

California Motorcycle License Skills Test

by Stephen Green
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The purpose of this document is to explain the California motorcycle license skills test that is administered to those individuals applying for a motorcycle license who are over 18 and already have a Class C license. I am providing this information because I could not find a decent description of the test or the dimensions of the test pattern anywhere on the web. I felt that it was important to post this information for all to use in chalking out your own pattern to practice on.

In all my worldly wisdom, I assumed that when I read the below text on the DMV's website that I would be given a route to ride my bike on city streets and the evaluator would follow me in a car and observe my turning, signaling and adherence to all of the items in the driver's handbook; much the same that the driving test for a Class C license is. I was sadly mistaken. When the evaluator led me over to the test pattern on my '06 Harley Sportster, I just about had a heart attack. I have a pretty good sized bike and this test pattern looked like it was designed for bicycles and scooters. LOL. For all of you who plan to take this test, please read this document so that you will be prepared.

For those of you over the age of 18, there are two ways that you may obtain a motorcycle license. Both of the below methods require that you also take the written test.

1. Take the MSF course and present the certificate to the DMV counter. If you present this certificate, you will not be required to take the on-cycle test.
2. If you don't want to take the MSF course, you can elect to have the DMV administer an on-cycle skills test.

Before I get describe the on-cycle skills test and the test pattern, here is some information copied directly from the DMV's website on 4/15/06: There are two classes of motorcycle licenses, Class M1 and Class M2.

- With a Class M1, you can operate any 2- wheel motorcycle and any motorized vehicle in Class M2.
- With a Class M2, you can only operate any motorized bicycle or moped or any bicycle with an attached motor. Effective January 1, 2006, you may operate a motorized scooter with a Class M1 or M2 driver license. Prior to January 1, 2006, you must have a Class C or higher driver license to operate a motorized scooter.

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A motorized scooter is defined as: A two-wheeled "device" powered by a motor with a floorboard that is designed to stand on when riding. The scooter may also have a driver 's seat.

Refer to the Motorcycle Driver Handbook for more information.

To apply for a motorcycle Class M1 or M2 permit, you will need to:

- Visit a DMV office (make an appointment for faster service)
- Complete application form DL 44 (An original DL 44 form must be submitted. Copies will not be accepted.)
- Give a thumb print
- Have your picture taken
- Pay the application fee
- Pass a vision exam
- Pass a traffic laws and signs test. You have three chances to pass the test.

Note: To allow you sufficient time for testing DMV will not be administering written or audio exams after 4:30 p.m.

After studying both the California Driver and the Motorcycle Handbooks, call your local DMV to schedule your appointment for the traffic laws and sign test.

After completing the requirements, you will be issued an instruction permit to allow you to practice driving a motorcycle. You may not drive at night, on the freeway, or have any passengers with you.

To apply for your motorcycle Class M1 or M2 license, you must do one of the following:

If you are under 21, you must complete a motorcycle rider training course given by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and provide a certificate of Completion of Motorcycle Training (DL 389) to DMV to be issued your license. You will not be required to take the motorcycle driving test at DMV if you currently have a California Drivers License.

If you are over 21, you may either choose to complete the course by CHP and provide the certificate OR schedule an appointment at DMV to take the driving test. You have three chances to pass the test.

For information about the CHP training course, please call 1-877-743-3411 or visit www.ca-msp.org.

After you have submitted your CHP certificate or passed your driving test, you will be issued an interim license valid for 60 days until you receive your new photo license in the mail. Double check your address before you leave DMV and tell the DMV representative if you have moved or if your address is incorrect. If you have not received your license after 60 days, call 1-800-777-0133 to check on the status. Have your interim license with you to provide information when requested."

On to the good stuff:

The two things that the evaluator told me that he was looking for while I rode the test pattern in the prescribed manner were:

1. Keep your front wheel between the lanes, which are exactly 2'3" apart, throughout the exercise. He said that he wasn't as concerned about the back wheel as he was the front.
2. DO NOT PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN! If you put your foot down, you will be automatically failed.

Here is the order that you will ride the test pattern, and then what follows is a diagram of the pattern, complete with dimensions.

1. Enter the test pattern in lane 1 and when lane 1 meets with the circle, follow it in a counter-clockwise direction and go around the circle twice and exit in lane 2. Remember to keep your front tire between the 2'3" lane lines.
2. For the second pass, you will begin by going around the first small circle between the two lanes on the right-hand side and weave through the remaining circles. This will lead you to going around the last small circle between the two lanes that is nearest the large circle on the right. After rounding that last small circle, you will enter the large circle traveling to the left and go around the circle in a clockwise manner, completing the circle twice and exiting in lane 1.

That's it. This sounds much easier than it really is, even if you've been riding bikes for over ten years as I have. Some tips to remember are:

1. If you have access to a bike that is light and small, use it for the test instead of your big ol' Harley like I did.
2. DO NOT PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN!
3. Keep your head up and your eyes focused at least halfway around the circle from where you currently are. Remember that you go where you look when you ride a bike.
4. Do not look at the painted lane lines. In keeping with item #3 above, if you look at the lines, you will drive on them, not between them.
5. Use your clutch to control your speed and very little throttle. You can drag the rear brake to also help you keep balance and control speed, but this should be a fluid and smooth ride to help keep you balanced.
6. Lean the bike while you stay mostly vertical. When making tight turns at slow speeds, it's usually easier to keep your balance by leaning the bike and not your body.
7. If you think that you can do this without practice, I say good luck to you. It would be a good idea to use the following dimensions to chalk yourself out a practice area and give it a go before having an evaluator and a bunch of spectators watch you fumble through it for the first time.

The test pattern and dimensions are on the next page. Good luck and keep your knees in the breeze and the shiny side up!

August 2007 update from Weston:

There was one minor surprise on my test day and that was that the test format has changed slightly. The new DMV test involves a first run in which the rider performs the cone weave, leading to two circles clockwise, and then exiting out to the right of the first cone and doing another cone weave. The second part of the test is to start in lane 1, complete two counterclockwise circles, and then exit in lane 2.

It wasn't a total surprise to me being I had studied what you have posted in the pdf, but I figured you might be interested to know that the DMV has made that slight modification to their test method.

