

Multi-Body Simulation and Multi-Objective Optimization Applied to Vehicle Dynamics

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Abstract – This paper describes a demo application, where modeFRONTIER, a commercial software for design optimization, is coupled with a parametric 2D Multi-Body model of a touring motorcycle. The optimizer is asked to identify the characteristics of the front suspension (teclelever scheme) that deliver more safety, more stability, and more riding comfort for a braking maneuver in straight running. All objectives are described through 4 scalar indexes, extracted from the braking kinematics.

As expected, results highlight that trade-off relationships connect the objectives. Only 15, among the 1900 tested configurations, are able to simultaneously improve the 4 indexes. Moreover, no design in this selection assures a decisive improvement of the stability. In order to accomplish this priority requirement, the best design is chosen accepting a slight reduction of stability.

Key words: Motorcycle Optimization, Braking Maneuver, Tecelever, Multi-Objective Optimization, Design Optimization

1 Introduction

Dynamical performances of two wheeled vehicles largely depend on the response of each component. Among all components, tires and suspensions are the most important sub-systems, because their role is to modulate any force going from the road to the chassis [1, 2, 3, 4]. Therefore, a deep knowledge of such parts can be the turning key to develop better and safer motorcycles.

Multi-Body Simulation is the most suitable approach to perform vehicle dynamics investigation [5, 6, 7]. By creating parametric models, different configurations can be quickly evaluated, even at the earliest stage of the entire development process. From a business perspective, this means that wrong gateways can be dropped long before they lead to costly and useless real prototypes.

These benefits can be further increased by coupling the Multi-Body Simulation software with modeFRONTIER, which automatically plans and drives sets of simulations in order to perform complex tasks such as Design of Experiment, Parameter Sensitivity Analysis, and Multi-Objective Optimization.

This paper describes a demo application, where modeFRONTIER is asked to identify the parameters of a motorcycle front suspension to deliver more safety, more stability, and more riding comfort for a braking maneuver in straight running. Although the research is targeted to a very specific case, the proposed methodology can be straightforwardly extended to any user-defined running condition. Potentially, it is possible to build a single modeFRONTIER project to optimize different vehicle parts for various maneuvers.

As expected, results highlight that trade-off relationships connect the objectives, hence full optimization is almost impossible. Only 13, among the 1900 tested configurations, are able to simultaneously improve the 4 scalar indexes that have been previously defined to measure the objectives.

Moreover, no design in this selection promises a decisive improvement of the stability. In order to meet these primary requirements, the best design is chosen accepting a slight reduction of stability. The decision task has been totally supported by the Multi Criteria Decision Making tool implemented in modeFRONTIER.

2 The 2D Motorcycle Model

The Motorcycle is a complex multi-body system and special efforts are necessary to reliably simulate the overall dynamics. The broad range of literature available on this topic covers all simulation fields, such as time domain behavior [6, 7], optimal maneuver [8, 9], steady trim [10], frequency response [11], modal properties [5, 14, 15], tire dynamics [12], and so on. Since this research aims at highlighting the benefits of implementing an optimizer into the simulation chain, a detailed and validated model is not available. Model features have been implemented following state-of-art guidelines [13] to ensure sufficient result reliability.

As a simple test case, the vehicle behavior at braking during straight line motion is considered. In general, lateral dynamics plays an important role and a detailed 3D model would be recommended to perform thorough investigation. However, a 2D model includes enough features to study the influence of the front suspension on the braking distance, keeping the simulation complexity at reasonable level. Indirect considerations on stability and vehicle comfort can be made in any event by examining the variation of some in-plane quantities [4, 14].

The motorcycle model used in this research consists of 7 rigid bodies, such as chassis (which includes the rider), rear wheel, swinging arm, front wheel and three bodies for the front suspension with tecelever scheme. Bodies are connected using proper joints to obtain the exact number of in-plane degrees of freedom.

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