

Crossroads HOG
Safety Thought October 2008
ASTRONAUT PILLOWS

Not really, we are going to talk some more about SPACE CUSHION as I promised last month. (but I hope I got your attention).

In the September Safety Thought I tried to help you focus on what the 2 second interval (space cushion) really looks like at various speeds and on the importance of a 12 second visual lead, 4 second escape plan, and a 2 second following distance. I also discussed the interdependence we share during a group ride.

When you are not riding in a group it is equally important that you maintain a sufficient cushion of space (and awareness) around you. But here you do not have the advantage of interdependency. You have to make sure you have a sufficient cushion of space so you can evaluate a potential hazard and take appropriate action. You may need to speed up, or slow down. You might decide that you need to alter direction or, maybe you just need enough time to “salute” your fellow motorist. Here are a few examples of situations where you are well advised to make sure of your ‘cushion.’

Trucks – big, boxlike, vehicles that hamper your ability to see ahead. Here the following distance to maintain an acceptable cushion changes dramatically. Remember you want to keep a 12 second visual reference. If you are 2 seconds behind the truck, can you see 12 seconds ahead? I think not. Back off! You also want to be sure the truck driver can see you and you know there is a large ‘blind spot’ behind his vehicle. (Remember the demo?) Back off and position yourself at a point where you can see the truck driver in his mirror. That will give you a proper cushion.

When you pass that truck remember that there are more blind spots along side. Again, the general rule is for you to be in a position where you can see the truck driver’s face in his mirror. If you can’t, get through that zone quickly to reestablish your cushion. When you are riding with a group, compress the stagger (move left) to get as much space between the truck and you as possible.

Cars and such smaller vehicles are easier to see over and around. Use your judgment of how far ahead you can see to adjust your following distance to get the necessary cushion. Keep in mind that these vehicles have blind spots too. Think of it as having no cushion if you are in their blind spot.

Lane position relative to the berm or the centerline is also a critical part of your cushion maintenance. This is one few think of. If you have positioned yourself too close to the curb, centerline, or the berm, you have limited your cushion of space available for maneuvering.

Mike “the safety guy”