

Introduction to Group Riding

Motorcycle touring is unique in that it can be enjoyed alone, getting away from all the cares of the day to day life; and at the same time, it offers great enjoyment as a social activity in the company of either good friends or casual acquaintances. To move a number of riders from one place to another, whether across town or across the country, the "group ride" provides a fun and efficient way to accomplish the task. As with most things, there are both benefits and drawbacks to riding in a group.

Benefits

In addition to the pure fun of riding with friends, the most important benefit of group riding is that there is safety in numbers. It is hard for even the most incompetent four-wheel driver not to "notice" a group of touring bikes traveling together on the highway. However, do not take that for granted, because you will be invisible to some of them.

Dangers

In spite of the enjoyment of riding with a group, there are also certain dangers associated with it. One is the tendency to become complacent and take things for granted, to pay less attention to other traffic, and to assume that the riders around you are always going to react in the way you expect. Also, remember that the skill level of the group, and therefore its safety, can only be as good as the least skillful rider in the group.

Pre-ride Discussion

Before any group ride, it is important to ensure that every rider agrees on the way the ride will be conducted. Such things as riding formation, speed, breaks, and stops, and signals or Citizen Band (CB) radio procedures should be addressed in a pre-ride briefing. It is very important that everyone is following the same rules in order to have a safe, successful and enjoyable ride.

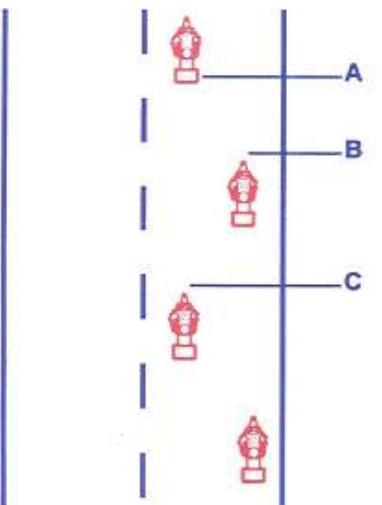
A group leader should be selected. It is the group leader's responsibility to suggest the type of riding formation once on the road and maintain the pace agreed upon during the briefing, when conditions permit.

Riding Formations

There are three basic patterns that can be used by a group of riders. Each may be appropriate at different times during the ride. Remember that conditions dictate what is the proper at any different conditions may even exist for different points in the same formation. The "Rules" should not be so rigid that they prevent individual choices during any given situation.

The three patterns or formations are:

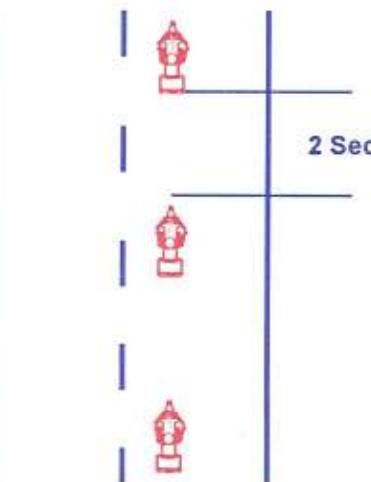
- 1. Staggered Formation.** The most common choice for highway travel, the staggered formation has several advantages. In the staggered group, the lead bike **A** occupies the left half of the travel lane; the second **B** rides in the right half of the lane and the remaining riders **C etc.** alternate as illustrated below.



The staggered formation is suitable for most open road travel, particularly on multi-lane highways. It is not, however safe for narrow or winding secondary roads. Give yourself and others plenty of room in such situations. Another important consideration is following distance is two seconds from the time the bike immediately in front of you passes a stationary object to the time you pass the same object (point A to point B). Some feel the two second rule applies only to the bikes on one side of the lane (point A to point C). That works only until an object enters the

roadway from the right in front of bike "B", which may serve to the left and may brake hard. Now you have an emergency situation, which develops only one second ahead of you in your part of the lane. An on-coming vehicle drifting across the centerline and crowding the bikes in the left half of the lane can cause the same kind of situation. If your group rides at the closer interval, make sure that all riders understand and accept the risk.

- 2. Single File.** Riding in single file is appropriate on winding, narrow or particularly rough roads. It allows for each rider to use his entire lane for proper lane position on corners and to avoid obstacles or potholes in the road.



When riding single file, the normal lane position is the left half of the lane, however each rider has the freedom to move around in the lane to adjust for road or traffic conditions.

- 3. On Your Own.** The third method of group riding allows each rider to act as an individual. It allows each rider more flexibility, but is also the most difficult to control and to keep together. On some secondary roads, where "passing zones" are short, riding "on your own" may be the only safe way to move the group around a slow moving vehicle. Communication between the lead bike and the "back door", or "tail gunner" is essential to keep the group from becoming separated.

Entering The Highway

Entering highways, whether from a parking lot into a secondary road or an entrance ramp onto a controlled access freeway, can present a challenge. In a slow or residential area, it may be possible to stop other traffic so that the entire group can enter the road together. If you attempt to stop other vehicles, be sure that the "blocker" gets the attention of the other drivers and stops them before placing himself or his bike in the lane of traffic.

Some drivers will stop and let the group out together, but remember that we have no special right to expect them to give up their right-of-way just because we are in a group formation. Thank those who do cooperate. Be sure everyone is alert and ready to move when you start so the group can quickly enter the road with as little delay to others as possible.

Many times it is not possible to "block" traffic in order to enter a roadway. In such cases, riders must wait for an appropriate opening and then proceed a few or even one at a time. Unless the traffic is blocked, the entrance should be made in single file or "on your own." Once all the bikes are on the road, riders can regroup by passing vehicles inside the group, or encouraging them to pass the bikes ahead. The lead bike should maintain a speed close to the normal flow of traffic, which will allow space for maneuvering behind him and not cause a dangerous bottleneck for the remaining riders and other drivers.

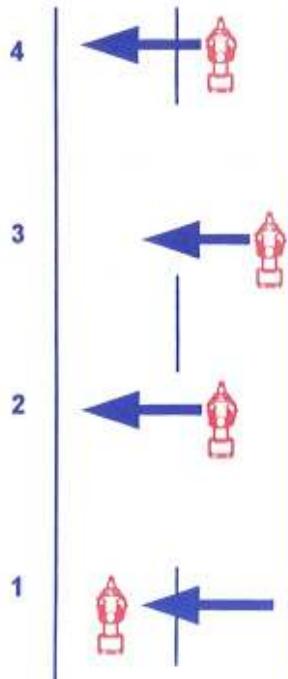
Entering a divided highway from an entrance ramp should only be done "on your own", although single file may be used approaching the point of merging. Space must be available to each bike to allow for speed adjustments required to facilitate merging safely into the travel lane. The lead bike should never enter the highway and slow down to keep the group together. All riders should be at the speed of the other traffic when they enter the highway. Multi-lane roads provide plenty of time and space to regroup, but speed must be maintained.

Passing

When passing slow moving vehicles on secondary (two lane) roads go to single file if traveling in staggered formation and then pass when it is safe to do so "on your own." The entire group will seldom be able to pass at once, and it is not

necessary to do so. The lead bike must maintain speed until far enough in front of the passed vehicle to allow room for all the other bikes in the group to pass safely.

Passing on multi-lane roads can be accomplished in the same manner as secondary roads, however some riders prefer to move the group as a single unit. This is done by using the "back door", or "tail gunner" as a blocker. The leader informs the rear bike that he or she wants to move the group to the left (or right) lane and asks him to block the lane. When he can safely do so, the back door moves to the desired lane and blocks it to prevent other traffic from passing the group. He should then notify the leader that the lane is blocked. There are two methods of completing the pass from this point. The leader can wait until all traffic has cleared the desired lane then signal for all bikes to move into the new lane at the same time. Another method is for each rider, from the blocker forward, to move into the new lane as it becomes clear to his position. That is the blocker, or last bike moves to the new lane, then the next to last, then the rider in front of him, etc, all the way to the lead bike.



The rear bike moves first to block the desired lane.

When each bike moves to the new lane in turn, from rear to front, interruption of the flow of the other traffic is kept to a minimum. When the entire group waits to move together, it creates a long empty space in the desired lane, which tempts other drivers to force their way between the bikes in the group. The method used should be decided during the pre-ride briefing.

Regardless of which method is used, speed is critical. Often the lead bike will pass a slower vehicle and after a short distance resume the original speed of the group. This must be avoided. Many vehicles will increase speed slightly when being passed. If the lead rider does not maintain his "passing speed" until the whole group has passed the slower vehicle, a dangerous backup will form behind the group. The leader must maintain the passing speed until notified by the back door that all bikes have passed the slow vehicle.

It is also critical that the leader recognize a slower moving vehicle far enough ahead that the lane change can be completed before reaching it. The group should not have to slow down and "follow" the slow traffic before changing lanes to pass. A skillful group leader will be able to maintain constant speed and not continually adjust the group's speed with every maneuver.

Other Guidelines

Stopping at Traffic Lights

When stopped on the road for traffic lights, the group should approach the light in a staggered formation. As riders stop they should "close up" the formation and stop side by side. The formation will compress and take up less space on the road. It will also allow for a quicker start when the light changes so that more bikes will be able to get through the light. Riders return to the staggered formation when starting again.

Road Hazard Warning

When one of the leading riders notices a hazard in the road he should point at it to warn those riding behind him. Warnings should be given for objects or conditions that may not be seen by following riders and that could cause them a problem. (Mufflers, metal, broken bottles, chunks of rubber, sandy or gravel areas). Warnings are not necessary for every grain of sand, twig etc. in the road. If the warning is over used, it will become less effective.

Speed

Travel speed for the group should be discussed and agreed upon at the pre-ride briefing. The safest speed is normally slightly higher (2 – 3 MPH) than the prevailing traffic flow. It is obvious that some adjustments for conditions and traffic situations will be required throughout the ride.

The group travel speed should be one with which all riders are comfortable. Riders however, that can not, or will not ride at a speed at least equal to the normal flow of traffic should not ride in the group, since they will endanger all the other riders and cause lengthy gaps in the group formation.

Speeding in heavy traffic in built up urban areas is extremely dangerous, particularly when riding in a group.

Leaving The Group

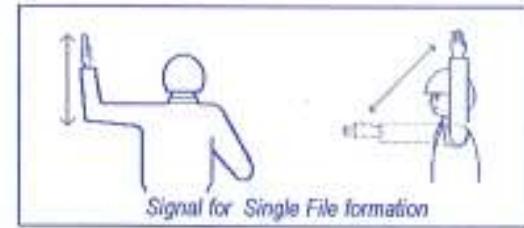
Any rider leaving the group should inform the group leader or back door when he/she does so. Notification can take place by CB Radio or a visual signal.

CB Radio Use

The CB radio can be very useful in control of the group and in keeping the group together. (The normal channel is Channel 4.) If all riders do not have CB's, insure the CB equipped bikes are in the lead and backdoor positions and if possible throughout the group.

Group Formation Signals

The following signals may be used for the group riding formations indicated.



Signal for Single File formation



Signal for Staggered formation

American Gold Wing Association



Group Riding

Group riding, when done properly, can be a lot of fun and provide more safety than riding alone. It can also be dangerous to all riders if even one member of the group commits a dangerous act.

This pamphlet addresses some of the practices that can contribute to a safer ride for the entire group. An active Motorcycle Safety Instructor, nationally certified by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, wrote it. This however, does not imply that the contents represent the position of the MSF, or any other group. The views expressed here are those of the author only, and are intended to suggest some ideas and practices, which promote safety and fun in-group riding.

Please remember that even when riding in a group, each individual rider is still solely responsible for the safe operation of his/her own motorcycle. Group riding may actually put each rider closer to more vehicles at one time than riding alone, and therefore great care must be exercised. That is the bottom line.

Written by an American Gold Wing Association member.

See WWW.christmasinjuly.org for information on Illinois Chapter H - Les Chapman – Area Rep. 1-630-640-5020

Sunday Rides leave from McDonalds at 9:00 AM from Army Trail and County Farm Roads.