

75 MPH Power Slide

By Mark Caldwell

Imagine if you will, a young couple traveling along I-90 at night. Having experienced severe rain storms (torrential downpours?) in the Seattle area and into the mountains, they are happy now to be cruising across the central desert portion of the state where it is dry. They are relaxed yet alert. With the cruise control set at 75 MPH, they are gradually passing the few cars on the road, so they stay in the left lane where it is smoother. It is completely dark on the roadway; the taillights of cars a half-mile ahead are visible, as are the occasional headlights of oncoming traffic on the other side of the median, but no street lights of significance. There is sufficient traffic to require keeping the headlights on low-beam. Suddenly, a large animal, perhaps a very large dog, looking about half to two-thirds the size of my Goldwing appears in the headlights, apparently standing still, staring at the oncoming couple. The animal is not more than 200 feet away, and at this speed we are covering 110 feet every second. There is no time to think other than to realize you'll never stop in time. What do you do?

What I did was to reflexively swerve into the right-hand lane. That part worked great. I missed the dog. But then things got really scary as I corrected for the swerve, and sent myself into a 75 MPH power slide with the wheels screeching in protest as they slide sideways down the road. Remember the cruise control? It's still trying to keep me at speed. Four counter-steer corrections later, each with a power skid of its own, using both lanes of the interstate, I finally get on the brakes gently which disengages the cruise and get the vehicle back under control. Thankful to be alive, and praising God that we didn't end up rolling over sideways and tumbling down the freeway, I can't even think clearly enough to pull over and stop for a while. A few miles later, we finally pull into a rest stop and take inventory of ourselves.

Yes, this is a true story. It happened last weekend, and it was a lousy way to start a vacation. In this case, we happened to be riding in my Land Cruiser, not on my Wing. I don't know how the story would have ended had we been on the Wing. Since I grew up driving in snow, I know how to handle a slide in a car and it just comes naturally to me. I don't have that kind of experience on a bike other than the swerve practice in the ERC (which is NOT at 75 MPH). I don't know about you, but I definitely see the need to practice my swerving technique on the bike, preferably under controlled conditions like an empty parking lot at slower speeds to start, and working up to higher speeds. If you haven't taken an ERC course lately (or ever) then make plans to do it. And in the meantime, pick up a good book on safe riding techniques, study it, and then find a way to practice them before you need them.

Remember: Life is precious! Protect yours with the right gear and with constant training.