



Why do I have so many near misses in town?

Road positioning is far more complex on a bike than in a car because you have so many options. And so many more ways to get it wrong...

WHEN YOU'RE LEARNING, you're taught to ride down the centre of the lane to keep you away from hazards on either side – it's safer to be in the middle if you're wobbling. But there are risks with this position. If you're in a row of traffic you're almost invisible both from in front and behind and you also have no clear escape route.

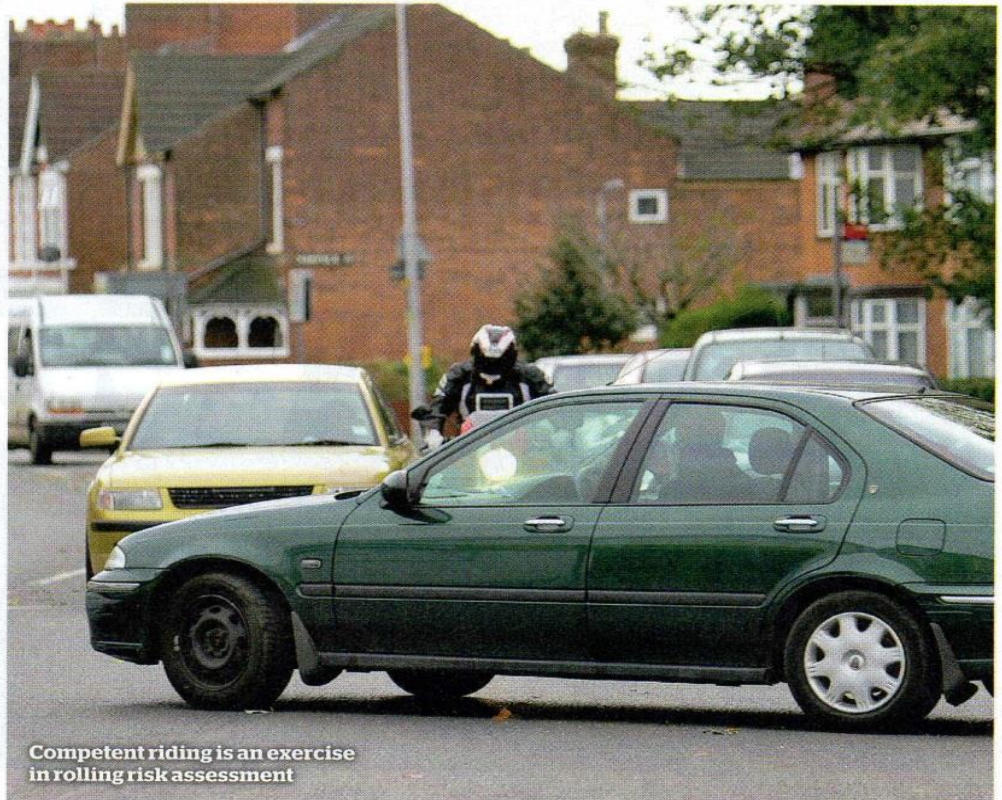
So if a car does slam the brakes on, you have to waste time working out which escape route to go for – left or right. It's much better to ride to the right (or left) of the lane so you don't have to make that decision. If you've got an idea of where your escape route is at any moment, that can save you between half and one second reaction time.

In terms of positioning in corners, if you want to ride in the middle of the lane and you're comfortable with that, then it's not a problem. It does compromise your view a bit, but if you go a bit slower that's fine. Moving to the right on left-handers and to the left on right-handers will mean you can go a bit quicker with the same degree of safety.

The danger with moving around to get the best view is what the following drivers are thinking. So you can get the classic situation where you move to the right to get a view round a left hander or maybe to see if you can overtake, and the guy behind thinks you're going to turn right and moves up the inside.

The same thing can happen when you move to the left to look down the inside of a vehicle you are thinking about overtaking. If there's a junction coming up, the vehicle behind might think you're going to turn left. You've got to keep checking your mirrors and doing your life-savers to make sure nothing's pulled up next to you.

But you really should be altering your position, changing your speed and making certain you're in the right gear the whole time. We get a lot of people on our courses who ride at the speed limit in the middle of their lane. Riding behind, I can see all sorts of things happening ahead – a vehicle coming to a halt on the



Competent riding is an exercise in rolling risk assessment

THREE POSITIONING TIPS

» **CHANGE** your position to increase your view around vehicles and through corners, but don't compromise your safety, and be aware this may give misleading signals to following traffic.

» **DON'T** ride in the middle of a lane when in a queue of traffic. Moving just slightly to one side or the other (usually nearer the middle of the road) means you don't have to waste time working out which way to go if you need an escape route.

» **CONTINUALLY** change your position and speed depending on what hazards you see ahead. In town, if you're riding along at a constant speed on a constant line, how hard are you looking?

left, a pedestrian crossing with a central refuge with someone on it, a line of parked cars, etc – and they don't react. They just ride like an arrow at constant speed past the whole lot. It's not surprising that so many riders get clobbered – they're not aware of potential risks. They're oblivious. And you can't see something you're not looking for.

A better rider will be changing position, his head will be moving as he looks around, his speed will be altering in preparation for what might happen. You've got to do a constant risk assessment, and position yourself where you would have the best outcome. Generally speaking, the biggest risk is vehicles coming in the opposite direction because the closing speed is doubled, so if you're in doubt, stay away from oncoming traffic. Better you hit a car door that's suddenly opened, than a vehicle coming the other way...

» Mike Abbott runs the British Superbike School, which has courses at tracks around the country. You can book on 01777 818013