

BMMC Rider Training

LANE-SPLITTING

(Also known as filtering forward, lane-sharing, white line riding)

I. What is it?...

...It's riding your motorcycle in between lanes of stopped or slow-moving vehicle traffic.



Filtering forward in stopped or extremely slow traffic requires very slow speed as well as awareness that when you're in a 'door zone', vehicle doors may unexpectedly open. Also, unexpected vehicle lane changes may occur with little warning. Buses and semi-trailers require

extreme care, as the motorcyclist may be nearly invisible to the drivers who may not expect someone to be filtering forward.

II. Why do it?

As it's practiced in California, lane-sharing offers a way to reduce congestion by creating an additional lane for motorcyclists to use when traffic is stopped or slow moving. It conserves energy in two ways. First, it keeps the motorcyclist and other traffic, to a lesser degree, moving. A moving vehicle is more energy efficient than a stopped vehicle plus the commute time is reduced, further reducing energy use. Second, it promotes the motorcycle as an alternative form of transportation.

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One barrier to widespread adoption of motorcycles as commuter transportation in the US is that there's no real advantage to it. In most places, two-wheeled transport offers *few advantages* over the four-wheeled kind. That's partly because, unlike almost every other country in the world, except for California, the practice of "lane-splitting" is outlawed in the U.S. That means that in every state

(except California), motorcyclists have to bump along at the maddeningly slow pace of traffic-snarled trucks and automobiles, even though there is *little empirical evidence* that the practice of lane-splitting is particularly dangerous (if done in a safe and reasonable manner).

Proponents of lane-splitting state that lane-splitting improves motorcycle safety by reducing rear end crashes. Lane-splitting supporters also state that the US DOT database shows that fatalities from rear end collisions into motorcycles are 30% lower in California than in Florida or Texas, states with similar riding seasons and populations but which do not lane-split.

The majority of the car-driving public, even in California, don't like the idea of lane-sharing. According to most surveys, the main reason is jealousy: "If I have to be stuck in this traffic, then so should you." The "it looks dangerous" argument seems hollow at best and bogus at worst, as car drivers as a whole show little concern or regard for the safety of motorcyclists. Luckily for Californians, law enforcement is firmly on the side of the lane-splitting argument because it allows motor officers greater mobility in high-density traffic areas.

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III. Is it legal?

Lane-splitting is controversial in the US, and is sometimes an issue in other countries. Questions such as *is it legal, should it be legal, and should it be practiced regardless of legality* abound in the US? Bills to legalize lane-splitting have been introduced in numerous other state legislatures for over twenty years and, so far, none have been enacted.



The Arizona legislature has introduced a bill that will legalize, for a one-year probationary period beginning January 1, 2011, lane-splitting in stopped traffic. It will only apply in counties with populations greater than 2 million (which is

just Maricopa County with the Phoenix-Glendale-Scottsdale megalopolis). The bill sailed through the Transportation committee and the House Rules committee, and has been read to the State Senate as well. It's looking like there is little opposition to the bill so far. Those who lean to the left should like the message of encouraging the lower environmental impact of motorcycle transportation, and those on the right should appreciate the individual rights angle.

IV. Debating the Pros and Cons

Proponents state that the practice relieves congestion by removing commuters from cars and gets them to use the unused roadway space between the cars.

Lane-splitting is not recommended for beginning motorcyclists, and is very risky for those who have never done it in a jurisdiction

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where it is allowed. Similarly, for drivers new to places where it is done, it can be shocking and frightening. Potentially, lane-splitting can lead to road rage on the part of drivers. However, deliberate "hostile action" by a motorist against a motorcycle rider is a rare accident cause. That said, I personally witnessed a pickup driver intentionally opening his door into the path of a rider lane-splitting, severely injuring him as he went down under the car next to him. I was right behind the pickup and we were only doing 5-10mph at the time. The driver was arrested on the spot for malicious intent to do harm and his truck was impounded.

Another consideration is that lane-splitting can possibly leave the rider legally responsible. Even in California, it is legal only if done safely, and *safely* is always very much a judgment call. The mere



fact that an accident happened while a rider was lane-splitting is very strong evidence that on that occasion it wasn't safe to do so. If you've been involved in an accident you will have a hard time convincing an insurance adjuster that the accident was not completely your fault.

California's DMV handbook for motorcycles advises significant caution regarding lane-splitting: "Cars and motorcycles each need a full lane to operate safely. Lane sharing is **not** safe. Riding between rows of stopped or moving cars in the same lane can leave you vulnerable. A car could turn suddenly or change lanes, a door could open, or a hand could come out of a window."

The Bottom Line is that you, the rider, must weigh the advantages of lane-splitting to save time against the disadvantages of increased vulnerability while doing so.

Hope this helps.