

# The Safety Corner

By Harold Dallmann

## "ARE YOU USING YOUR SPACE CUSHION?"

*Or are you sitting on it?*

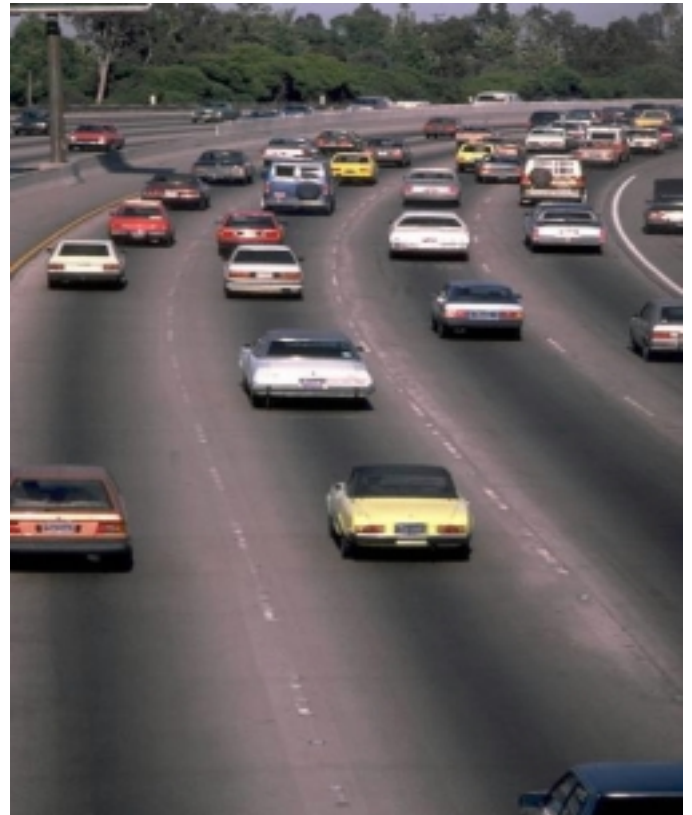
Teaching motorcycle safety classes, I like to introduce the concept of **Risk Management** as a way of discussing the need to address the hazards of motorcycling by saying, *"I am continually looking for the potential accident, that hopefully never happens."* This is not to say that I am a fatalist by nature, but my motorcycle training continues to emphasize the need to be aware of the complexities of motorcycling. *When you get right down to it, there are only two absolutes to riding safely,* and the first one--keep the machine upright--most anyone can master. The second is called **"space cushioning"** or "lane positioning." I often ask, *"Why street riders are not more protective of this critical space?"*

If you take a trip to a big city salvage yard, you will be astonished at the number of low-mileage late-model bikes with demolished front-ends. Apparently, many of these riders did not know their environment, know where trouble is likely to come from and *failed to take whatever action necessary to defend their space cushion.*

You can **create space by braking, swerving or accelerating**, but the most important **space is that which you create with your mind**. Think of it as a "bubble", a friendly familiar ellipse in which you can execute all of your anticipated maneuvers and still have a comfortable space cushion reserve. For example, if you find yourself passing through a person's blind spot, have you left sufficient space to avoid a collision? That's space cushion reserve.

**I like to look at space cushioning as "buying time."** Even in laboratory conditions, the skilled rider needs one full second to effectively change paths after receiving a signal...a second and a half to swerve a meager three feet. *"At 60 MPH, you'll eat up 132 feet of tarmac making this three foot adjustment."* The point being that this meager swerve of three feet could be sufficient to prevent a hazard that could have turned real.

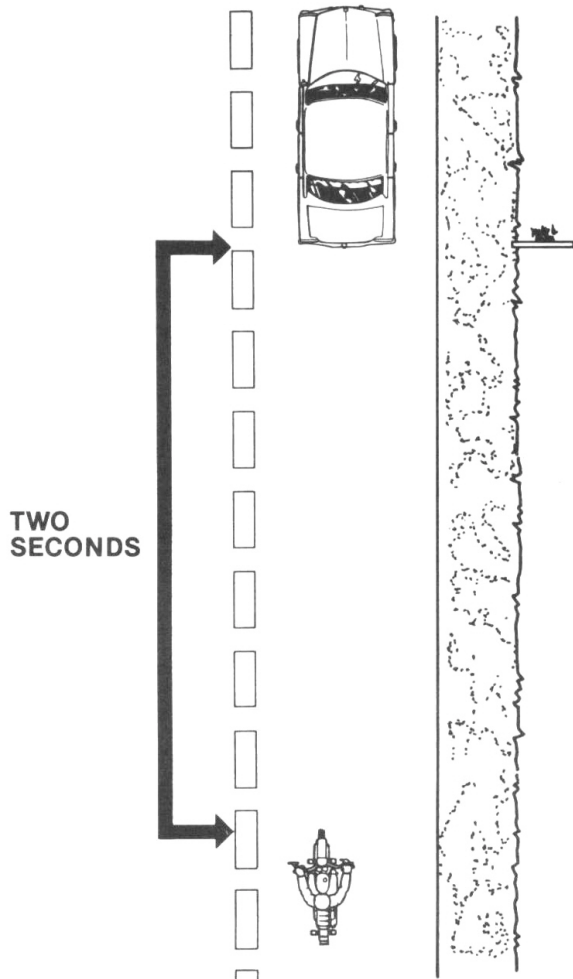
KNOW THE ENEMY (Hint: The vehicle that is turning left in front of you.) **You** must face the possibility that the next blind hill or turn **you** negotiate could hide a car turning left across **your** path. This merely underscores the need for early detection of a potential hazard and predicting how the situation may evolve. **A good SPACE CUSHION should enable early hazard detection** whereby you can roll smoothly through a world of constant change. *Even though the car turning left is the most lethal confrontation in motorcycling, very few riders adequately adjust lane position for maximum space cushion to minimize this hazard.*



**When riding in traffic, try to maintain MORE SPACE around you, and be especially wary of vehicles approaching from behind.** If you do follow a car, maintain a minimum following distance of two seconds or following a truck; increase your following distance to at least four seconds to allow space for maximum braking.

# "ARE YOU USING YOUR SPACE CUSHION?"

Make a point of counting out your following distance in seconds, rather than just guessing. When the car ahead passes by a stationary point such as a street light, start counting. "One-thousand-and-one, one-thousand-and-two..." *If you can count to two before passing the same street light, you are at the minimum safe following distance.*



*The secret to avoiding collisions is distancing yourself from situations that evolve into collisions (Risk Management). When conducting motorcycle classes, I remind novice riders of how limited their windows of opportunity are. The environment is always moving and changing shape.*

**It is not a certain speed or specific lane position but a *PROACTIVE* creating of your own environment by using building blocks of space and time.**

While you are riding, remember the concept of **SPACE CUSHIONING**. Space is measured in time. A major cause of collisions is conflicting concepts of space and time requirements. **Create space between traffic to the front, back and sides. Adjust constantly. Increase space according to traffic, speed, weather and riding ability.**

To learn more about **space cushioning**, lane placement, or following distance, contact your Chapter Educator about arranging a RSS or ERC motorcycle course; and, **remember to use the "space cushion" on your rides to maintain your safe environment; don't be caught sitting on it.**

For the ones you love, ride safe,

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