



SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

The Big Road

Believe it or not, there are moments when I enjoy cruising our interstate highways. It's usually early on a Sunday morning when the air is still crisp, the sun starting to burn off the fog. I fill the tank

with some valuable petrol, head for the tollbooth, and pick a direction to head for my mental vacation. The Ultra is perfect for this. I set the cruise control, turn up the tunes, put the boots onto the highway pegs and I'm ready to chew up some miles. An occasional chat on the CB adds to the experience. After some time, I either turn around or pick an exit and hit the Home button on the GPS to meander my way back to try and relax a little more (if your home is like mine, though, the relaxing normally ends when the ride ends).

For many, riding down the interstate is not considered enjoyable riding; there are those who feel the risks of riding on the interstates are not worth it. With that, let's take a look at some of the pros and cons of the big roads. Perhaps with better understanding of our nation's highways, some of you may want to try that Sunday cruise.

Let's look at the things that can be considered risks that steer us away from hitting those On ramps. The one thing we all know for sure is the high rate of speed traffic on these roads moves at. Many of us are not comfortable at such levels for an extended time. Although there are speed limits, most of the traffic moves an average of 10 mph above what is posted. Now, if you have ill feelings about riding and keeping up with the flow and decide to keep your own slower pace, you may be putting yourself at risk ... even in the "slow" lane. Vehicles may not notice your slower speed until they're right up behind you. That certainly would increase your stress level (and theirs), not a good thing. Along with the higher speeds, you're subjected to massive rigs that have large blind spots and generate a lot of wind turbulence. The instability can be felt even a few hundred feet behind a trailer truck. Though semis may be hard to avoid, keeping a clear view of them will help you adjust and/or steady your ride when passing or being passed. Another item to consider while riding a major road comes into play if you decide to pull over to the shoulder.

Many highways now have rumble strips cut into the edge of the shoulder area. They may help drivers be aware of going off the road, but they sure can bounce a bike around, especially at higher speeds. Finally, like many other roadways, there are certain times of day that traffic becomes congested, even coming to a standstill. This can make things hot, and frustrating for you and the other drivers. Keep an eye out for risks (aggressive drivers or displays of road rage) that could come into your path.

These may be more than enough reasons for you to stay clear of interstates, but, believe it or not, there are some positives. Traffic direction is a good thing. Most highways are divided, thus minimizing the chances of any crossover conflicts. Also, the number-one spot for accidents is eliminated as there are no intersections. You can merge on and off exits safely, and taking those ramps can lead to much-needed gas stops, hotels, and food. Roadside rest areas usually offer the same conveniences. And thinking of those rumble strips once more, the shoulder areas normally offer sufficient room to pull over if necessary.

As for cruising pleasure, interstates are, for the most part, simple to navigate. Layout is fairly simple: odd numbered roadways head north and south, even numbers run east and west. There are also numbers prior to the route number that designate whether those extensions go through or around a city. Most open roads offer beautiful scenery, so you can enjoy the sights, without having to take a quick glance before a turn comes at you. And if you need to get somewhere quickly, paying the toll and hopping on the pavement, whether for a few exits or a long run, could save you some time.

Granted, the super-slab may not be your first choice for riding, but it can offer a different level of enjoyment. With a better understanding of the roadways and the risks involved traveling them, you and your hog can eat away many memorable miles. Enjoy the ride, and keep it safe out there. **AIM**