

Group Riding – Participant Guidelines

So, You're Going On A Group Ride

The group ride organizer will alert you to the time and place for the ride. The organizer's responsibilities include notifying you of the time of the riders' meeting, which should take place immediately prior to the ride, matching the abilities and the interests of the riders in the group, informing and preparing the group of any points pertinent to the ride, choosing the Lead rider and the Sweep rider (who both should be the most experienced riders of the group), as well as organizing the route and controlling the group's activities once under way. Your responsibilities prior to the group ride include being familiar with the limits of your own riding skills, as well as thoroughly knowing the capabilities of your own motorcycle. If you are a newer rider, your group ride organizer should suggest that you complete a formal rider training class prior to taking part in the event. For longer trips, you also need to be aware of your own stamina. It's also important to realize that your motorcycle may handle differently when loaded with a passenger or luggage.

Preparation

An integral part of your own responsibilities is preparing yourself appropriately for the ride. Mental preparation is always crucial. Riding a motorcycle requires an alert mind that is free from distractions like worry and stress. This also includes riding free from the influence of drugs and alcohol. For some, even too much caffeine or personal prescription drugs can adversely affect their ability to concentrate!

Preparing your motorcycle is also key. Prior to a longer ride or trip, it's a good idea to have your motorcycle serviced at your local dealership if you aren't able to do the work yourself. Tires should be in good condition and fluids should be changed if they haven't been replaced in a while. Remember to consider such variables as passengers or extra weight from luggage that might require a change in tire pressure or a suspension adjustment. A thorough pre-ride check before the ride is a must. Use the T-CLOCK checklist as a reminder of important components to check.

- T – Tires and Wheels
- C – Cables and Controls
- L – Lights and Switches
- O – Oil and Fuel
- C – Chain and Chassis
- K – Kick / Sidestand

Protective riding gear for wearing on your group ride should also be chosen carefully. Wearing proper riding gear not only can enhance your personal comfort on the ride by shielding you from the elements of harsh sun, warm or cold wind, rain and noise fatigue, but it can also enhance your safety by protecting you in the event of a crash. Wearing riding clothes in high-visibility colors that are accented with reflective trim or patches is also recommended, to make you easier to see. Each rider and passenger should wear a DOT-approved helmet as well as eye protection, a long-sleeved motorcycle jacket appropriate for weather conditions, full-fingered motorcycle gloves, long pants and over-the-ankle footwear with soles that provide a good grip.

A few items that are always handy to pack include a rain suit, cell phone, a first-aid kit, and your motorcycle's toll kit and owner's manual. On a bright sunny day you might appreciate a tinted visor for your helmet, but be sure to pack a clear visor if your ride might continue past dusk.

Rider's Meeting

When you were contacted by your group ride organizer, they should have informed you about the time and place for the riders' meeting. Plan to arrive at this meeting with your bike prepared a full tank of fuel and everything else you plan to bring on the ride. Generally, riders' meeting will take place about 30 minutes before the ride. At the meeting, expect to receive a final map noting the groups route, itinerary, and the

location of fuel, meal, rest or lodging stops. Sometimes, if the ride is large enough, you may be asked to select a buddy within the group so you can watch out for each other.

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

Hand Signals

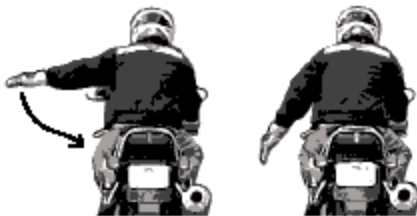
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Hand Signals

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



Fuel - arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended



Refreshment Stop - fingers closed, thumb to mouth



Comfort Stop - forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion



Riding in Formation

As part of a group ride, never pair up side-by-side by positioning your motorcycle directly alongside another rider. This riding formation does not give both riders an adequate space cushion or room to maneuver. There is no place to go if you have to avoid a car or a hazard in the roadway. To talk, wait until you are both stopped. The only time a side-by-side formation might be required is during a parade event that is using a police escort. Ideally, the group will ride in a staggered formation. Riding formations are for your safety as well as the safety of the group. When a group is riding in a staggered formation, it takes up less space on the highway than a single-file line, is easier for other motorists to see and, by protecting the its lane, is less likely to be separated by other traffic. Larger groups should divide up into smaller, more manageable groups, ideally five to seven riders.

Your staggered formation can be tight or loose, depending on traffic conditions. During heavy traffic, a tight staggered formation usually works best to keep other traffic from cutting into your group, although keep in mind that safety comes before the integrity of the group.

A staggered formation is the best way to keep ranks close and still maintain an adequate space cushion both in front of and behind each rider. A space cushion will give each rider plenty of room to maneuver and still maintain the riding formation. On a sunny day on dry roads, a minimum space cushion is considered to be a two-second following distance between each rider and the rider directly in front of them. During inclement weather it is advisable to increase following distance by adding more space in between riders of the group.

In a staggered formation, the leader rides in the left third of the lane, while the next rider stays at least one second behind in the right third of the lane. The rest of the group follows this pattern.

If your formation is correct, the third rider is two seconds behind the leader, but only one second behind the second rider. If there are trikes and/or sidecars within your group, those machines should be ridden in the center of the lane, and keep at least a two-second following distance within the group to maintain their space cushion.

In certain situations, it is safer for the group to ride in single file. The single-file formation is best used when more room to maneuver might be needed such as on narrow and/or curvy roadways, in poor visibility, at tollbooths, entering and leaving highways, on roadways with bad surfaces, when entering a traffic circle or roundabout, or in any other situation where more space cushion is needed. By riding single file, each rider in the group can more freely, use the entire lane and choose their own line through a turn. As with riding formations, keeping an adequate space cushion between riders and adjusting it to suit changing needs is important.

Keeping the Group Together

The Lead rider should plan ahead for changes and signal early so the word “gets back” to the rest of the group in plenty of time.

Many groups put newer and less-experienced riders at the end of the group. This way, slower riders won't hold up the group, but the Sweep rider, who is an experienced rider, is behind them to ensure that there aren't any problems. Other groups prefer to put newer riders up front directly behind the Lead rider so that the entire group can keep an eye on them and no one rider falls too far behind. This decision rests with the group and particularly with the Lead rider who is aware of the demands of the chosen route and the skills of each rider in the group. Your group should determine the way that suits its needs the best. The only two positions that require the most experienced riders of the group are the Lead rider at the front of the group and the Sweep rider at the end of the group. Of course, wherever the newer riders are placed, a good lead rider will set a pace that accommodates the skill level of all the riders in the group.

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 until you see the rider behind you in your rearview mirror. Then depart and the bike behind you will do the same thing for the rider behind them. This way if a rider falls behind, the other riders can slow down to prevent the slower rider from falling too far behind. If all riders of the group use this technique, the group will be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without the others feeling pressured to ride too fast to “catch up”.

Intersections

Intersections are the area of highest risk for a motorcyclist. This is still true for the group, despite the increased visibility. All intersections should be approached with caution.

When making a left turn at a protected intersection, where traffic turning left has its own turn signal arrow, tighten the formation to allow as many riders as possible to pass quickly through the intersection. Do not ride side-by-side; the group should make the turn single file or in a tight, staggered formation. Use the same procedure for right turns and remember to respect the rights of other roadway users. During your riders’ meeting, you should have discussed what to do if all of your group cannot proceed through the light before it turns red. Knowing that the group will stop at a designated point up ahead will help keep each rider from feeling pressured to jeopardize their safety by running the light.

In unprotected intersections that have no turn signal arrow, riders should proceed with caution and in single file. Each rider should act as an individual, only making the turn when it is safe and legal for them to do so. While awaiting your turn, remember to check your rearview mirror, as other motorists may be expecting you to ride on as a group. The most important thing is to make the turn safely. The group can re-form after everyone has ridden safely through the intersection.

Blocking an intersection without specific permission and an appropriate escort is illegal in most circumstances. In the case of an escorted parade and event ride, riders should be given specific instructions at the riders’ meeting on the group formation and the procedures to be used for moving legally through blocked intersections.

At two-way stop intersections, where you are required to stop, move through only when it is safe and legal. When stopping at an intersection with a light, it may be appropriate to close up the formation and sit side-by-side while waiting for the light to change. If you do this, the rider on the left proceeds first, and the following riders reestablish the staggered formation and space cushion as they depart.

At yield intersections be safe and cautious. Turn your head to check for traffic before merging. Respect the law, other members of the group and other roadway users. Put safety and operating within the law ahead of trying to stay in formation. The group can reestablish its formation afterward.

Interstates and Freeways

A staggered formation is essential on freeways and interstates. Enter in single file and form up only after safely merging onto the roadways. Your lead rider should maintain a merging speed that will allow enough space for following riders to safely merge. Since riding in a group doesn’t change your right-of-way, be alert to the fact that cars entering or exiting may cut through your formation if your group is traveling in the far right lane. It may be better to move the group over one lane when everyone has safely entered the interstate. In heavier traffic, resist the temptation to close up the formation too much. Maintain your space cushion and at least your one-second/two-second staggered formation following distance.

Exiting an interstate always requires a single-file formation. Doing so allows a better space cushion and time to react to whatever is at the end of the exit lane or allows you to merge onto another roadway.

Passing

When your group want to pass slower traffic as a group (or change lanes) on a freeway or interstate, the group may pass as a unit. When it is safe and legal, the lead rider should signal the lane change when they

have determined the entire group can change lanes and pass as a unit. The other riders then follow this lead and signal one at a time to move into the next lane.

On a two-lane highway, when passing slower traffic such as construction or farm vehicles, the group should pass one at a time. Take special care if passing slower vehicles or hoarse-drawn carriages such as those that the Amish use. Be courteous and safe by only using marked passing zones. The leader should signal their intentions first and then pull out when it is safe and legal. After completing the pass, the leader should return to the left lane position and continue at a passing speed to leave room for the next rider, then the next rider should move up to the left position and watch for a safe chance to pass. After passing, this rider should return to the right position and open up room for the next rider. The rest of the group should follow the same pattern.

Some people suggest that the Lead rider should move to the right side after passing a vehicle. This is not a good idea. It encourages the second rider to pass and cut back in before there is a large enough space cushion in front of the passed vehicle. It's simpler and safer to wait until there is enough room ahead of the passed vehicle to allow each rider to move into the same position held before the pass.

Parking

Parking as a group has many benefits. If parking is organized, you get your group off their bikes more quickly. You also run less risk of blocking access to others trying to park in the lot. Avoid parking downhill or head-in, or you may find you need to use your fellow riders as a reverse gear! Try to park where you can pull through to make both the arrival and departure much smoother. If this is not possible, try to position the motorcycles so that the group can depart as a unit in single file.

Leaving the Group

If you plan to drop out of the group, notify your leader or ride buddy beforehand about the place or time you will be leaving the group. This way, they know you have not had a problem and need assistance. When you do depart, the rest of the group should adjust the formation while maintaining a good space cushion and following distance. This may require riders to change their position to the opposite side of the lane.

Roadside Emergencies

If a member of your group has mechanical difficulties or has been involved in a crash, the following riders should all stop, including the Sweep rider and the chase vehicle (if your group has one). The riders ahead of the incident should continue on to the next scheduled stop area since doubling back could cause additional safety problems.

The Sweep rider should assess the situation and, if it appears there will be a delay, send one rider ahead to meet the rest of the group at the next scheduled stop area. If medical assistance is necessary, the sweep rider can use their cell phone to call 911.

Separated from the Group

You might get separated from the group because of a signal, traffic or other reasons. Don't panic. Your group should have a pre-planned procedure or place selected in which to regroup. Don't feel pressured to catch up, especially if it means breaking the law or riding beyond your limits. Proceed to the regrouping area or call the pre-selected contact person for your group.

Roadway Hazards

You may encounter differing types of roadway hazards or severe roadway conditions while on a group ride. When entering construction zones, it is probably best to ride single file, reduce speed and increase your

space cushion. This will allow riders to adjust their lane positions and respond to the roadway conditions more freely.

Maintaining a good space cushion and following distance throughout the ride will allow riders to react to roadway debris like sand, gravel and oil. If riding in a staggered formation, it may be better to change to single file. The lead rider should use pre-determined hand signals. Avoid riding over debris unless you have no choice. Not only could you damage your tires or bike, but you also risk throwing the debris into another rider's path of travel. Ride as smoothly as possible and avoid sudden changes in speed or direction. The same is true for wet roadways.

Environmental Hazards

Riding into the sun may seem scenic in movies, but can be hazardous for a motorcyclist. The glare makes it hard for all motorcyclists to see one another. This might be a good time to plan a break as these conditions increase rider fatigue. But if you must ride into the sun, reduce speed and increase your space cushion. Remember, it may be more difficult to see roadway hazards.

Make extra precautions when riding at night. Be visible. Consider wearing a retro-reflective vest. Make sure that all lights are working and your headlight is adjusted properly. Reduce speed and increase your space cushion. Remember that roadway hazards will be more difficult to see at night.

Have Fun

A group ride is one of the great on-roadway motorcycling experiences. Taking part in a group ride is a great way to share the fun and camaraderie of motorcycling. Following these guidelines will help make the rider safer and more enjoyable for yourself and everyone else taking part in the ride.