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LANE SPLITTING SAFELY

Keeping Your Head While Riding Efficiently **By David Kinaan**

Recently, the California Highway Patrol, along with the California Motorcycle Safety Program, has made statements

referencing the practice of splitting traffic, lane filtering, lane splitting or white lining, in California. Lane splitting describes maneuvering through slow or stopped traffic on a roadway or at an intersection.

The AMA Board of Directors recently adopted a position statement on lane splitting to aid in understanding the issue and to help motorcyclists decide whether to support efforts to permit it in their states. (To read AMA position statements, see www.americanmotorcyclist.com/rights/positionstatements.)

Lane splitting is permitted in California for one simple reason: California does not have a statute prohibiting it. There are, however, several laws and best

behind traffic at a red light. I looked in my rearview mirror and saw a vehicle coming up fast. Remembering my training, my motorcycle was in gear, clutch in, and I had stopped a safe distance behind the vehicle in front of me. I accelerated, pulling between the stopped vehicles as a drunk driver rear-ended the vehicle I was behind. The collision only resulted in property damage, and I was able to arrest the drunk driver at the scene.

So here are some best practices on how to safely lane split. First, keep your eyes up and use your peripheral vision. You will need to look well ahead of you constantly to recognize changing traffic conditions and make the necessary adjustments. Developing your peripheral vision is a skill you may have to work on, but it can and should be mastered.

As a rule, keep your headlight on, which most motorcycles do automatically.

aware of turn signals, drivers who are looking around, or drivers who are changing their hand position on the steering wheel. The safest time to pass between vehicles may be when they are side by side. A driver who does not see a motorcycle will still usually see a vehicle beside them.

Another best practice is only splitting when there are two or more traffic lanes in one direction. If there is only one lane, you're not splitting traffic, you're shoulder passing or possibly passing on the wrong side of the road. Both are extremely dangerous and usually illegal.

It is not a good idea to pass another motorcycle that is lane splitting ahead of you by moving to the right and splitting past the traffic and the other motorcycle along another lane line. Many times, when a driver realizes the first motorcycle is lane splitting, they will move to the outside of their lane, providing the most space for the splitting motorcycle. That driver probably won't see you, and the driver will unintentionally close off the opening you were intending to use to pass. Usually, if you can get the first rider's attention by flashing your lights, or with a light tap on the horn, the other rider will move into a gap in traffic and allow you to pass safely.

As mentioned, limiting distractions is a good idea when riding a motorcycle in any conditions, but can be critical while lane splitting. Taking a few seconds to look down at a GPS, or answering a phone call on a headset, changing a playlist, or any of the many other functions of electronic devices you can attach to your motorcycle will take your eyes and your attention off the road ahead. Those few moments are all it takes for a vehicle ahead to begin a lane change. By the time you see the hazard and react, you may have lost the time and space you needed to avoid a collision.

As the speed of traffic picks up, the congestion generally decreases, creating more space between vehicles. This is another time where you

will need to make adjustments to your speed and lane position. As gaps open up between vehicles, it may be a good idea to move into the open spaces. Select the wheel path that provides the most space between you and the vehicles you are passing, and watch for other drivers who may also want to move into the open lane. As the flow of traffic approaches 35 to 40 mph, or the posted speed limit for the roadway, you will want to decrease lane splitting. At these speeds, your ability to perceive and react to a hazard begins to diminish and the potential for a collision greatly increases.

Another component of safely lane splitting in California is educating automobile drivers that the practice, when done properly, is completely legal. The California Highway Patrol has, along with the California Office of Traffic Safety and the California Motorcycle Safety Program, produced pamphlets and posted safety announcements on their websites to spread the word. Motorcycle enthusiasts need to do our part by riding safely at reasonable speeds, and leaving a reasonable space between us and the other vehicles on the road. Respecting the space of other vehicles on the road will go a long way toward ensuring your safety and promoting a safe partnership between motorcyclists and other road users.

Sergeant David Kinaan retired in 2012 as the supervisor of the California Highway Patrol Academy Motorcycle Training Unit. Sergeant Kinaan was an active member of the CHP for nearly 29 years.

If You Lane Split...

- 1 Keep your eyes up and use your peripheral vision. Look well ahead of you constantly to recognize changing traffic conditions.
- 2 Keep your headlight on. Check your motorcycle to make sure it is operating properly.
- 3 Don't lane split at speeds faster than 10 mph over the speed of the prevailing traffic, and never exceed the speed limit to lane split.
- 4 When the flow of traffic starts slowing and stopping ahead of you, don't be in too much of a hurry to begin lane splitting.
- 5 Only split when there are two or more traffic lanes in one direction.

practices that increase the safety of both motorcyclists and automobile drivers while sharing the road in California.

Motorcycles have been used in California law enforcement for more than 100 years. Motorcycle officers have effectively split lanes to enforce the law, and provide rescue and relief response to multiple incidents on congested roadways throughout California. Many of the best practices, as well as the reasons for splitting traffic, have been developed and passed down by California's motorcycle enforcement officers.

As a young motorcycle cop, I learned many lessons from my training officer that helped me throughout my career. Among them were lessons about lane splitting. He explained to me that lane splitting was safer than stopping behind traffic. While there was the potential for a sideswipe collision while lane splitting, there was equal potential for a rear-end collision when stopped behind traffic.

I put this lesson to use early on in my career. One evening I came to a stop

Your headlight will greatly enhance your chances of being recognized by a driver checking their mirror.

You should not lane split at speeds faster than 10 mph over the speed of the prevailing traffic. You should recognize slowing and stopping traffic well in advance of reaching it, and make necessary adjustments. Generally, on a multi-lane highway, it is safest to split between the two leftmost lanes. Usually, these drivers are the least likely to make lane changes as they are often commuting longer distances.

When traffic starts slowing ahead of you, don't be in a hurry to begin lane splitting. Slow with the traffic and observe while the last-minute lane changers settle into their lane. Then you can safely begin to lane split. Sit up tall in the saddle and keep your eyes looking ahead of you. Use your peripheral vision to maneuver your motorcycle between the vehicles. Be keenly



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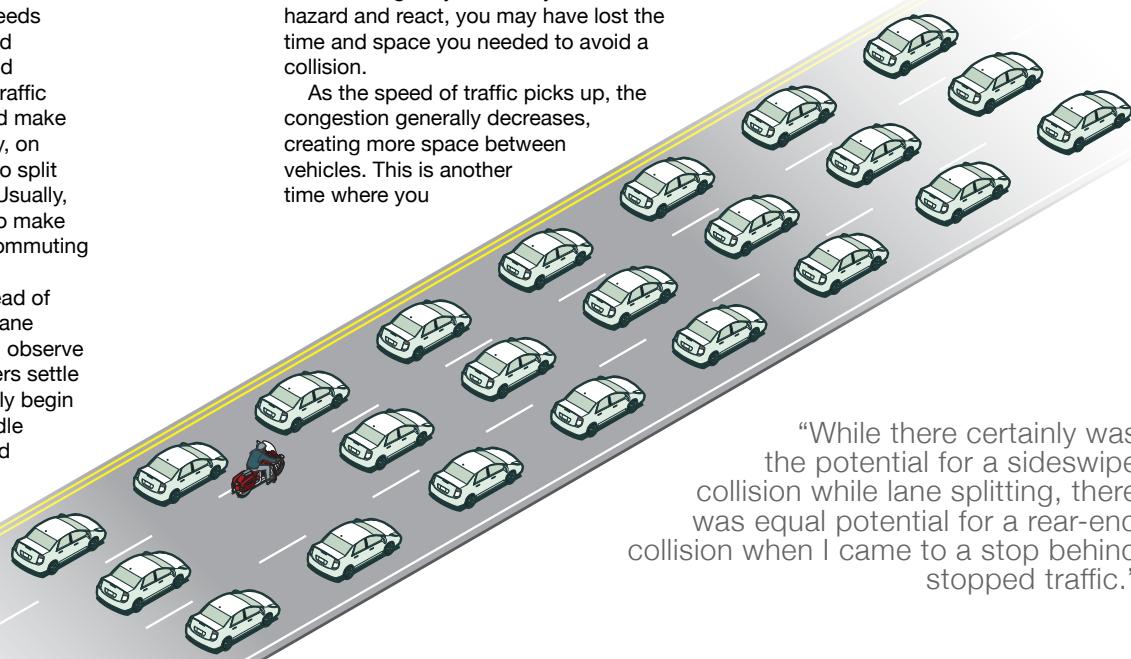
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"While there certainly was the potential for a sideswipe collision while lane splitting, there was equal potential for a rear-end collision when I came to a stop behind stopped traffic."

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