

# SAFETY



# FEATURES

## Sharing The Road with Large Trucks

A loaded truck/trailer combination on the highway weighs about 200 times what a bike does and sits on nine times the number of wheels. When you're traveling down the road, you'll be in their company from time to time whether you like it or not. It's better to have the guys driving them on your side.

At first glance, bikes and trucks don't have much in common. Nevertheless, riders and truck drivers are somewhat alike. Unlike most car drivers, both are usually close to their machinery and are afflicted with a love of the open road. Even the size of the vehicles distinguishes truckers and bikers from most highway users; one drives disproportionately large equipment, the other small. You might almost say they're united by their differences from the norm.

The worst problem that trucks cause for bikes is the turbulence they create, particularly in rainy or windy conditions. They can block traffic, too, on two-lane roads or when passing one another on expressways. It pays not to get impatient; think of the problems involved in guiding a 45-foot long mastodon along the road.

### STAY VISIBLE

There are ways you can make a trucker's life easier, particularly by remaining visible. It's in your interest to be polite. A trucker must always be aware of the position of every vehicle on the highway with respect to his truck. He hates to know there's a vehicle near him that he can't see, which can happen with a bike that's following.

Driving close behind a semi-trailer rig is common with many motorcyclists, although it's dangerous. The suction behind a big trailer pulls the bike along. It saves fuel, and can provide a haven from head-

winds and rain. According to Pierre Deschamps, president of the Teamsters local in Quebec, truckers don't mind bikes hitching a ride as long as they can still see them in the mirrors. However, to get the benefit of the draft a bike has to be extremely close to the truck. Too far back and you're in the turbulence without the benefit of the draft.

### POSITIONING YOURSELF

If you're directly centered behind the truck, not only can the trucker not see you, but you can't see ahead. Bumps or obstacles in the road won't appear until it's too late to do anything about it. If you must try to hitch a ride stay in line with a set of wheels where you can see around the truck and the driver can see you.

That's better than sitting directly behind, but it has its own hazards. If a rock is picked up between the wheels and later comes loose - not an uncommon event - your goose is as good as cooked. The tires are far enough apart that it'll be a big rock. Another problem is braking. Not only do you have to watch for the driver suddenly slowing, but the truck may do so on its own, catching you unaware.

Many modern trucks have pneumatic brakes equipped with a device that automatically applies the brakes if air pressure in the system starts to get too low. It's rare, but it happens. If you're catching a ride in the draft, even if you can see ahead, you're not going to expect a truck to suddenly slow for no apparent reason.

*It's foolish to try to fight them -  
so why not get them on your side?*

### WATCH FOR TURBULENCE

Deschamps, a long-time motorcyclist himself who's owned four Vincent Black Shadows and now has a Yamaha RD350, also warns against the type and severity of turbulence on many newer trucks. Deflectors and spoilers fitted to reduce frontal drag and improve fuel efficiency can do wicked things to air flow at the rear. Watch for it.

Proper signaling makes truckers' lives easier and will make them more disposed to look out for you. A driver will really appreciate a signal from you via a flashing headlight when he's passed you. It lets him know when his trailer is far enough ahead for him to safely move back into your lane.

### SIGNAL YOUR INTENTIONS

At the same time, signal when you wish to pass a truck. On a single lane road where visibility may not be optimal because of curves, hills or possibly even the weather—you may have trouble seeing through a truck's spray on a wet road while the driver is perched high enough for a clear view—signal your intention to move out. Most truckers will flip on their own signals to let you know when they can see that it's safe for you to pass.

If you see trouble on a truck, tell the driver. A rock trapped between tires, burning brake linings, a tire shedding its carcass or a shifting load are all extremely dangerous for the truck and anyone else on the road. Flash your lights to get the driver's attention, pull up beside him and point to the problem. Deschamps says almost all drivers will pay attention and stop to see what's going wrong as a matter of self-interest, and they'll appreciate the warning.

Finally, Deschamps advises staying away from convoys of trucks. You'll sometimes see trains of semis following closely and passing one another con-

tinually. There's no aerodynamic advantage for the trucks to do this, says Deschamps; rather, drivers who engage in such activity are "unprofessional cowboys." The tactic is dangerous and illegal; trying to hook up with such a train will have dubious benefits at best.

Truck drivers are on the road by choice and because of ability. They're used to talking among themselves while traveling and to helping one another along the way. You can help put this traveling fraternity on your side with a little attention and a little politeness. It's worth your while.

## HELMET ON THE SHOULDER

A helmet on the shoulder of the road indicates a motorcyclist has a problem and would appreciate some assistance.

Please help to make this a universal signal by spreading the word and by stopping when you see a helmet on the shoulder.

