

Characteristics of Motorcycles in Traffic

What all drivers should know

1. Motorcyclists often slow by downshifting or merely rolling off the throttle, thus not activating the brake light. Allow more following distance, say 3 or 4 seconds. At intersections, predict a motorcyclist may slow down without visual warning.
2. Turn signals on a motorcycle usually are not self-canceling, thus some riders, (especially beginners) sometimes forget to turn them off after a turn or lane change. Make sure a motorcycle's signal is for real.
3. Motorcyclists often adjust position within a lane to be seen more easily and to minimize the effects of wind, road debris, and passing vehicles. Understand that motorcyclists adjust lane position for a purpose, not to be reckless or show off.
4. Because of its small size a motorcycle seems to be moving faster than it really is. Don't think motorcyclists are speed demons.
5. Because of its small size, a motorcycle may look farther away than it is. When checking traffic to turn at an intersection, predict a motorcycle is closer than it looks.
6. Because of its small size, a motorcycle can be easily hidden by objects inside or outside a car (door posts, mirrors, passengers, bushes, fences, bridges, blind spots, etc). Take an extra moment to thoroughly check traffic, whether you're changing lanes or turning at intersections.
7. Stopping distance for motorcycles is nearly the same as for cars, but slippery pavement makes quick stopping difficult. Allow a motorcyclist more following distance because it can't always stop "on a dime".
8. Maneuverability is one of a motorcycle's better characteristics, but only at slower speeds and with good road conditions. Don't expect a motorcyclist to always be able to dodge out of the way.
9. Carrying a passenger complicates a motorcyclist's task. Balance is more difficult. Stopping distance is increased. Maneuverability is reduced. Predict more problems when you see two on a motorcycle, especially near intersections.
10. Mirrors are smaller on a motorcycle and are usually convex, thus giving a motorcyclist a smaller image of you and making you seem farther back than you really are. Keep at least a three or four second space cushion when following a motorcyclist.
11. There are a lot more cars and trucks than motorcycles on the road, and some drivers don't "recognize" a motorcycle and ignore it (usually unintentionally). Look for motorcycles, especially when checking traffic at an intersection.
12. At night, single headlights and taillights of motorcycles can blend into the lights of other traffic. Those "odd" lights could be a motorcycle.
13. When a motorcycle is in motion, don't think of it as motorcycle; think of it as a person.