

Rider Education Report

Evolution is a wondrous thing. Every living organism was once something different, and because of random events and learned behavior, has become what it is now. In the animal kingdom, there are those that hunt, and those that are hunted. Evolution has yielded physical and mental abilities that help both in their quest for survival.

One of the key differences between predator and prey is the location of the animals' eyes. Hunters like bears and wolves have eyes that are set to look forward. Peripheral vision is available, but the total window from which their brain sees the world is not more than 180 degrees wide. They must turn their head to get a clear and detailed picture of what is to the sides and behind them. But with both eyes focused forward, these animals can very capably target their next meal. Hunted animals like deer and squirrels have their eyes set looking more to each side of their head. Along with peripheral vision, they have a window of over 300 degrees of view the world. They barely need to turn their head at all to see everything around them. They can easily notice another animal's movements and get a head start on their escape from becoming the next meal.

Human beings have eyes placed like a hunter. As motorcyclists, this physical trait offers us both advantages and disadvantages. Like the wolf, we can focus ahead and find at great distance any object or pitfall that may be in our path. Uniquely, at the same time as we are hunting for obstacles ahead, we are also the hunted. As we travel faster, we need to look farther forward so we can react in time to stay alive. But the farther forward we look, the narrower our window to the world becomes. We must move our eyes and our heads up and down, side to side, and remember to check our mirrors, to get a complete picture of the dangers that lie in wait to spoil our day.

This time of year, we have perhaps the greatest number of animals, people, obstacles, and events that are hunting us. Late September and early October is prime time for the deer rut. Normally shy, these animals are driven to seek each other to mate, and will often choose the shortest route over the safest one to get where they want to go. Likewise, human youth are going back to school with new schedules and new relationships that have them distracted while they travel the same streets we are riding. Like the deer, they tend to throw caution aside to get where they want to go. Falling leaves become slick and hazardous when they land on the roadway, especially in the rain. Walnuts and hedge apples are very slick and hazardous obstacles, and one should use extreme caution when they are sighted on the road, as more may fall at any moment. And road crews working to wrap up their summer projects are now applying the new asphalt surface to the highway. The first rain after paving is the most dangerous time as any lightweight oils mixed into the asphalt to keep it pliable will quickly rise to the surface.

Be safe and vigilant this Fall. Evolve your riding style. Be a hunter, but remember you are being hunted too.

Richard Artmayer
KY State Educator