

Many motorcyclists prefer secondary roads to interstates. Traveling the back roads can be a very enjoyable experience. There are often many interesting things to see “off the beaten path”, traffic may be lighter, and it’s more relaxing. But, sometimes we have little choice other than to take the interstate.

In some respects, interstates are safer than secondary roads in that they are limited access highways. Many MC/auto accidents result from vehicles pulling out, or turning in front of motorcycles. This risk is significantly reduced on a limited access highway.

Of course, there are other dangers lurking on the interstate. One of the things we fear most are the “big rigs”. A fully loaded tractor-trailer may weigh as much as 80,000 pounds and can be over 65 feet long. The interstates around Atlanta are some of the busiest truck routes in the country. Compounded by the perennial construction, these highway are extremely dangerous for motorcyclists.

Your best defense against getting tangled up with a tractor-trailer is to stay away from it. Either speed-up or drop back. Try to create a buffer zone all around your bike. This puts you in control, not the other motorists around you. When there are three lanes, if possible put one between you and the semi.

When riding with large trucks, remember that even though the driver sits much higher, his visibility around his vehicle is quite limited. Observe the No-Zone when traveling with large trucks (see illustration below). Tractor-trailers have large blind spots in the rear, on both sides and even in front of the cab. The rear blind spot can be 200 feet deep; on the sides, it can extend past the end of the trailer and in front, it can be as far as 20 feet. If you’re driving behind a truck and you can’t see one of its side view mirrors, the truck driver can’t see you.

Don't follow a truck too closely; not only are you not visible to the driver, but it takes greater response time to maneuver around a large vehicle. Also, your own view of what’s up ahead is severely reduced. Other hazards of riding behind large trucks include tire blowouts and flying debris. You’ve seen the chunks of tread rubber from poorly recapped tires along the highway; if this stuff hits you, it can be deadly.

When passing, don't linger beside a truck. Pass quickly on the left and put plenty of room between you and the rig before you re-enter the lane. Do not pass or hang out on the right side - the blind spot is bigger there. Be aware that you will feel increased wind turbulence when you pull out to pass a truck, and again when you get to the cab of the truck.

In some states, trucks are only allowed in the two rightmost lanes. If you are traveling below the speed limit, by law you must travel in the right lane. This will allow trucks to pass you in the second lane if necessary. On multi-lane roads truckers prefer the middle lane because it gives them more maneuvering options in case of an emergency ahead. Make room for trucks that are entering and exiting the flow of traffic. Be careful around weigh stations, as trucks will be moving slowly there.

You may have to slow to a crawl or even stop around construction areas on the interstate. If you come up behind a stopped truck, stay a good ways back. The truck may roll back as the driver takes his foot off the brake to accelerate and you don't want to be too close when that happens. As you approach the stop, keep an eye on traffic behind you, and look for an escape route. That is, can you go to the right or left of the vehicle in front of you if you have to get out of the way of on-coming traffic? When you do stop, stay in first gear, keep both hands on the grips, and scan your mirrors every 3 to 5 seconds, watching for approaching vehicles. Remember that it takes trucks nearly twice the time and room to stop as it takes other types of vehicles.

NO-ZONE

