

**Crossroads HOG
Safety Thought
September 2008**

SPACE CUSHION

No, not astronaut pillows, but the CUSHION of space you want to maintain around you and your motorcycle as you ride.

As you learned when you took the motorcycle safety course (you DID take a safety course, didn't you?) you want to establish and maintain as much space between you and what might hurt you as possible. One of the tools you can use to do so is to always maintain a visual 'lead' of 12 seconds, an escape path within 4 seconds of your position and never follow any closer than 2 seconds from the vehicle in front of you. Basic stuff – be scanning 12 seconds out to see anything that might be a problem and be consciously planning what you will do if something goes 'haywire.'

Now, put yourself in a group riding situation and think about how you do that. We ride in a 2-second stagger formation. You maintain a full 2 seconds' distance from the bike directly in front of you. Remember the guideline – 12 seconds, 4 seconds, 2 seconds – that does not change. But now you are riding with a level of interdependency. I'll discuss that further in a minute.

It is helpful to have a solid 'feel' for what those seconds mean in distance. Here's a chart that you might find helpful.

Speed	2 sec	4 sec	12 sec
30 mph = 44 fps*	88 ft	176 ft	528 ft
55 mph = 81 fps*	162 ft	324 ft	972 ft
70 mph = 103 fps*	206 ft	412 ft	2472 ft

*fps = feet per second

Visual field of reference: 12 seconds is 6 bikes if we are properly spaced. At our normal highway speed, that means you are trying to look nearly ½ mile ahead! Riding alone or in a group, that is a long way! But, on a wide open, flat, straight limited-access highway, you can do it.

Escape plan: 4 seconds is 2 bikes in front of you. But, different from riding solo, in a group you always have friends inside that 4 second interval!

Following distance: 2 seconds. We have set our following distance based on MSF and Riders' Edge recommendation. They are based on typical reaction time. You must know how to determine that 2 second distance and must check frequently to assure that you are maintaining that cushion. Count – *out loud* – one/one thousand, two/one thousand.

That's the plan. That's how we do it.

Now, remember that reference to interdependency a little way back? Here's how it comes into play for us as we ride in a group. Here's some of the increased responsibility that comes with riding in a group.

We are depending on each other to be scanning & planning as far as possible ahead. Each of us dare not focus only on the bike 2 seconds in front. We cannot wait for that bike to react before we do *but we must remain aware of what it is doing*. By doing so we are, in effect, extending our visual field of reference and its benefit to us.

We enhance that by our use of signaling – passing the signal back through the group. We can, and often do, learn of a potential hazard even before we can actually see it.

We enhance that by selecting our riding formation to match the conditions.

We enhance that by assuring that we are all riding by the same “rules” – group riding course.

No method is universally applicable but the need to maintain that “space cushion” is.

You may be involved in a ride where the Road Captain announces an alteration to formation and/or spacing at the drivers meeting. Pay Attention!

You may find yourself uncomfortable with the spacing and formation being used while on the ride. Slow down and give yourself a cushion that is comfortable. **AT THE NEXT STOP**, talk with the Road Captain(s) and explain your situation. They will help you find a comfortable alternative.

There's considerably more to the “space cushion” that I will discuss in future articles. For now, that's my safety thought for you.

Ride safely – enjoy.

Mike – “*the safety guy*”

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