

Safety Tips #9

By Ben Hochberg, ABATE of Colorado

Extra Texture

As street motorcyclists we like a predictable riding surface, one that affords good traction. From experience, though, we know that we don't always get what we want. We have to deal with less-than-ideal riding surfaces on every single ride. In some environments we will encounter road surfaces that change often; and we need to be aware of the changing surfaces, because our available traction changes with each different type of surface.

Our vision gives us clues about changes in surface conditions and therefore changes in available traction. One thing we should look for on the road's surface is variance of textures. Different surfaces will appear to have different textures. Obviously, liquids (slippery!) usually appear differently than solids. But solid materials vary in appearance as well, in color as well as in texture. Liquids we may find on the road surface include water, oil, anti-freeze, hydraulic fluid.

Asphalt can look different than concrete. Metal has other visual characteristics; it's usually shinier than pavement. We frequently see metal on the road surface in the form of manhole covers, those large metal plates covering underground work areas in construction zones, as well as on steel-deck bridges.

Ice can look different than other road surfaces, and be especially careful of "black ice," which is more difficult to detect... Leaves can be slippery, especially when wet. Mud is bad news. Dirt is often present on the road. Paint on the road can be a challenge; we often see this at intersections and crosswalks. Spilled cargo is always interesting, along with other types of debris. (I once had a mishap involving a spill of powdered lime: the road was smooth and black, the lime was powdery and white; I guess I wasn't paying attention to the visual clues!)

The moral of the story: search the road surface for changes in textures, and be aware that when the texture changes the amount of available traction usually changes as well. A caveat: search everywhere for potential problems;

in other words, don't become preoccupied with the road surface, or with any other single thing. Keep those eyes moving around.