

What NOT to (or what you should) say to a Police Officer!

Sooooo, you are speeding along and you get pulled over. What do you say? Before I give you the answer, I am not advocating doing anything wrong, taking unnecessary risks or trying to argue the fact that you did anything wrong or unsafe. I am just giving you some simple advice, and in doing so, I hope you think about what and why you chose to do what you got pulled over for.

So let's start by analyzing what you were doing and why. Yes, this will bring you to the answer that you should be giving the fine infallible Officer who kindly removed you from a potentially dangerous situation. Let us take speeding as an example, since almost everyone I have ridden with, know and have heard about, has done this. So you were speeding along I-680 South, cruising through the 24 interchange and flying through the Caldecot tunnel. On the other side of the tunnel, increasing speed down the hill toward downtown Oakland, you get the abrupt awakening of bright lights in your mirror, quickly followed by a quick burst on a siren. You yield, as required by law, for an emergency vehicle, only to find that you have been selected from the crowd to prove your ability to handle a dangerous weapon (yes the motorcycle you are on).

As you exit Broadway, down the ramp to a safe location, you start to think of an excuse. Mistake number three. Yes number three, the first mistake was to be speeding, the second was getting caught. I will let you in on a secret. Most every police officer, including the rookies, have probably heard almost every excuse, so lying will do you no good. AND if you aren't lying and you said "I didn't realize I was going that fast!" DING! A winner, speeding AND not paying attention. You get a ticket. How about "I was only going the speed of traffic!" Or, "I wasn't going as fast as everyone else, why did you pull me over?" For starters, the speed of traffic is no excuse if it is over the posted limit and going slower than everyone else, over the posted limit is speeding. Oooh, I hear Bruce saying "Ride your own ride!" Yes, this counts even if you are by yourself. If you are uncomfortable in the traffic situation, get yourself off the freeway. I digress...

Okay, so I told you what not to say. No lies, no silly excuses. So what do you say? In most cases you are going to be stuck with a ticket. Do NOT say sorry or thank you (unless you get off with a warning). We all know "I'm sorry, it won't happen again" is a lie. And yes, so the Police Officer. So when an Officer asks "Do you know why I stopped you?" If you answer "Yes, I was riding a little faster than the speed of traffic." Or "Although riding slower than traffic, I was still speeding." Okay you may still get the ticket, but what this says to the Officer is that you were aware of your surroundings. Thereby acknowledging more than most, and probably getting the Officer thinking you may know what you are doing, even while violating a speed law. Honesty is the best policy. Make it short and as succinct as possible. You don't want to be there an most Police Officers don't want to be standing on the side of the road either.

I am sure that now you are thinking "Well that was dumb, tell the truth and still get a ticket?" Well duh, you broke the law. There is a point to this however. What I want you to do is be aware of what is going on and your surroundings. Be able to articulate what you are doing while you are doing it and most likely you will be more aware of what is going on around you. I'm not just talking about your actions, but what was happening around you that made you decide what you were doing was safe.

Here is why. Not everything done against the law is unsafe, nor is everything done legally, safe. However, the Officer can not be inside your head when (s)he sees you breaking the law or doing something "unsafe". This is why sharing lanes in California is neither legal nor illegal. It is at the Officers discretion whether you are acting in a **safe and prudent manner**. If you can articulate what you are doing, it is reasonable to assume that you were thinking about what you were doing. Not just because you saw an opening and went for it! Why do most accidents happen within 5 miles of the home. Because it becomes so routine, people stop paying attention. They probably could not describe the woman (or even saw her) walking her dog a block away from their house. They turn left into their driveway, with you on the motorcycle coming down the street or not. They

don't see you because they can no longer articulate what and why they are making decisions. It's just a routine.

I will close with two examples of the same situation:

Here is what the Police Officer saw -- A motorcycle rider came out of a side street traveling West, entering with traffic going North, crossing three lanes, entering the West bound left turn lane. The motorcyclist did not slow for the red light, turned left behind a vehicle coming down the hill at a relatively blind and very dangerous intersection. At the beginning of the turn, the rider looked back, acknowledged the Motor Officer and continued through the red light West bound. When the Police officer followed down the street after the Motorcyclist. The Motorcycle was stopped at the side of the road, the rider was off and waiting with Driver License in hand.

Simple case of failing to stop for a red light on a left turn. The officer asks "What in the world were you thinking when you did that?"

Answer number one:

I ride this road every day. The light does not change for motorcycles and I didn't feel like waiting!

Answer number two:

Rider: I have been riding this same route since September of last year, twice a day to drop off and pick up my child from school, and the light does not change when a motorcycle stops at the light. I have waited upwards of 15 minutes. So unless there is a car behind me I have to run the red light.

Officer: I would have let that fly, if you had stopped first. This is a dangerous intersection and cars go way too fast down that hill to begin with.

Rider: I would have stopped, but as I approached the intersection I saw that the truck pulling the boat was the last vehicle coming down the hill and there was a white car coming from the side street. If I waited for that car, then other traffic would probably start coming down the hill and I may have to wait for some time. I saw that it was safe so I took the opportunity.

Officer: I saw you looked back and saw me, why didn't you stop then?

Rider: When I saw you I felt I had already committed to the turn and trying to stop in the intersection would not have been safe.

This is a real life example, and the outcome (this time) was that the Police Officer did not process the ticket after verifying that the light did, in fact, not trip for a motorcycle.

Again, I am not advocating you do anything unsafe, illegal or stupid. I am just saying that even though you may or may not get a ticket, if you were able to articulate what you did and why, you were probably being safe. Minimally you were thinking through the situation. The key here is think through your options, be aware of your surroundings and make decisions based on the wealth of information presented to you. It is your life you save.

I would like to thank the rider who let me use their story as an example. Name withheld.

