

Riding with Trucks

Our motorcycles share the road with large trucks, i.e., the 18-wheeled behemoths of the highway. These trucks have certain characteristics with regard to driver blind spots, braking, turning, etc. Understanding how these trucks perform on the road contributes to our safety.

Trucks have “blind spots.” Vehicles in a truck’s blind spot cannot be seen by the driver, either directly or in his mirrors. They are referred to as “No Zones” and are unsafe areas for motorcycles to ride. Blind spots occur at the front of the truck, on each side of the truck, and at the rear of the truck. To determine if you are in a blind spot, look for the driver’s face in his rear view mirrors. **If you can see his face, them presumably he can see you. If not, then you are riding in a blind spot and are advised to adjust your position.**

In traffic, a bike might pull in front of a stopped or slowly moving truck. The rider must be aware, however, that the truck has a blind spot that extends 10’ to 20’ in front of the truck and a close bike may not be visible to the driver. This is not a good place to be.

Riding in front of a truck is of concern because of the truck’s braking capability. A truck needs more distance to stop than a bike. If a bike brakes abruptly, a closely following truck may not be able to stop in time to avoid hitting him. If a truck has to brake hard or swerve abruptly to avoid hitting a vehicle in front of him, it may cause a shift in his load, leading to a dangerous situation. For everyone’s safety, we should avoid any action that might result in a truck having to abruptly brake or swerve. This includes such actions as changing lanes abruptly in front of a truck, merging in front of a truck without accelerating sufficiently, etc. When merging with a truck, adjust your speed to get in front of the truck or fall in behind it. Trucks tend to maintain their speed and let other vehicles adjust to them in these situations.

Riding alongside a truck is fraught with hazards. A truck has significant blind spots on both sides, but more so on the right side. If the driver can’t see you, he may maneuver his truck into your space inadvertently. Riding alongside also limits your view of vehicles on the other side of the truck and their view of you. A car could dash across the lane in front of the truck into your lane not knowing that you are there. There is air turbulence flowing alongside the truck from front to rear that can be unsettling for motorcycles. Strong winds could force the truck into your lane. Tire blowouts on big trucks are common, with explosive force and shards of heavy rubber flying, and causing the truck to swerve. During wet conditions, riding next to a truck exposes you to splashing water that may make it difficult to see clearly. Avoid lingering next to a truck. Move ahead or follow behind and maintain appropriate distances.

Some riders use trucks as shields against the wind or traffic. Riding on the downwind side of a truck may provide some protection from a strong cross wind. Also, many crashes occur when another vehicle enters an intersection. If a rider rides alongside of a truck on the opposite side from where other vehicles are entering, then the truck acts as a protective barrier.

While these riding techniques may be effective when used selectively by skilled riders, they are rife with peril with all of the above mentioned risks of riding alongside of a truck.

Large trucks make wide turns. In order to turn right at an intersection, the truck may swing into the left lane before turning right. This creates a lane to the right of the truck that may appear as an opportunity for a biker to advance. However, the lane will close as the truck turns and the driver can't see what is in the lane. It is not a good place to be. During a left turn, the truck may swing into the right lane before turning. Always pay attention to what the truck is signaling as well as what it appears to be doing. Never try to pass a truck when it is turning.

When passing a truck, advance well beyond the truck before pulling over in front of it. If there is another rider following you, advance far enough for him also to have sufficient room to pull over in front of the truck without crowding it. Don't slow down; ride at a higher speed until there is distance between you and the truck. Since the blind spots on the right of the truck are larger than on the left, it's safer to pass a truck on its left

Passing a truck on a single lane road requires extra caution. Because a truck is longer than a car, it takes more time to pass and a longer clear passing area must be available, including space to safely pull in front of the truck after the pass. Increased passing speed may be required. Leave enough room to return to your lane behind the truck if an oncoming hazard appears.

When passing a truck, expect air turbulence near the front and rear of the truck as you pass it. If there is a cross wind that is blocked by the truck as you pass it, the wind will return when the pass is complete. Pass trucks quickly on the side of the lane away from the truck.

Riding too close behind a truck is not advised. More of your view is blocked than when riding further back. There is a blind spot behind a truck that extends approximately 200', where the driver can't see you. Other vehicles waiting on side streets to enter the road can't see you and you can't see them. You have limited time and space to respond to potholes or debris that the truck passes over in front of you. Ride near the edge of the lane where the driver has a better chance of seeing you. Leave an ample space cushion between you and the back of the truck, adjusting speed and changing lanes as necessary.

In summary, you should give big trucks lots of room. Don't ride too closely in front of them. When passing them, do it quickly, preferably on the left side, and leave plenty of space before pulling over in front of them. Don't ride alongside of them and don't follow them too closely. Stay out of their blind spots. Our bikes are quicker and more maneuverable than trucks. We should be able to avoid the hazards of riding among them.

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