

Safety Corner



This month we will discuss something that many if not most of us enjoy, and that is riding with friends or Group Riding. Nothing I know of makes a ride more enjoyable than when you get together, impromptu or otherwise, with a group of your best friends and head out for a relaxing ride with or without a designated destination.

However, Group Riding has inherent dangers implicit with riding with multiple bikes, and you need to know the rules of the road before you get out and ride with your friends. There are a myriad of specifics regarding group riding, such as, a pre-ride briefing so everyone understands the hand signals, the route, how long between rest stops and other pertinent instructions relevant to safe riding.

This article will primarily focus on the more basic and general aspects of group riding with the goal of having a safe ride.

Every group, formal or informal will have a group leader, or ride captain and a gunner or sweep rider bring up the rear. It is their responsibility to organize or lead the ride and make sure that everyone gets to the intended destination as safely as possible.

The first order of business would be to meet with the group members and go over a number of issues germane to a safe riding environment. Ensure that all members of the group are gassed-up and personal needs taken care of before the departure. The ride destination will be outlined along with refueling stops and locations for taking a break along the way need to be laid out. Bikes with smaller fuel capacities obviously will need additional considera-

tion in planning refueling locations. The riding skills of individual riders need to be considered and those who are less than comfortable with group riding, need to be accommodated either by being paired up with a more experienced rider, or by placement closer to the gunner where they will not have the pressure of the rest of the group surrounding them. Anyone riding a trike needs to be placed at the very front or at the rear of the formation as trikes will obscure the view of others riders when interspersed in the formation, and obviously they require more of the lane.

The size of the group also needs to be considered, for if the group exceeds significantly beyond 10 bikes, say in the range of 13 to 14 bikes, then you need to consider forming a second group with a second Road Captain and gunner, as the original group will be unwieldy and difficult to maintain control over and keep together. There is no hard and fast rule, but 10 bikes is a general demarcation point for considering a second group.

Communications is key to safe riding in a group and this is accomplished by a CB radio or more commonly via hand signals as most riders do not have a CB Radio. The individual hand signals are important to get the group to do what the Road Captain feels is appropriate, thus passing back hand signals is important even if there is a lack of understanding as to what the signal was.

Prior to the ride these signals will be discussed at length with the group to ensure everyone is familiar with them. However, the signals and their specific purposes is an article in themselves, and a detailed discussion of these signals will be in next month's article.

Recommended riding for a group is a staggered formation. Basically, the driving lane is divided in half with each rider occupying his/her respective



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half of the lane. It is each rider's responsibility to ride in the half of the lane as dictated to by the next rider in front. If the rider in front needs to change lanes for whatever reason to maintain the stagger, then the subsequent riders need to adjust lane position to compensate for the change. The Lead Rider or Road Captain should always start the stagger in the left half of the lane. While in staggered group riding, the normal stagger distance is 1 to 2 seconds, in order to maintain a reasonably tight formation and discourage traffic from cutting into the formation. This means that each rider will be 2 to 3 seconds behind the rider directly in front and using the same half of the lane. When stopped, the group should be two abreast or side by side. When the group resumes travel, the stagger begins anew.

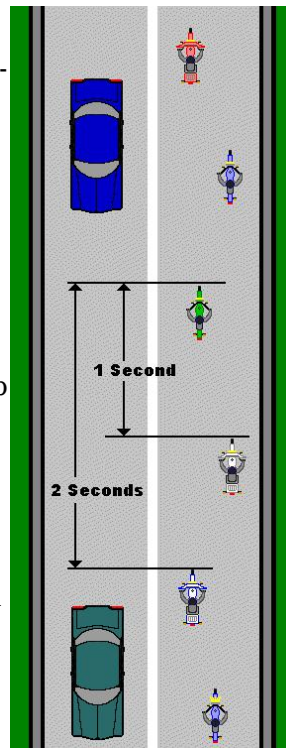
In a winding roadway environment, this staggered formation should be transitioned into a single file riding arrangement which gives individual riders greater leeway in negotiating the winding roadway conditions. Single file formation allows riders greater measure of freedom negotiating curves and enhances the ability to avoid obstacles. When road conditions return to a more normal roadway, then the Road Captain can direct a change back to a staggered formation. These and other directions are at the discretion of the Road Captain and communicated via a CB radio or hand signals.



If during the ride, the group is broken up for whatever reason, then the lead rider of the "second" group should

shift to the left half of the lane if they are not already there. Once a shift occurs, the remaining bikes will follow suit and adjust their positions to reflect the change by the temporary leader of the

second group. Once the second group reconnects with original group, then the bikes will return to their original positions.



The position of the tail gunner can either be where ever the position adjusts to based on the number of bikes in the staggered lineup, or as was suggested in the recent HOG training I attended, the tail gunner should be in the left side of the lane, in the same position as the Road Captain. This suggestion is based on a premise that it allows the gunner a better view of the RC and traffic conditions. I tried this position and in my mind the jury is still out, as it can stretch out the group somewhat and can place two bikes in the same half of the lane behind one another. This would require some additional spacing, as the safety margin between the bikes has been reduced.

If someone encounters a mechanical or some other issue and has to drop out of the formation, it is the gunner's responsibility to stop and render whatever assistance they can to the driver who has the issue. The last bike in the remaining group will now assume the responsibilities of the tail gunner until such time as the assigned gunner returns to the group. If equipped with a CB radio, the gunner will relay this information to the Road Captain and if possible the separated members will rejoin the group at the next scheduled stop.

If during the course of a ride, the group turns onto another road, and the next trailing rider cannot be seen due to traffic, or too much of a lag in the group; the last rider to make the turn should hold at the intersection until the next rider shows up and is able to determine that the group has made a turn. This will keep the group together on the same route even though there may be unforeseen gaps in the formation.

Ride safe and by all means, enjoy riding with a group of your best friends!