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# More motorcycles on the road require more attention from truck drivers.

Hogs, crotch rockets, choppers, donor cycles. These are all slang terms used for one of the most challenging vehicles for truck drivers to share the road with — motorcycles. In fact, in 2013 motorcyclist fatalities accounted for 14% of all highway fatalities even though they make up only 3% of registered vehicles! Truck-motorcycle accidents often result in death or serious injury to the motorcycle riders. There is a growing number of motorcycles on the road, and the rider demographics are changing. Here are some reminders and techniques that all truck drivers can use to avoid getting tangled up with a motorcycle.

## More motorcyclists on the road.

In 1997, the number of registered motorcycles in the United States was 3.82 million. In 2016, that number rose to 6.67 million, more than doubling in 16 years. More motorcycles mean more exposure to them on the road. In 2016, 5,286 people died and 88,000 were injured in motorcycle crashes. Motorcyclists are about 28 times more likely than car occupants to die in a crash per vehicle mile traveled<sup>2</sup>

## Older motorcyclists on the road.

Motorcyclists come in all shapes, sizes, races, religions, genders, and economic status. They also come in all ages, but this is one demographic that has been changing. In 1998, the average age for motorcycle owners was 33. The current average age for a motorcycle owner is 48. Why the increase? Many people will point to aging baby boomers who are trying to recapture their youth by picking up their old riding hobby that they gave up during parenthood, or by starting a new hobby and riding for the first time.

Older, more affluent riders, along with a doubling of motorcycles on the road, is great for motorcycle manufacturers, but not so good for truck drivers. Think about the following:



Track motorcyclists as they move through your blind spot. Ensure they have passed before making a lane change.

- Driving a motorcycle requires more skill, experience and attentiveness than other vehicles.
- The average age of motorcyclists has increased substantially.
- As we age, our ability to react to a stimulus, such as a traffic hazard, slows.
- Many older riders have limited experience.

## Tips for the professional driver.

The following are some reminders and techniques that drivers and their companies can incorporate into their daily operations to help avoid crashes with motorcycles:

- **Remember a motorcyclist has the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as any other motorist** on the highway. They should be given the same courtesies as any other highway user.
- **Never drive distracted.** Motorcycles are difficult enough to see. Always keep your eyes and mind focused on the roadway.

- **Increase your ability to see motorcycles.** To avoid lane-change accidents, ensure your mirrors are clean and adjusted properly. Equip your vehicle with properly placed and adjusted fender mirrors to eliminate as much of your vehicle's blind spots as possible.
- **Track motorcyclists** as they approach your blind spots and ensure they have passed before making lane changes. Many may ride in the blind spot due to lack of knowledge and/or training.
- **Always signal well in advance** before changing lanes or merging with traffic, and then slowly complete the maneuver. This allows motorcyclists to anticipate your movement and find a safe lane position.
- **Look for multiple motorcycles.** Motorcyclists often ride in pairs or groups, so if you see one expect others.
- **Increase your following distance** when following a motorcycle. Remember, they can stop much faster than another vehicle, giving you less time to respond. This gives the rider more time to maneuver or stop in an emergency. Motorcycle riders may suddenly need to change speed or adjust lane position to avoid hazards, such as potholes, gravel, wet or slippery surfaces, pavement seams, railroad crossings and grooved pavement.
- **Be alert at intersections.** Take a second look specifically for motorcycles before pulling out or turning. Motorcycles may be obscured by other vehicles. Again, because of their size, it is hard to judge how far away or how fast a motorcycle is traveling. When in doubt, yield the right of way. If the rider is signaling a turn, wait to be sure of the rider's intentions before you proceed.



Take a second look for motorcycles at intersections. They may be obscured by other vehicles.

- **Be cautious when making left turns.** In 2013, 42% of all motorcycle/vehicle fatality collisions occurred when the other vehicle was making a left turn.
- **Be cautious when making right turns,** as right-turn squeeze accidents with motorcycles are often fatal.

Motorcycles pose a unique challenge to the truck driver. Their small size makes them difficult to see. With more of them on the road than ever before, drivers must stay focused on the road and anticipate where they could be.

<sup>1</sup>Traffic Safety Facts 2013—Motorcycles, DOT HS 812 148, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, May 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Traffic Safety Facts 2018—Motorcycles, DOT HS 812 492, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, February 2018

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