

Group Riding – Leader Guidelines

Eighteen tips to ensure everybody has a great day

By Bill Andrews

The engine purrs beneath you as a string of motorcycles snakes through the hills in front of you. With a quick look in the mirror, you see your buddy following close behind with a smile on his face that matches yours. The camaraderie forms because, at just this moment, you're all on the same page.

That's what a group ride is all about. It's an opportunity to share the open road and wonderful scenery with other like-minded people. But like most motorcycle experiences, this one is best enjoyed by following a few simple guidelines that **keep everyone safe**.

- 1) The first thing you want to do is organize the ride. This can be as informal as standing around in a parking lot, or as complicated as a special meeting to hand out maps and cell phone numbers.
- 2) Remember that riding in a group does not mean you surrender any decision making when it comes to your safety. Ride your own ride, and don't go any faster than you feel comfortable going.
- 3) When picking your route and the stops you'll make along it, consider the stamina of the group, the experience of all the riders, and the limits of the motorcycles in the group. Remember, these are your friends. If it's going to be a long ride, be sure to have a few break stops along the way.
- 4) You'll need to communicate while on the ride, so make sure everyone knows the signals you'll use. If your group has CB communications on their bikes, then let everyone know which channel you are using. In this case you should appoint a confident rider to be the rear bike in the group commonly known as the "Sweep" to communicate with the lead bike during the ride. These two bikes will communicate to each other and the remaining group in order to change lanes and to notify everyone of traffic and road conditions during the ride. If your group only has two (2) bikes with CB communications, it is preferred that these two riders be the Lead and Sweep riders of the ride. But this is not necessary, if your group chooses to use hand signals to communicate with each other during the ride. In this case the front bike will give the signal and then each bike rider thereafter will then give the signal to the rider behind him/her.

Here are some commonly used hand signals. (Reprinted with permission of the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, copyright 2003.)

Often during the meeting, **hand signals** are reviewed so that you can communicate with the other riders during the ride. Hand signals are a useful tool to keep the group aware and cohesive on the roadway. Your group is free to determine its own set of signals, but here's a review of some commonly used ones:

Hand Signals

Stop - arm extended straight down, palm facing back



Slow Down - arm extended straight out, palm facing down



Speed Up - arm extended straight out, palm facing up



Follow Me - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward



You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger; swing in arc from back to front



Single File - arm and index finger extended straight up



Double File - arm with index and middle finger extended straight up



Hazard in Roadway - on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand



Pull Off - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder

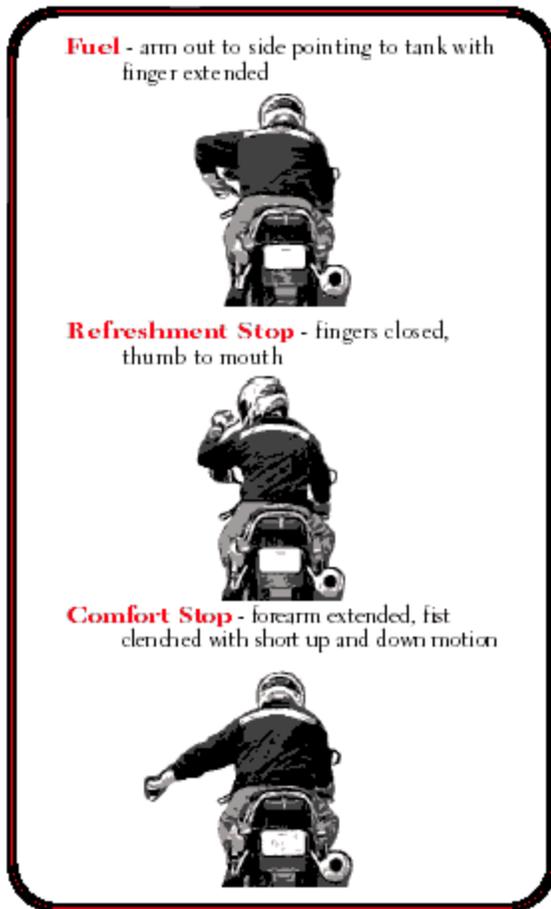


Turn Signal On - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



Highbeam - tap on top of helmet with open palm down





5) When creating your formation, it's wise to have your experienced riders at the lead and running sweep. Consider positioning the less experienced riders immediately behind the leader. This allows the front rider to adjust the pace if necessary.

6) Ideally, the sweep rider will also have a cell phone to call for help if a motorcycle is disabled, or if there has been an accident.

7) If the goal of the ride is to keep the group together, the leader should only go at the pace of the least experienced rider.

8) You may be worried about your riders getting **separated from the group**. There are a couple ways to make sure that everyone stays together. Groups often use a **leader/sweep-rider method** for keeping everyone together. When you get on a particular route, stay on that route. When the leader comes to any direction/route change, they will wait as the group collects, even if they have to sit through a light cycle or two. The leader doesn't start off again until the "Sweep-rider" is in sight and gives a thumbs up. The "sweepers" job is to stay behind all riders and make sure that nobody gets left behind.

Another method used for keeping everyone together is the **"last rider waits"** method. When the road changes direction (i.e. fork, turn, etc.) the last person in line waits for the people behind them. If you are 4th in line with 5 people behind you and the group turns left, but you don't see the riders behind you, stop and wait.

Don't worry about losing the group in front of you because, if this is done correctly, there will always be someone waiting at the next direction change for you.

The **method of keeping the group together** should be **discussed at the beginning of the ride**. Time and mileage duration vary with each ride, but there are usually rest stops for socializing or eating/drinking about every hour. People should NOT consume drugs or alcoholic beverages when riding. Let the others know if you have to depart early. This will ensure that nobody thinks that you are lost or something.

9) While riding, don't fixate on the motorcycle in front of you. Instead, remember your basic training. Look well through the turn to where you want to go.

10) If the group is riding faster than you are comfortable with, let the sweep rider know you're dropping out and ride at your own pace. So you may reach your destination a few seconds behind the others, but you will get there, and that's what's important. Keep in mind, it's all about fun.

11) All riders are also responsible for making sure their motorcycles are mechanically up to the task. Before you even meet up with the group, make sure you've got plenty of fuel in the tank, and you've taken care of all those maintenance issues. Not sure what to check? Use T-CLOCK. You really don't want to be the reason for stopping the group for something mechanical you could have prevented.

12) If it's going to be a large group, consider establishing a buddy system among the riders, or divide the group into smaller five- or seven-rider packs. That way, if something goes wrong, you don't have 25 motorcycles sitting on the side of a busy highway. Also, smaller groups can more easily navigate through city streets.

13) On the road, motorcyclists should have at least a 2-second cushion in front and behind them. If you want to keep the group tight, consider a staggered formation. Leave enough room per lane so each rider can maneuver side-to-side if need be. Avoid side-by-side formations as they shrink your space cushion.

14) Trikes and sidecars should stay in the center of the lane, and should be given the same amount of cushion as if they were a car.

15) As turns get sharper, or as visibility decreases, move back to a single file formation. You'll also want to use single file when entering or exiting a highway, at toll booths, or when roads have a rough or questionable surface.

16) At intersections where you've come to a stop, tighten the formation to side-by-side to take up less space. As the light turns green, or when traffic opens up, the bike on the left proceeds through first.

17) Remember we share the road with many other vehicles, and it's against the law to block an intersection.

18) When parking, try to get the group off the roadway as quickly as possible. If you can, arrange in advance to have pull-through parking at your destination, or at the very least, make sure there is ample parking for your size group.