

3PointTurn – Episode 9: Share The Road

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You're listening to 3PointTurn, a driver safety podcast presented by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. In promotion of a safer Florida, FLHSMV offers this educational series as a supplemental resource to the Florida Driver License Handbook. For more information on the topics presented in this podcast, please visit FLHSMV.gov.

On this episode, the FLHSMV team talks about how to safely share the road with commercial motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles.

Derek Perez:

Welcome to 3PointTurn. I'm your host, Derek Perez. For our final four episodes, I'm joined by Major Chris Blackmon, a 30-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and FHP's Troop H commander. Good to meet you.

Major Chris Blackmon:

You, too, Derek.

Derek Perez:

For this episode of 3PointTurn, we're going to discover, debate, and drive home a few points about sharing the road with a couple different types of vehicles. Ready to do this?

Major Chris Blackmon:

Where are the donuts?

Derek Perez:

I imagine that you like donuts, friend.

Major Chris Blackmon:

I was bribed and told if I appeared here I would be paid with donuts, so ...

Derek Perez:

I'll speak to the producers.

Major Chris Blackmon:

Looking for my dozen, please. Krispy Kreme preferred, thanks.

Derek Perez:

Man, this whole thing feels like a setup. It feels like entrapment, actually. How about we just talk about commercial vehicles and how to share the road with them? Major, what should our listeners know the most about CMVs or what most people know them as, 18-wheelers or semis?

Major Chris Blackmon:

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Biggest thing about the semis is they're very crucial to the economy and it's a critical infrastructure source for the state. You can see any time on any interstates here in Tallahassee, on I-10 or I-75, the Florida turnpike, I-95, there's a lot of commercial traffic traveling up and down the interstates. And that is commerce that's brought to the stores and has goods and stuff we purchase every day, so the critical infrastructure source of CMV vehicles is extremely important to our economy.

When you see a CMV, the best thing I think you need to think about is the no-zone, which is the ... Basically, there's four blind spots where a truck driver may or may not see the driver, despite the large mirrors. Those zones are directly in front and directly behind the vehicle. And if you're behind them like that and tucked in, you're blocked from view. Best purpose there to be ... is to be seen by the commercial vehicles and not tuck in behind them. Let the trucker see you. Often, people come up quickly on semis from behind at a high rate of speed. They'll tuck up behind him like they're in NASCAR draft. But they pull in behind them, then they make their attempt to pass. But a truck driver needs to see you coming.

So, you're going to pass and the biggest thing is, is when you do pass, safely move back into the lane in front of them. Don't cut back in front of them because you have 80,000 pounds of steel moving. You can maybe stop your car quickly, but 80,000 pounds of a vehicle trying to stop on a dime is not going to happen. You could make a decision so costly it could cost you your life.

Derek Perez:

That's a lot of important and crucial information. Thank you, Major. Just to recap for our listeners, it sounds like we need to treat CMVs with respect because they're absolutely critical to our infrastructure. You've got to remember what we call the no-zone, basically the four blind spots where a truck driver may not see your vehicle, despite its large mirrors. The zones directly in front, directly behind where you are blocked from view, and on either side of the vehicle at angles where you can't be seen by mirrors.

I heard you say that you must let truckers see you and I imagine that's incredibly crucial to prevent everything from crashes to accidentally cutting someone off. And last but not least, speaking of cutting someone off, giving them space and the right-of-way. It may be frustrating on a long highway journey to get stuck behind one or more of these CMVs, but giving them a wide berth and making sure they see you and when you pull back in, not to cut them off. Does that sound right, sir?

Major Chris Blackmon:

Absolutely. I think you should give the utmost courtesy to them because these men and women are driving vehicles for long hours, confined to the driver's cabin. I'm sure they're under stress, as well. But nothing that we do is worth dying for on the road. If we show a little courtesy to each other, slow down, in time those semis will pass each other and make space for you. Then you can safely pass them and continue on your journey. I believe giving the CMVs the utmost respect and courtesy on the roadway is important to a safer Florida.

Derek Perez:

Thank you. And very poignant information. It comes to mind that recently a teen driver using her phone while driving drifted onto the shoulder, over-corrected to get back on the interstate and then drove into a semi's wheels. It caused the semi to lose control, go off the road and flip over. The truck driver was killed. We mention this because poor decisions can have major consequences on the road. And like you said, we should show them the utmost respect. Truck drivers take a lot of flak, but it's a hard job. Imagine driving all day, every day, in that cab. As a motorist, you can make a truck driver's day a lot easier just by being cautious and courteous.

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On that note, we're going to take a quick break and jump right back in with a look at two-wheeled vehicles.

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I drive a commercial motor vehicle that weighs 80,000 pounds. When you pass me on my right, I can't see you. We both have loved ones at home, so do us both a favor. Stay out of my blind spots and only pass me on the left. The Florida Highway Patrol reminds you to share the road with bicycles, motorcycles and commercial vehicles. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Derek Perez:

When we talk about sharing the road, motorists have no trouble seeing huge tractor trailers. What they have a much harder time with is seeing small, two-wheeled vehicles. Ever driven a motorcycle, Major Blackmon?

Major Chris Blackmon:

I did. As a kid, we had some friends that had dirt bikes. We road those in the woods and had a good time with them. It's a good recreational tool. Years ago, back in the mid-90s, I put in for our motorcycle squad position in Orlando and went out and did the driver's trial where you jump on the big Harley and ride around. Got on it and realized that it was too much machine for me and I pulled back up, put the kickstand down and told the sergeant that ran the squad ... I said, "This is not for me. I need to be around four wheels, not two." So, I parked it and stepped aside.

But I worked hand-in-hand with our motorcycle squad. We have a unit in Orlando – sergeant and nine troopers that ride motors. And worked hand-in-hand with them and there's all kind of issues with the motorcycles. A lot of people love motorcycles and I get it and I understand. However, I think the big theory behind that is look twice. When you're starting to pull out, look twice, see if you see a motorcycle come because most of them have just one headlight. And during the daytime, it is visible but not nearly as visible as it would be at night.

Derek Perez:

Let me just clarify. Today, we're not necessarily talking about the aspects of owning and driving a motorcycle, although you can get that testing done and get a motorcycle endorsement. What we're talking about is being a driver on a road surrounded by motorcyclists. Major, from having motorcycle officers under your leadership, what are some of the biggest fears about getting on a motorcycle.

Major Chris Blackmon:

Biggest fears, speaking to our guys that ride them every day ... that's their job. A lot of the troopers you see are in black and tan Chargers, and Tahoes, Explorers, riding around. Then we got our guys on two-wheels and girls that ride the two-wheel motorcycles. They're working every day. It's a very dangerous climate. One thing is visibility – just being seen by the public when they're out there working. Motorcyclists, they worry that the cars won't see them. Our guys are constantly in that battle because they're trying to do speed enforcement and stuff on the expressways and stuff, and interstates in

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Central Florida, where I come from. And their problem is visibility, being seen, because it's a very, very small vehicle compared to a car or semi or even a pickup truck.

When you're on the road, take the extra time to spot a motorcycle. Look for them. That's why I said look twice before you make your turns. Before you pull out of a restaurant or a business, look twice. Make sure a motorcycle's not coming because they are not as easy to see as a passenger car. At nighttime, they're running with one light. You'll see a lot now are a lot brighter than what they used to be because they're using LED lights. And motorcycles can come to a very quick stop compared to passenger cars and commercial motor vehicles.

Derek Perez:

Well, it sounds like we need to be extra careful with our two-wheeled motorcyclists on the road. As you said, they worry that they won't be seen. And although it's pretty easy to spot a pack of Harleys on the weekend driving down the road in a staggered position within a lane, it's also equally difficult to encounter a single motorcyclist. And just the wind from your passing vehicle can affect them as they drive. Giving them a wide birth and making sure you take a little extra time to spot them is always going to be appreciated.

To reiterate, one light at night is what you will see. Don't presume that one illuminated headlight coming towards you is a motorcycle. Sometimes it's a car with a headlight out. By the same token, you can move your car to the right side of the lane to allow a little extra space just in case. And as you said, Major Blackmon, those motorcycles can stop quick and they can take off just as quickly. It's important to give at least a four second buffer if you're following a motorcycle so that you don't accidentally rear-end it if it slows down or stops suddenly.

Well, when we come back, we'll talk about bicycles and wrap up this conversation on sharing the road.

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All right. Here are the rules to say safe on the road. Motorcyclists, be seen. Wear bright colors and reflective gear and use front and rear lights at night. Drivers, watch out for motorcyclists and give them extra room. Everyone, share the road and pay attention. Now, head to your respective vehicles and let's all arrive alive. The Florida Highway Patrol reminds you to share the road with bicycles, motorcycles and commercial vehicles. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Derek Perez:

Welcome back to 3PointTurn, where we're discussing how to share the road with various vehicles. Sticking with two wheels, drivers should also share the road with bicyclists. This topic does start to hit some gray areas because bicyclists also have access to sidewalks. I know there can be confusion on this, but what do we most need our new drivers to understand about operating on roads where bicyclists also travel?

Major Chris Blackmon:

I think the biggest thing with them is patience, first and foremost. When you encounter a bicycle, a lot of times the people are in a hurry. Sometimes we don't know why we're in a hurry, but we're always in a hurry. It's a go, go, go society. So, you pull up in a hurry on ... I'm just going to use some examples over when I worked in Central Florida, again, as a trooper. We had a bicyclist out on a Saturday ride and it

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was basically a bicycle team and they were riding two abreast and there was probably 200 bikes in this pack. They're riding and a young driver, she came up on the pack and slowed down, then became very impatient and chose to make a pass around roughly 200 bicycles. So, she pulled out and started to proceed in her route, but she was passing on a no passing zone; double yellow line.

As she started out and started making it around the pack, a vehicle came southbound on her. So, it's now going to be a head-on collision. The inexperienced driver and new driver ... she was 16 ... she tucked back into the lane and what did she do? She took out 10 bicycles. They're piled up, so we had 10 that she actually struck and put on the shoulder that were injured. And if you've ever seen any of them in the races when they're all stacked up, what happens? It's an accordion. They all stack up behind, they crash, they fall over. Then, of course, the bicyclists became irate at the driver and we had to get there and calm down the corral and said, "Listen, it's a brand-new driver."

However, just because she was new, she made a mistake, but that could be any of us that are impatient. We've got to give them room. You can't blow by them. You have to give them three feet of distance because if not, when you go by the velocity and the vortex created by your car with the wind could suck them into the roadway, could pull them into your car or could push them off the road.

Derek Perez:

I heard you say that we should pay attention to bikes, but bicycles on the road should also follow the same rules as motorists. Is that correct?

Major Chris Blackmon:

Absolutely. They are bound by law to the same motor rules and vehicle rules and laws that the cars are.

Derek Perez:

As a motorist, bicycles on a road do have the right to be there. They are supposed to follow the same rules of the road but there are some differences. Often, they can stop at an intersection then proceed when it's safe to pass. If you're behind a bike in a left turn lane, you can't just race around it when the light turns green; it has priority. Priority also applies at four-way stops and other tie-breaking scenarios involving right of way. We should also watch for pedestrian bicycles. Bicycles can also use the sidewalk. When approaching an intersection to stop, make sure you look at the crosswalk or other walking areas for something that's moving faster than a person walking. It just might be a bicycle.

Bicyclists in collisions with cars don't often live. While bicyclists are tasked with not driving into the path of cars, motorists are likewise tasked with being extra cautious to prevent a crash with a bike. When you get to an intersection, take an extra moment to spot bikes, pedestrians, et cetera. Don't blow by them on the open road and don't nudge them with your car. The results of a crash with a bicyclist will mostly be worse than a car and as a result, the potential for manslaughter charges can be mandated. Sounds like it's always best to just give bicyclists space and to remember to have patience.

Well, that's it for this episode. However, we have three more episodes together, Major. I really enjoyed your company and your input. Let's do this again.

Major Chris Blackmon:

Yeah, I've enjoyed this. I hope the listeners have enjoyed the feedback we've given you and have gained some knowledge about the roadway. And all in all, let's just try to make just a safer Florida and make everybody safer so we can all get home and arrive alive.

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Derek Perez:

That's just great advice. Well, we're not done with 3PointTurn yet. Make sure you tune in for more safety discussions. Until next time, drive safe, Florida.

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On the next episode of 3PointTurn, the FLHSMV team discusses safe driving behavior in school, crossing and construction zones.

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