

The “Infamous” 2-Second Rule

The 2-second rule, basically the distance between you and the bike directly in front of you riding in a group. The 1-second rule applies to the bike to your left or right in a group, this distance keeps the formation in a tight enough group so as to discourage cagers from trying to squeeze in. And don't get caught up in all the “feet per second” that a lot of folks rave on about. Actually the bike will travel an “estimated” 88 feet per second at 65 MPH (this is the highway safety foundation speaking), but there are far too many variables to consider when trying to “exact” the amount of feet per second you are traveling at a particular speed. Besides, if you are that worried about how fast you are traveling, perhaps you should sell your bike and stay in your car or truck.

How do you judge your “2-second” distance you say? Very easy, just pick an object on the road such as a mile marker, post, sign or whatever and when the rear tire of the bike in front of you passes that object count “one thousand one, one thousand two” and then your front tire should be passing that object that you used for reference. This counting technique is listed this exact way in the DMV manual for motorcycles.

But, there are many folks out there who decry that we should abandon the “2-second rule” (distance between bikes in the same track) and possibly double it to increase safety.

While that will certainly increase safety, it results in a group that is spread so far out that it causes new safety issues, like encouraging cagers (that's people driving 4 wheel vehicles) to try and wedge themselves into the gaps left by such a distance between bikes. And THAT, is a real safety concern to be dealt with, especially at Interstate speeds.

However, the 2-second rule only works if the individuals riding in that particular group are experienced enough riders to be at par with one another. Basically the 2-second rule is designed to give the rider enough space to accomplish maneuvers that may be necessary, such as moving over to avoid objects in the road, bicyclists, pedestrians, etc. It also gives the rider to your right or left enough room to pull over to the side of the road in front of you (after giving the appropriate hand and turn signal that is) if a situation occurs that requires them to do so, that little gap that is created between bikes following the 2-second rule.

It has been well documented that it takes the average person almost one full second to recognize and then to react to an unexpected threat, about a ½ second if the threat is anticipated. The 2-second rule in other words, provides 1 full second of distance between bikes in order to provide sufficient time for following bikers to recognize and react to unexpected threats.

If all bikers in the group have roughly the same riding skills, then no matter what the driver ahead of you does, so long as they remain in control of their bike, you should be able to do the same without running into them. After all, riding in a group is much more safer than riding alone or perhaps with just a couple of bikes. Reason being is that a group of bikes, even just six or seven, is a much larger object for cagers to see and react to versus the lone bike or a couple of bikes. And, if you add the double distance to the 2-second rule, that a lot of so-called “experienced” bikers want, then you provide the anticipated opportunity for cagers to “wedge” themselves between bikes, and believe me, most if not all cagers love to do just that because it’s fun to them to do so.

But, in all cases the 2-second rule should give way to the safety aspect of “riding your own ride”, that is to say riding in your comfort zone. Some folks, even if they have been riding for awhile, still have problems with group riding and group riding is not for everyone. But if your comfort zone is twice or more the 2-second rule then you would be wise to avoid group riding because you will only cause issues for all the bikes behind you and in front of you in a group.

All else being equal, the “2-second rule” should constitute your fundamental safety margin while riding in a group if you use it as a minimum spacing distance. Basically, if your reaction time to an unexpected threat is 1 second or less, and if your motorcycle skills are as good or better than those of the rider ahead of and around you, then the 2-second rule spacing will provide the margin of safety you need.

As always, ride smart, ride safe.

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