



'Using psychology to ride safer'

Most of us have experienced the mist descending and consequent idiotic, and usually dangerous, riding. Here's how to stop it

Photography Chippy Wood

THE THEORY OF Transactional Analysis says that when you interact with someone you adopt one of three basic roles; Parent (superior know-it-all), Adult (clear thinker), or Child (highly emotional). This also applies when you're riding and is useful in understanding why some people ride like they do.

Take the all too common incident of a car pulling out in front of you without looking, causing you to swerve or brake sharply. If you behave as a Parent, you'd be superior and judgemental, saying something like 'look at that bloody fool, didn't look', and you might get off your bike and explain to him why he's an idiot.

If you go into Child mode, you'd start swearing and shouting and might go and punch them – you're having a tantrum. The obvious risk here (apart from the assault charge) is that you've handed control of your behaviour over to another road user – allowing him to affect the way you behave.

But if you can stay in Adult mode, you can calmly wonder why he pulled out, ask yourself if you could have done anything different, maybe adopted a different road position or adjusted your speed. In this mode there's a chance you could learn from the situation – even if it was totally their fault. Also, because you've thought about it, there's more chance you'll recognise that situation in the future and perhaps take different action.

But if you're in either of the other modes, Parent or Child, then you can't learn, because you either think you know it all, or you're not thinking at all because you're behaving like an emotional child.

In the car-pulling-out scenario, a subsidiary problem is that when you behave like a parent to someone else, they often respond like a child. So if you get all superior with the car driver, they'll get highly emotional with you and it won't be a constructive interchange, to put it mildly. If you can stay in Adult mode, there's a chance you'll both come away with something from the interaction – hopefully you'll both learn.

The other complication with bikes is



Treat the road as one big adult learning centre

3 STEPS TO RIDE LIKE AN ADULT

» **CHILD** If you have an interaction with another road user, be aware of how you're feeling immediately afterwards. If you're in a rage, the chances are you've slipped into Child mode. Take time to recover composure.

» **PARENT** If you ride round tutting, you're probably in Parent mode, which means you cannot learn and your riding will not improve.

» **ADULT** The trick is to balance emotional pleasure with the rational skills. And if you get that giddy feeling of invincibility, it's best to stop for a cuppa or come in early from your trackday session.

that a lot of people ride in Child mode because it's good fun and it brings out the youth in us. That's one reason why sportsbike riders in particular can get themselves into trouble.

It's not a great deal better riding in Parent mode, because you'll regard everyone else as an idiot and believe you're the only one on the road who knows what he's doing. It's impossible to improve your riding and learn in this mode.

Because of all this, it's useful to be aware of what state you're in when you're riding. If you can feel yourself drifting too far towards Child mode, you know that might compromise safety because your decision making won't be great and you become less aware of danger. If you find yourself in Parent mode, realise you won't get any better because you're not open to learning, and don't forget that being right doesn't make hospital food taste any better.

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