



The Jack-in-the-Box

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As children, long before we could ride a motorcycle, many of us started out with a jack-in-the-box as our first thrilling toy. Twist the crank, fast or slow, and eventually...POP! We now ride motorcycles for excitement, but being startled is no joy on a bike.

Just like a jester can explode from the box at any moment, serious riding hazards are present on every motorcycle ride. We generally expect these surprises, as we did after the first time the jack-in-the-box caught us off guard.

Intersections are like a jack-in-the-box to riders. From an aerial view, a typical intersection looks like a box. Compare this to looking down at the hidden door holding back the jester. The release of the jester can be compared to a crisis appearing before you at the last second. Consider how many intersections you go through on a given trip. In most cases, you travel through as the metallic melody plays. But on any trip you *could* get a jester pop. Intersections are the most dangerous place for riders. If you crash with

another vehicle, it will likely be at a crossroad where you have the right-of-way. When approaching them, remember that **you are not in a car**. You will be on the losing end of any crash, regardless of who was at fault. A carefree attitude impairs you at intersections.

Since intersections are common, we become overly familiar and confident with them. What goes through your mind when you approach an intersection? If the light turns yellow, do you speed up? Have you considered the consequences of misjudging your path through? Riding towards a cliff or brick wall is obviously dangerous. You would never do that. Yet many more riders are hurt by intersections than cliffs or walls. Consider your risk assessment skills.

What surprise jesters should you be aware of? The biggest and most notorious clown is the "left turning vehicle." As you proceed straight through an intersection, the car opposite you signaling to turn across your path might do so at the last second. Other pop-up hazards can come from anywhere: stop sign runners, bicyclists, dogs, or vehicles coming from various directions.

Why are intersections so dangerous? Simply put, human vision is weak at recognizing and judging the movement of other vehicles. Even the largest motorcycle lit up like the Fourth of July can be invisible in traffic. There is no practical value in blaming others for not seeing us. We are responsible for adapting to this imperfection in other people.

Here are some techniques to keep the jester in the box:

- △ **Never trust an intersection!**
- △ **Make yourself more visible.** You can do this in a variety of ways. Additional lighting, hi-viz

gear, and changing lane position are easy options. Give others a better chance of seeing you by creating space around you. Riding close to other vehicles can hide you in their silhouette. Make eye contact with other drivers to confirm you have been noticed.

- △ **Slow and cover your controls.** Expect the unexpected. As you approach an intersection, rest your fingers on the levers and prepare to use the controls immediately. This will shave off some reaction time during a jester moment.
- △ **Watch the wheels of stopped traffic.** When approaching an intersection, a quick glance at the front wheel of a car pulling out to your right provides a good clue to any movement.
- △ **Look for contrasting movement behind other vehicles.** As you approach traffic, if the background of a car opposite you is not moving, then you are possibly camouflaged by your background. Change lane position and/or speed so that you can see the background move behind others. This will improve their ability to judge your position against your background.
- △ **Check your mirrors.** When slowing or stopping for an intersection, glance in your mirrors to make sure traffic behind is doing the same.
- △ **Control your stopped motorcycle.** Make sure to stop at intersections in the left or right of your lane, or with plenty of space in front of you, providing an escape route if trouble comes from behind. Keep a lookout for slippery surfaces. Always remain in first gear at intersections for an appropriate takeoff when required.

Riding a motorcycle is an inherently dangerous activity. That fact is unfortunate and inconvenient as we try to explain our activity to non-riders. Surely you want to experience the thrills of riding. Just remember, intersections are not child's play.