



Through helmet intercom instruction, Stayin' Safe's on-road training program starts with heightening awareness of surroundings, then moves on to such strategies as lane positioning and use of different braking techniques.

ALL ABOUT **STAYIN' SAFE**

TWO-DAY RIDER TRAINING SESSIONS HEIGHTEN SKILLS, CONFIDENCE

> By **Moshe K. Levy**

Stayin' Safe's on-road training program was launched by safety guru Larry Grodsky in 1993, then taken over by Eric Trow when Grodsky died in 2006.

Trow, a long-term Motor Officer and Certified MSF RiderCoach, is a prominent figure in moto-safety circles and has written more than 100 columns related to riding proficiency in national magazines.

The courses are offered up and down the East Coast, in Wisconsin and in Southern California.

For a recent two-day "Connecticut Backroads" tour, I met up with one such group in Danbury, Connecticut, for breakfast early on a Saturday morning, where instructors went over the day's syllabus and outfitted students



Eric Trow goes over a few of the concepts of his Stayin' Safe school session with students at a two-day tour.

with in-ear speakers to be coached in real time. From there, we were off to a local parking lot for some warmup drills before winding north on a scenic 174-mile loop into the Berkshire Hills, through Litchfield County and up toward Massachusetts. The pace was initially relaxed as we were introduced to the Stayin' Safe curriculum's pillars of competent on-road riding techniques:

visual strategies, speed management, lane positioning, cornering lines and advanced braking techniques.

With a vigilant, 360-degree situational awareness as the first line of defense, we glided over the rolling hills of Connecticut's back roads, practicing exercises designed to tune into clues to potential threats the landscape offered. For example, a worn painted centerline around a curve is evidence of oncoming automobiles cutting the corner and becoming a hazard. Tree lines, mailboxes, telephone poles, guardrails, fences, ridges and rooftops in the distance can help riders foreshadow what lies ahead.

The Stayin' Safe courses heighten awareness of such indicators that hide in plain sight on every ride, and students are taught to carefully read them. As we soaked in all this new visual information, instructors point out even more

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New England roads proved to be the perfect class room, and instructors used any and all means to make their point.

clues that are often overlooked. This first lesson serves as a wake-up call to remain on guard at all times.

Fully tuned in, our focus shifted to proper speed. With heightened awareness came the tendency to slow down and process the newfound wealth of information all around. Such data was then used to select the appropriate gear and speed for not just lawful compliance, but for gauging distance to the “visual point.” This is the point where the road surface vanishes from sight. This dynamic exercise teaches students to visualize a fishing line, reeling them in to the visual point. The motto “slow in and out with a grin,” emphasized the need to slow down as the rider neared the visual point, then speed up as that distance opened up again.

Once visual point awareness was solidified, we received instruction in placing the motorcycle properly within the lane. This is critical to maximizing the rider’s space cushion, achieving the clearest view of the visual point and presenting oneself to oncoming traffic. The rider’s lane was divided into three parts: left track, center and right track. The left track is the default position and the preferred line when traffic is light, the road is good and visibility is high; changes are made as the situation changes.

With us hyper-aware and properly positioned, the teaching shifted to turning, with the emphasis purely focused on practical strategies for street riding, since the classic racer’s line isn’t always the safest choice on public roadways. Because there are many more variables on the street than on the racetrack, the teaching once again reverted to reading the cues presented in each specific moment.

We conservatively entered curves using the lane track with the clearest view of the visual point—often one with a “late apex,”—and then rolled on the throttle to squirt out of the curve. The course route was designed to introduce many real-world variables and emphasize that a capable street rider must always be ready to deal with any potential hazards of public roadways.

Day Two of the Stayin’ Safe course began with videos of tricky road scenarios, and might have been the most illuminating lesson of all. Compiled from Trow’s decades of teaching and riding experiences, the video segments were designed to demonstrate how seemingly benign situations could turn dangerous, with an emphasis on hillcrests—the great unknown in street riding. Roads that appear to go in one direction may suddenly go the opposite way. Here, we learned how to recognize road surface changes, unpredictable traffic behavior and other situations.

Armed with the knowledge gleaned from Day One, we hit the road for a 140-mile loop through Dutchess County, New York, and back down to Danbury, Connecticut. The long, lazy sweepers from Day One were replaced by more challenging serpentine ribbons, as we delved into advanced braking techniques. Building on basic MSF lessons of transferring weight to the front wheel and then progressively squeezing the front brakes, the class practiced various trail braking techniques, which relied on the rear brake to squat the rear suspension, creating chassis stabilization.

Our class was also introduced to a novel concept called “cam braking,” a practice of applying both brakes and the

throttle simultaneously into a curve, and then progressively releasing the brakes while rolling on the throttle upon exit. The technique invited skepticism among students, but after some practice, some reported smoother and faster cornering.

As the curves came faster, we began “dancing cheek to cheek,” or changing position of our rears on the seat and leaning into curves with our bodies. The motorcycles followed, and dropped right into place upon entry. By the second half of Day Two, there was dramatic improvement in everyone’s skills, and many of my classmates said they felt they’d catapulted themselves to the next level in their ongoing development as skillful riders.

Stayin’ Safe proved to be an excellent experience for the moderate-to-seasoned street rider who is earnest about improving riding skills. The course structure is concise, though there are frequent breaks on the route to discuss and strategize about the material. All logistics were handled seamlessly by the organizers, from the conveniently situated hotel to the delicious meal stops throughout the riding days. The tactics are wholly practical for the real-world situations street riders and commuters encounter every day.

The student group was an interesting mix of serious motorcyclists who each brought valuable insights to the discussions. The instructors demonstrated a high level of professionalism, experience, and patience throughout two days of instruction. Every student reported increased knowledge from the educational materials, as well as improved awareness, ability and capacity to manage risk. I highly recommend this class. **MCN**