

Safety Tips #20

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Trucks and Buses

Almost anywhere we ride, trucks and/or buses are there, too. Riding in an environment which includes large vehicles presents special concerns, so let's consider them.

Visibility: Truck drivers have blind spots in their fields of visibility, and motorcycles fit neatly into them. We must not allow ourselves to remain invisible to truck or bus drivers for any longer than is absolutely necessary. There will be times when we are near a truck, and in the driver's blind spot, but we must minimize the length of those times. So first we have to know whether or not we are visible to the driver. There are large areas behind and to the sides of big vehicles which hide a motorcycle from the driver's view. Generally, if you can see the driver in the vehicle's mirrors, the driver can see you. If you can't see the driver, or even the mirror(s), you are not in a good spot, and it's time to scoot on to a better position on the road. Drivers can also have a hard time detecting a motorcycle which is adjacent to the cab of a truck on its passenger side. And large vehicles interfere with our ability to see large parts of the road and the rest of the environment, and therefore keep us from receiving visual cues we would find useful in maintaining a safety margin. The closer we get to large vehicles the more of a visual obstacle they become.

Drivers of smaller vehicles like to get away from larger vehicles because they know their visibility is impaired, and because the larger vehicles tend to maneuver more slowly and therefore cause those other drivers to become impatient. Plus those large tires tend to throw up spray and large pieces of debris from the road which

can damage windshields, etc. So there is often plenty of erratic traffic motion near larger vehicles.

One thing I have noticed is that drivers of large vehicles tend to leave lots more following distance between their vehicles and the vehicles ahead of them; and, of course, this is proper because the larger vehicles need more room in which to stop. This is not a great place for drivers of smaller vehicles to “place themselves” (cut in)! I have even seen motorcycle riders enter a lane directly in front of a large vehicle. This is just plain dumb.

Many trucks and buses use re-capped tires. Sometimes these big caps separate from the carcass of the tire and go flying around the roadway until they land and finally come to a stop. I’m sure you have seen plenty of them on or near the road. These things are a big hazard to motorcyclists. Contact with them can cause a bike to change direction; they can take a rider right off the bike; they can get jammed in the moving parts of a bike and cause it to stop immediately. If you are near a truck or bus and you see smoke coming from a tire and/or hear a thumping sound, get away quickly!

Large vehicles displace lots of air and cause turbulence, which can affect the control of a motorcycle.

Large vehicles have huge blind spots. They interfere with our ability to see, too. They cause traffic to behave erratically. They throw debris, water, and tire caps, and cause turbulence as well. What can we do? Stay away from them!