

New Mexico Driver Manual

the vehicle at all times. The law specifies that you must carry a minimum amount of coverage to enable you to pay for damages arising because of motor vehicle accidents.

Minimum Amounts:

\$25,000	Bodily injury to or death of one person in any on accident.
\$50,000	Bodily injury to or death of two or more persons in any one accident.
\$10,000	Injury to or destruction of property of others in any one accident.

Failure to have insurance could result in non-issuance or suspension of your vehicle registration, and surrender of the license plates, as well as possible criminal penalties.

MOTORCYCLES

Passing

Ride in the left portion of the lane at a safe following distance to increase your line of sight and make you more visible. When you are ready to pass:

- Signal and check for oncoming traffic. Use your mirrors and turn your head to look for traffic behind.
- Move into the left lane and accelerate. Select a lane position that doesn't crowd the car you are passing and provides space to avoid hazards in your lane.
- Ride through the blind spot as quickly possible.
- Signal again, and complete mirror and head checks before returning to your original lane.

Remember, passing must be completed within posted speed limits, and only where permitted. Know your signs and road markings.

Cars Alongside

Do not ride next to cars or trucks in other lanes if you do not have to. You might be in the blind spot of a car in the next lane, which could switch into your lane without warning. Cars in the next lane also block your escape if you come upon danger in your own lane. Speed up or drop back to find a place clear of traffic on both sides.

Braking

Your motorcycle has two brakes: one each for the front and rear wheel. Use both of them at the same time. The front brake is more powerful and can provide as much as three-quarters of your total stopping power. The front brake is safe to use if you use it properly. Remember:

- Use both brakes every time you slow or stop. Using only the rear brake for "normal" stops will not permit you to develop the habit or skill of using the front brake properly in an emergency. Squeeze the front brake and press down on the rear. Grabbing at the front brake or jamming down on the rear can cause the brake to lock, resulting in control problems.
- Apply both brakes at the same time. The sooner you apply the front brake, the sooner it will start slowing you down.
- If you know the technique, using both brakes in a turn is possible, although it should be done very carefully. When leaning the motorcycle, some of the traction is used for cornering. Less traction is available for stopping. A skid can occur if you apply too much brake. Also, using the front brake incorrectly on a slippery surface may be hazardous.

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- Some motorcycles have integrated braking systems that link the front and rear brakes together by applying the rear brake pedal. (Consult the owner's manual for detailed explanation on the operation and effective use of these systems.)

Passing Parked Cars

When passing parked cars, stay toward the left of your lane. You can avoid problems caused by doors opening, drivers getting out of cars, or people stepping from between cars. If oncoming traffic is present, it is usually best to remain in the center lane position to maximize your space cushion.

A bigger problem can occur if the driver pulls away from the curb without checking for traffic behind. Even if he does look, he may fail to see you. In either event, the driver might cut into your path. Slow down or change lanes to make room for someone cutting in.

Cars making a sudden U-turn are the most dangerous. They may cut you off entirely, blocking the whole road and leaving you with no place to go. Since you cannot tell what a driver will do, get the driver's attention. Sound your horn and continue with caution.

Lane Sharing

Cars and motorcycles need a full lane to operate safely. Lane sharing is usually prohibited.

Riding between rows of stopped or moving cars in the same lane can leave you vulnerable to the unexpected. A hand could come out of a window; a door could open; a car could turn suddenly.

Discourage lane sharing by others. Keep a center of the lane position whenever drivers might be tempted to squeeze by you. Drivers are most tempted to do this in heavy, bumper-to-bumper traffic, if they want to pass you, when you are preparing to turn at an intersection, or when you are getting in an exit lane or leaving a highway.

Lane Positions

In some ways the size of the motorcycle can work to your advantage your lane position to:

- Increase your ability to see
- Protect you lane from other drivers and allow you to be seen
- Communicate your intentions
- Avoid other's blind spots
- Avoid wind blast from other vehicles
- Avoid surface hazards
- Provide an escape route

Select the appropriate path to maximize your space cushion and make yourself more easily seen by others on the road.

In general, there is no single best position for riders to be seen and to maintain a space cushion around the cycle. No portion of the lane need be avoided, including the center. If hazardous conditions exist on both sides of you, the center of the lane is usually your best choice.

The center of a lane can be oily. It collects the drippings from cars, particularly at intersections. This strip is usually no more than two feet wide. You can operate to the left or right of the grease strip and still be within your traffic lane. Unless the road is wet, the average center strip permits adequate traction to

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ride on safely. Avoid riding on big build-ups of oil and grease that are usually found at very busy intersections or toll booths.

Ride in the portion of the lane where you are most likely to be seen. Depending on the traffic situation, move to the portion of the lane where it will be difficult for other drivers to miss seeing you.

Signals

The signals on a motorcycle are similar to those on a car. However, due to a rider's added vulnerability, signals are even more important. They tell others what you plan to do. Use them anytime you plan to change lanes. Use them even though you think no one else is around. It's the car you don't see that is going to give you the most trouble. Your signal lights also make you easier to spot.

When you enter onto a freeway, drivers approaching from behind are more likely to see your signal blinking and make room for you. Turning your signal light on before each turn reduces confusion and frustration for the traffic around you. Once you turn, make sure your signal is off or a driver may pull directly into your path, think you plan to turn again. Use your signals at every turn so drivers can react accordingly. Do not make them guess what you intend to do.

Helmet Requirements

New Mexico Law requires all motorcycle drivers and passengers under 18 years old to wear a helmet. However, it is recommended that ALL motorcycle drivers and passengers wear a helmet.

Whichever style you choose, you can get the most protection by making sure that the helmet:

- 1) Meets U.S. Department (DOT) standards. Helmets with labels from the American National Standards institute (ANSI) or the Snell Memorial Foundation give you an added assurance of quality;
- 2) Fits snugly, all the way around; and
- 3) Has no obvious defects such as cracks, loose padding or frayed straps.

Whatever helmet you decide on, keep it securely fastened on your head when you ride.

Using Your Mirrors

Traffic conditions can change quickly. Your need to know what is going on behind you can help you make a safe decision about how to handle trouble ahead.

Frequent mirror checks should be part of your normal scanning routine. Make a special point of using your mirrors:

- **When you are stopped at an intersection.** Watch cars coming up from behind. If the driver isn't paying attention, he could be on top of you before he sees you.
- **Before you change lanes.** Make sure no one is about to pass you.
- **Before you slow down.** The driver behind may not expect you to slow, or maybe unsure about where you will slow. For example, you signal a turn and the driver thinks you plan to turn at a distant intersection, rather than at a nearer driveway.

Most motorcycles have rounded (convex) mirrors. These provide a wider view of the road behind than flat mirrors do. They also make cars seem farther away than they really are. If you are not used to convex mirrors, get familiar with them. Practice with your mirrors until you become a good judge of distance. Even then, allow extra distance before you change lanes.

Riding At Night

At night it is harder for you to see and to be seen. To compensate, you should:

- **Reduce your speed.** Ride even slower than you would during the day, particularly on roads you don't know well. This will increase your chances of avoiding a hazard.
- **Increase distance.** Distances are harder to judge at night than during the day. Your eyes rely on shadows and light contrasts to determine how far away an object is and how fast it is coming. These contrasts are missing or distorted under artificial lights at night. Open up a three second following distance and allow more distance to pass and to be passed.
- **Use your high beam.** Get all the light you can. Use your high beam whenever you are not following or meeting a car. Wear reflective materials.

Be flexible about lane position. Change to whatever portion of the lane is best able to help you see, be seen and keep an adequate space cushion.

Keep Your Distance

A close motorcycle group takes up less space on the highway, is easier to see and is less likely to be separated. However, it must be done properly.

Staggered Formation—This is the best way to keep ranks close yet maintain an adequate space cushion. The leader rides in the left side of the lane, while the second rider stays one second behind in the right side of the lane.

A third rider maintains in the left position, two seconds behind the first rider. The fourth rider would keep a two second distance behind the second rider. This formation keeps the group close and permits each rider a safe distance from others ahead, behind and to the sides.

Passing in Formation—Riders in a staggered formation should pass one at a time. First the lead rider should pull out and pass when it is safe after passing, the leader should return to the left position and continue riding at passing speed to open room for the next rider.

When the first rider passes safely, the second rider should move up to the left position and watch for a safe chance to pass. After passing, this rider should return to the right position and open up room for the next rider.

Some people suggest that the leader should move to the right side after passing a vehicle. This is not a good idea. It encourages the second rider to pass and cut back in before there is a large enough space cushion in front of the passed vehicle. It is simpler and safer to wait until there is enough room ahead of the passed vehicle to allow each rider to move into the same position held before the pass.

Single-File Formation—It is best to move into a single-file formation when riding curves, turning, entering or leaving a highway.

Animals

Motorcycles seem to attract dogs. If you are chased, shift down and approach the animal slowly. As you approach it, speed up and leave the animal behind. Do not kick at the animal. Keep control of your motorcycle, and look to where you want to go.

Intersections

The greatest potential for conflict between you and other traffic is at intersections. An intersection can be in the middle of an urban area or at a driveway on a residential street - anywhere traffic may cross your path of travel. Over half of motorcycle/car collisions are caused by drivers entering a rider's right-of-way.

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Oncoming cars that turn left in front of you, and cars on side streets that pull into your lane are the two biggest dangers.

There are no guarantees that others see you. Never count on "eye contact" as a sign that a driver will yield. Too often, a driver looks right at a motorcyclist and still fails to "see" him. The only eyes that you can count on are your own. If a car can enter your path, assume that it will.

Increase your chances of being seen at intersections. Ride with your headlight on in a lane position that provides the best view of oncoming traffic. Provide a space cushion around the motorcycle that permits you to take evasive action.

As you approach the intersection, select a lane position to increase your visibility to the driver. Cover the clutch and both brakes to reduce reaction time.

Reduce your speed. After entering the intersection, move away from oncoming vehicles preparing to turn. Do not change speed or position radically. The driver might think you are preparing to turn.

Blind Intersections

If you have a stop sign or stoplight, stop there first. Then edge forward and stop again, just short of where the cross-traffic lane meets your lane. From that position, lean your body forward and look around buildings, parked cars, or bushes to see if anything is coming. Just make sure your front wheel stays out of the cross lane of travel while you're looking.

Wobble

A "wobble" occurs when the front wheel and handlebars suddenly start to shake from side to side at any speed. Most wobbles can be traced to improper loading, unsuitable accessories, or incorrect tire pressure.

Trying to "accelerate out of a wobble" will only make the cycle more unstable. Instead:

- Grip the handlebars firmly, but don't fight the wobble
- Close the throttle gradually to slow the motorcycle. Do not apply the brakes; braking could make the wobble worse
- Move your weight as far forward and down as possible
- Pull off the road as soon as you can to fix the problem

Being Passed

When you are being passed from behind or by an oncoming vehicle, stay in the center portion of your lane. Riding any closer to them could put you in a hazardous situation. Be aware of these dangers:

- **Other vehicles**—A slight mistake by you or the passing driver could cause a sideswipe.
- **Extended mirrors**—Some drivers forget that their mirrors hang out farther than their fenders.
- **Objects thrown from windows**—Even if the driver knows you are there, a passenger may not see you and might toss something on you or the road ahead of you.
- **Blast of wind from larger vehicles**—They can affect your control. You have more room for error if you are in the middle portion when hit by this blast than if you are on either side of the lane.

Do not move into the portion of the lane farthest from the passing vehicle. It might invite the other driver to cut back into your lane too early.

For further information about motorcycle training and safety, please contact:

Motorcycle Safety Foundation

1-877-667-8880

www.msf-usa.org