

## **A new theory for increasing death toll.**

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The motorcycle death toll in Wisconsin has doubled from a low point a few years ago to over 100 last years. Wisconsin has not been in triple digits in decades. I feel that education, or the lack there of, is to blame. Others have blamed the baby boomers for coming back into the sport and not being able to handle the newer more powerful big bikes. Shame on all of you guys for buying those 1800's you're to blame. Some blame the number of bikes registered is at a all time high, which means more miles are being driven and increasing the exposure. These all-sound pretty good for an explanation.

Last week I read an article and the author blamed a new source and backed it up with lots of picture and facts and statistics. It was pretty convincing. This person was blaming the increase on the dreaded "SPORTS UTILITY VEHICLE". His contention was that the rapid increase in popularity of the SUV has caused the death rate to go up. He had a graph showing the to increases going up together. It is true that the number of these road warriors have gone up while standard passenger car registration has stayed about the same. SUV's include mini vans, 4-wheel drive off road vehicles, regular vans, and pickup trucks. These vehicles usually have higher ground clearance, higher bumpers and are heavier. They are also very boxy and hard to see around and through. This has a definite affect on a motorcyclist.

The visibility issue of the motorcyclist seeing the traffic around him is a problem reducing the time to react to hazards and other drivers. It also limits other drivers from seeing the motorcyclist. So with the increased number of SUV's means motorcyclists are less likely to be seen or see hazards. There were other things this author was able to bring in to support his idea. The raised bumper and higher bodywork were a greater hazard to a biker during a collision. A motorcyclist being hit by a small car broad side the bumper will contact the riders lower leg or ankle and there is room for the rider to land on the top of the hood and slide over the car. In this instance the hit is spread out over a greater period of time distance reducing the force of the impact. When we are hit by a SUV the contact area may be the entire side of our body and the force will be to send us flying in a new direction resulting in a second impact when we land. So given the choice of being hit by a Yugo or a fully loaded cement truck, most would take the Yugo. The SUV falls somewhere in between, but closer to cement truck.

While the idea has lots of merit, it is only part of the increase. And of all of the explanations that have been going around, this is the one we can do the least about. It will be hard to stop people from buying SUV's so that others are safer. It is also a matter of personnel choice. We chose to ride Wings at some risk, while SUV owners chose SUV's for whatever reason they choose them. We can use more caution and try to make ourselves more visible with proper lane positioning when we are around SUV's or try not to ride around them if possible. We also need to be aware of where we cannot see and try to anticipate problems coming from these areas and know that we will have reduced reaction time. We also need to remember that others cannot see us and may invade our space because of they never saw the motorcyclist hiding behind the van.