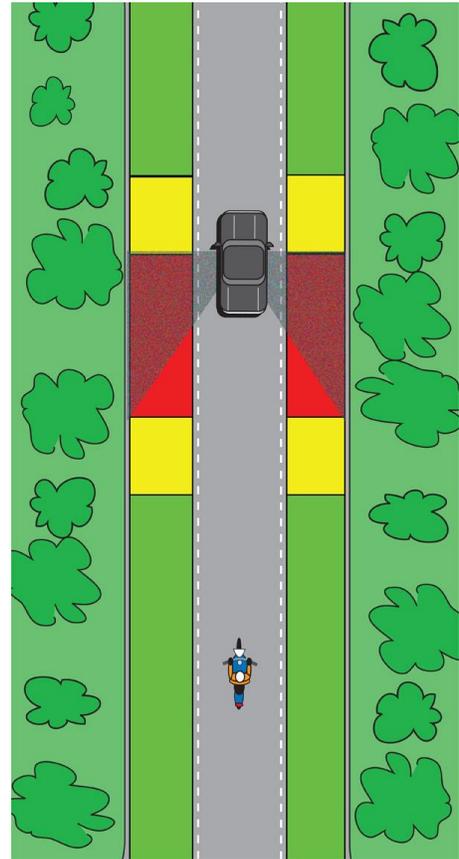


The simplest positioning tool is to avoid blind spots.

The blind spot is the visual gap between where the drivers' vision ends and where the side and rear-view mirror viewing area begins. The blind spot is usually also obstructed by a car's roof pillars, so even a careful head check may not help a driver notice a motorcyclist.

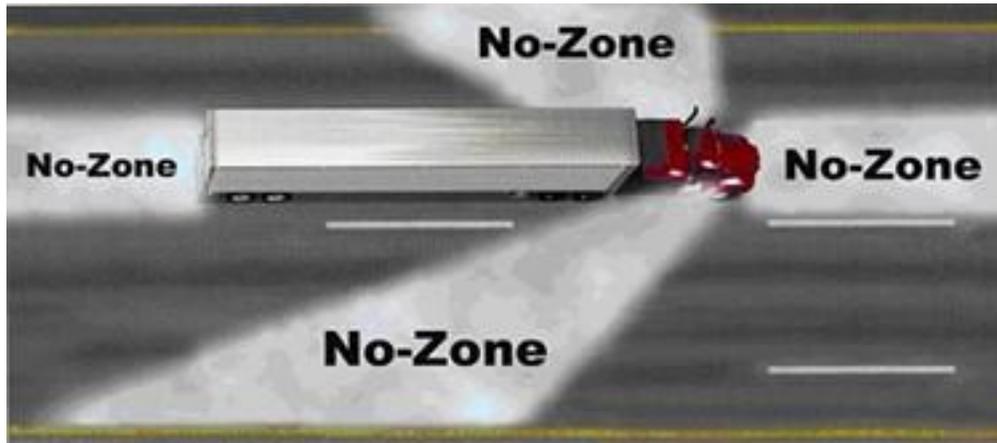
Your goal when it comes to blind spots is to spend as little time in the dark-colored zones as possible.

The only time you should be in yellow, red or gray shaded area is when stopped in traffic, or when adjusting your position to reach an area where you will be more visible to drivers of other vehicles.



No-Zones. Large Vehicle Blind Spots

No-Zones are danger areas around trucks and buses where crashes are more likely to occur. Some of those No-Zones are actual blind spots where your motorcycle (or car) “disappears” from the view of the truck or bus driver.



A commercial driver has limited visibility on all four sides because of large blind spots around the front, back, and sides of the vehicle. Strive to stay out of these “No Zones”. The limited visibility of the drivers of these large vehicles calls for extra caution in passing and being passed by large trucks and buses. Also you need to be particularly careful to stay out of the blind spots when a truck is turning, backing up, or changing lanes.

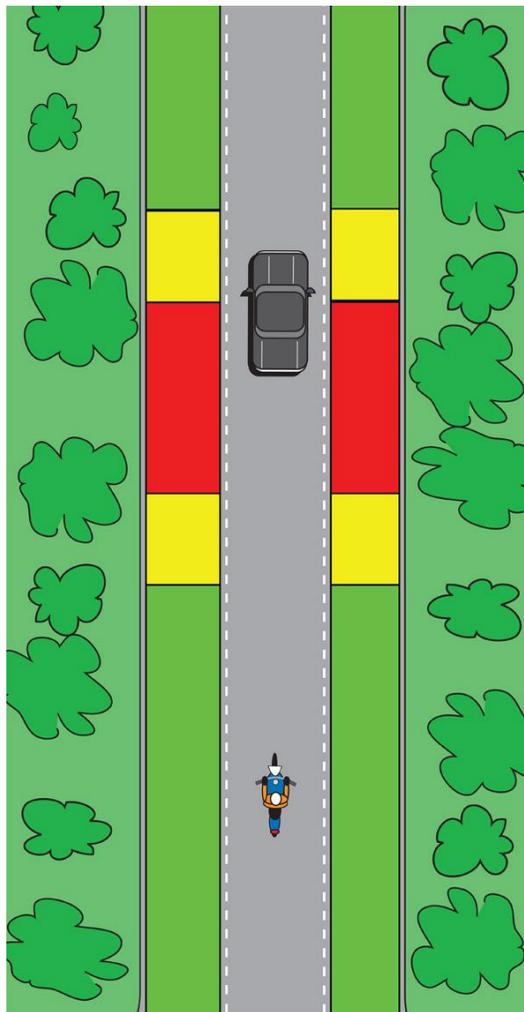
None of the motorcycles in the image below can be directly seen by the driver or in his/her mirrors.



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Blind Spots - Yours

Also consider your own blind spots. You have the same gap in visibility that drivers do - the area between where your peripheral vision ends and your mirror's viewing area begins. Make sure no other drivers are driving along in your blind spots. Make frequent, quick mirror checks (every seven seconds) and head checks (every 15 seconds), especially in heavy traffic. Adjust your position as needed to keep all vehicles near you in full view, whether they're ahead of you or in your mirrors. Be especially alert to vehicles that "disappear" from view.



Editor's Note: The material in this article was researched and written by motorcyclist safety expert and author of four books about safe riding Pat Hahn during the time he was employed as the Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center Public Information and Education Coordinator. Edits have been made to Mr. Hahn's original article.

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