

# The Safety Corner

By Paul Holko

## Keeping Your Cool On The Inner-City Freeways!

Traveling the crowded inner-city freeways is a *necessity* for many Gold Wing riders and co-riders. For many others that don't live in or near a *big* city, traveling the crowded freeways can be very intimidating, sometime downright *scary*. Completing a Motorcycle Safety Foundation Experienced Rider Course and being experienced in traveling the freeways is probably the *best* teacher of safety on the freeways.

Let's start with the rider and co-rider. Mental attitude is *very important*. If you equate riding the crowded freeways as "*into the valley of death rode the 600*," you have already done yourself an injustice because you have just thrown away all the training, skill and confidence you have acquired over the years. "*I am a good rider (co-rider): I am a highly skilled individual: I know what I am doing.*"

**SABS** Remember, *See And Be Seen*. Mixing with hundreds of cars and trucks on the freeways **demands** that you **BE SEEN!**

**Lights:** The more the better. **Front:** Headlight on *bright*, pulsating headlight is *best*. Cornering lights lit if possible. **Sides:** *All* side marker reflectors replaced with lights and have "flickers" installed. **Rear:** Add pulsating brake lights if practical.

**Eye catchers** The Gold Wing is an eye catcher because of its beauty and massive size. If you are pulling a trailer, great! You are now longer than most cars. Add antenna flags, stuffed animals or whatever it takes to stand out. *We are proud of our Gold Wing; look at us!*

**Communicate** The rider and co-rider is a highly trained and skilled team. You may not know it, but you are. Very few people have the skill and knowledge to ride a motorcycle and fewer have the skills to ride with more than one person. Use the intercom. Rider, let the co-rider know what is about to happen, what your intentions are. Co-rider, assist the rider by warning of any potential hazards, adverse conditions. Help keep your mental skills alert. Talk to each other. Listen to each other. You are **both** responsible for the actions of each other. Have a **secret emergency word** for *dangerous* situations. Use it if necessary.



**N**ow let's talk about riding the freeways. The Harry Hurt study concluded that 77.2% of all motorcycle accidents happen in the front, mainly cars turning left in front of the motorcycle. Since a left turning car is not a likely thing to happen on a freeway, we have eliminated a good portion of that 77.2%, **but not all**. A major portion of what is left of that 77.2% is the motorcyclist who runs into the back of a slow moving or stopped vehicle. Remember the rule, **scan twelve seconds ahead, maintain a two second gap minimum**. If you can't scan twelve seconds ahead, lengthen the two second gap to three or four seconds.

**Which lane is best?** For some, this is the *left most* lane, including the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane. (Federal law now requires that motorcycles have access to any federally funded HOV lanes, even a single rider). For others, it is the *right most*, or slowest moving lane. The answer is: the lane that offers **you** the best *space cushion*, that is, the most room in the front, back and both sides is the *best* lane and it should *also* be the lane **you** feel most comfortable in. Create your own space cushion. Will someone take the cushion away from you? *Rarely*. Over the many years of *daily* commuting to work on my Gold

Wing, I found that other motorists have more respect for the Gold Wing than they do for other cars or trucks. What if someone takes your cushion?. *Don't get angry if they do*; just create it again. One of the reasons they may have taken your space cushion is they *did not see you*. Most cars, trucks, vans have "*blind spots*," where they cannot see some portion of the road behind them, left and right side. Usually, this area is adjacent to the rear quarter panel of the vehicle. Most drivers do not do a head check before changing lanes. Avoid riding in those "*blind spots*" by slightly speeding up or slowing down.

**Speed:** Go with the flow of the traffic, always maintaining your space cushion. If the flow is too *fast*, move to a slower moving lane. If you feel you are being pushed, take whatever steps necessary to correct the situation, but

think it through first and with a clear mind. Should I speed up, slow down, change lanes, flash my brake lights, or simply ignore them? The wrong answer is to ignore them. Each situation is different and your response will be to the situation now-at-hand. For example, you are traveling in the left most lane, you are maintaining your two second gap, the guy reading your license plate has nothing to gain if you move over one lane. One answer, try to get him to "back off." Signal with your left hand for him to back off, left arm extended downward telling him to slow down, (no finger gestures): or, flash your brake lights: or temporarily engage your emergency flashers. Usually, one of these actions will work. If they fail, I suggest you extend your two second gap in front to three or four seconds and at the first safe opportunity, change lanes. Don't forget to wave as he flies by. Watch him after he goes by; this kind of motorist is dangerous at all times.

**Lane changes:** Lane changes are done the same way you learned in your MSF courses. Talk to your co-rider, check your mirrors, signal your intentions, do a *quick* head check, and if clear, accelerate into the next lane. **Rule:** You can *never* change lanes on a freeway without doing a head check. Does the co-rider do a head check *also*? You bet she does. Remember "flickers"? Using "flickers" in addition to your normal turn signal indicators, you now have two additional alternating light panels signaling your lane change. See and Be Seen.

**Stopping:** Normal stopping on the freeway is not normal! **There is no such thing as a normal stop on a freeway.** Anytime you must stop, it is because some *abnormal* situation has occurred. This is the reason your twelve second scan, two second gap is so important. This rule alone will give you enough time to react to the situation. Again, every situation is different but we know (a) we must stop our motorcycle safely, (b) we must ensure the guy behind us stops his vehicle without hitting us, and (c) we know when stopped, we must be in a position to quickly move even if the vehicle in *front* of us cannot move.



(a) You already know we stop our motorcycle safely by applying even pressure on both brakes. (b) The guy behind you never heard of the twelve second, two second rule, so let's help him out. When you see the traffic slowing in front of you and it appears to be stopping, signal the person behind you by using hand signals or flashing your brake lights. If like many situations, you are traveling at high speed and traffic suddenly stops (or so it seems), push the button on your emergency flashers, (forget the hand signals) and slow your Gold Wing as much as possible, as quickly as possible, widening your *front* space cushion. Check your mirrors. Usually the actions you have already taken is enough warning to the following vehicles. Is your rear space cushion still good? If not, widen it, but don't concentrate so much on the rear that you lose sight of what is happening in front of you. Are you going to stop in time? Fortunately, with your MSF training and experience, you know how to stop quickly (see a) and you have the option of braking then swerving. The car behind you doesn't have that option. (c) When you stop your motorcycle, you should always be in a position that will enable you to move forward quickly, even if there is a car in front of you. How? Simple. Do not stop with your motorcycle pointing *directly* at the car in front of you and so close to that car you cannot move.

**Group Riding** Group riding does not change. One important item. If the group captain or safety officer feels the situation is too dangerous for group riding, they should inform the group to not try to keep in formation. If you feel the situation is too dangerous for you, inform the group captain that you are dropping out of the group and will meet them later. Do not ride in any situation you feel is dangerous.

**Rain** The first thirty minutes of a drizzle is the most dangerous because of oil and debris being washed from the roadway. In a "gully washer," the roadway becomes secondary to **SABS, See And Be Seen.** In *either* situation, it is best to exit the freeway and grab a cup of coffee. If it is not possible to exit the freeway, then pull off the freeway as far as possible under the nearest bridge, engage your emergency flashers and quickly get your bodies away from your motorcycles and up to the highest point on the bridge embankment. Do not stay with your motorcycle. If you must continue in the rain, properly suited, remember you will be harder to see and you will have limited visibility (SABS). Give yourself *extra* space cushioning all around. Your stopping power will not diminish in the rain, but a car's stopping power greatly diminishes, especially if it hydroplanes. Cars will hydroplane at almost any speed: but motorcycles will not hydroplane at normal highway speeds.

There is always more but until then, ride safe and don't forget to wave.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely the author's name, Paul &amp; Madonna Holko.