

IPSGA

IN THE SECOND INSTALMENT OF OUR NEW SERIES, WE LOOK AT THE IAM'S SYSTEM OF DRIVING THAT STRUCTURES DECISIONS IN A SEQUENCE: INFORMATION, POSITION, SPEED, GEAR AND ACCELERATION (IPSGA). OUR PREVIOUS ISSUE (SPRING 2011) FOCUSED ON INFORMATION AND HERE IS THE NEXT PHASE – POSITION

The first element is always information – you cannot make a decision about where to position yourself without knowing where you want to be. So, forward observation (as well as observing what is behind) is the first key to good positioning. Information keeps running through this all the time – you need to constantly monitor what's happening, visually, audibly and physically.

The decision is not really one about a single position, but one about a series of positions through a hazard or series of hazards – a line or course. It starts, inevitably, with where you are now and develops from there: approaching a right-hand turn into a side road, for example, would develop a line that moves out towards the centre of the road, then turns through the junction itself, and moves away along the side road. This 'whole line' is what the position phase is there to deal with.

There is a series of conventional things that control positioning – the principle of positioning so that you can see and be seen by others, following distance from the vehicle in front, and road lane

markings for starters. Then there is having space between you and other road users, maintaining as smooth (or straight) a path as the circumstances make sensible, and the message your position gives to other road users. This is not the whole list, and each element interacts with the next. So, while you are thinking about following distance and whether you can see round the vehicle in front, while, at the same time, spotting the lane markings and working out which lane is the one you need, you are also avoiding the potholes for good measure.

PLAN AHEAD AND NOT JUST LEFT

The earlier you think about your intended position, the easier it is likely to be to achieve it. If you are in town traffic, this gives you longer to deal with the other drivers to get there. If on a country road, it allows you to have a smoother line with all the benefits that can offer.

Your position also governs your speed – that's why they come in that order in the system. An early position plan allows for a more planned speed phase to the system as well, allowing safety,

smoothness and all their benefits to come to the fore.

Positioning for view or to be seen (essentially the same thing) is where the greatest controversy tends to develop. On left-hand bends, this does mean sitting out so that you can see round the bend – and be seen by those approaching from the other direction. However, it does interact with other things involved in positioning, and if there is traffic coming the other way, you should 'surrender' some positioning to have a safe space between you and the oncoming traffic. That may, of course, mean that you also need to reduce speed to match the altered amount of vision available. Positioning for view is also a big issue when following another vehicle (easiest to picture if you think of it as a bus or a tipper lorry) along the road. If there are left-hand bends, you will sometimes gain view ahead of it or be looking along its left-hand side into a left-hand bend – so holding back far enough to let you see there is a positioning issue is well worth some attention.

There are times when altering position will not gain you any real advantage. If you already have a lengthy view, or so much relative to your speed that increasing it is of no real value, then there is most likely no advantage to be gained by positioning. So, in towns, there is usually no point in substantial positioning for bends. There can be for the other hazards, however – to create space between yourself and other traffic, including cyclists, of course. Likewise, having room between you and pedestrians is an important safety measure. Positioning in town can also be used to allow you a better view between parked vehicles, so that you can see any activity between them. For motorcyclists (and cyclists), positioning when filtering is complex, but the principle that having space from the traffic is a good thing is a sound one.

EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT

Stereotypically, for a right turn you position yourself by the white line before it. For a right-hand bend, however, you position yourself to the left, to gain maximum vision around it. Why the difference? The right turn is really governed by the idea of lanes of traffic – it allows other road users to pass you on your left, while you wait for a break in the oncoming traffic. The bend, however, is usually a situation in which you can be a bit more self-centred in where you place yourself on the road. Following the principle of how much difference the presence of other traffic can make, for a roundabout in traffic you follow the lanes marked on the road, because that helps other drivers understand where you are

going. Without another road user in sight, the straightest line becomes preferable with all the advantages it has – but the observation is important to the decision. 'Nothing about? Straighten it out' is a phrase to consider. Straight lines are always attractive – but be careful about straightening a line where it will confuse others, or where you cannot see properly into a curve which might hide a person, or an entrance that, in turn, has another road user in it. You must know it is safe, not just think it is.

Being in a good position will allow you more information, or better-quality information (for example, it is easier to judge the length of the gap between the two vehicles ahead of you if you can see into the gap, rather than from behind the rear vehicle). This is part of the reason for the overtaking decision being made so often after a move to the right-hand side of the road to make an assessment. Being in a poor position can leave you with poor information and reduce your options, reduce your safety simply by putting you too close to something else, or, if manoeuvring, leave you having to make an extra manoeuvre.

Good positioning is a really good base from which to manage the next step – the decision about the speed you travel at. Thinking about positioning is a vital element of advanced driving.

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