Look Out Below!

By Lt. Clark

A beautiful, sunny day in New Hampshire found my friend and me completing a full day of successful fishing. To make the day even better, we decided to spend the evening out relaxing. I told him I would go home and change, then meet him back at his place. As I straddled my motorcycle, I made sure I had donned the usual protective gear for my winding ride along the well-traveled country roads toward home. Ahead, the road turned to the right, and there also was a bend from right to left. I noticed a line of vehicles coming toward me as I approached the corner; a pickup was in the lead, with several cars, vans and trucks following. My first thought was that I hoped none of the drivers would get lazy and turn without looking in my direction. With this thought in my head, I slowed down a little--just in case.

Sure enough, as I approached the turnoff to my right, a small, red car pulled out of the pack and cut me off. I knew I immediately had to slow down, and I hoped I would be able to slip behind the back bumper. I locked both brakes and was slowing down very fast. Just then the driver looked over to see if someone was coming. Seeing me, she panicked and stopped her car in my path, which didn't give me enough room to slip between her and the oncoming traffic. In a split second, I decided to jump.

While in the air, my motorcycle's right side hit her rear bumper, then flipped onto its left side, which tore off all the fairings. Despite all this chaos happening below me, a sense of relief came over me. I actually remember smiling, though it was short-lived. I glanced ahead and saw I was heading for a rock wall.

Upon touchdown, I landed directly on the border of the pavement and the gravel next to the wall. Several cars stopped to help me. The last car in the chain was a police cruiser. The driver who cut me off left the scene but came back 30 minutes later.

The only injuries I suffered were some bruises on my back and road rash--even though I was wearing good jeans. I also noticed that my expensive, leather glove was ground to my skin. If I had been going any faster, my situation would have been ugly.

What did I take away from this incident? Several things. First, never assume people see you when you're on a motorcycle. Always have a solid game plan before things happen. Wear the proper personal protective equipment. Regularly maintain your motorcycle with good parts and service. Last, school yourself on how to drive defensively; it just may save your life.