

## **GUIDELINES FOR GROUP**

### **RIDING FOR STREET BIKES**

#### **Road Captain's Job: Preparing for a Group Ride**

When a number of motorcyclists are invited for a group ride, the riders and their co-riders gather at the appointed time and place, often without knowing their specific destination or route from that point on. The Road Captain for that ride will have a route in mind and will usually have pre-ridden the route within the past week in order to look for construction and road surface problems and other situations which might affect the safety of those who are to participate. The Road Captain will appoint or volunteer experienced riders to serve as Lead Bike, depending on the total number of bikes and the number of groups required. Each Lead Bike will then select a person to ride as Drag Bike for that group. The other riders will determine which group they are going to ride in, and if there is an inexperienced rider along, will usually ask the Lead Bike to make suggestions on group positioning. The Lead Bike should determine roughly the experience level of each rider in his or her group before departing, putting the rider with the least experience in group riding immediately in front of the Drag Bike in the slot position. If the last open position before the Drag Bike is not a slot, the least experienced rider should be in the last slot position available, away from oncoming traffic.

The Road Captain usually provides a Route Memo or will have copies of maps or directions to give the members of the group (this should be supplied to the Lead Bikes if not to all riders) and will have a rough idea of times and distances to be traveled, suggestions for rest stops, food and gas, etc. The Road Captain will have out emergency medical information forms and release of liability forms for sponsored rides, to be filled in and signed. He or she will then conduct a short riders' meeting to establish that each group has a designated Lead and Drag Bike, to review group riding guidelines briefly, to alert the riders of potential hazards, to discuss communications within and between the groups, to review hand signals if there are riders without CBs, and to answer any questions about the ride. The Road Captain may or may not lead a group himself, and in fact may not accompany the riders at all once the ride is underway.

If there are several groups of riders, the Road Captain expects all Lead Bikes to follow the route which has been laid out and not to initiate changes in the route except in an emergency. IN face of problems that require emergency personnel or re-tracing a route to find a disabled rider or part of group which has gotten lost, it is much easier to locate the person(s) sought if all groups follow the same path to their common destination. It is not unusual for groups of riders to be separated by several miles and to find themselves out of CB range from other groups during a long trip or in heavy traffic. It is also not unusual for groups to break up briefly in traffic, requiring a station-keeping rider to serve as Lead Bike or Drag Bike for a fragment of a group, for a short time.

#### **Rider's Job: Preparing for a Group Ride**

Riders are expected to arrive on time at the departure point with a full tank of gas, in proper attire for the conditions, and physically ready to ride (potty stop made, medications packed if needed, sober and alert). Motorcycle endorsements and insurance should be up to date, and the bike should be in street-legal condition. The Road Captain may ask a rider not to join a group ride if these basis conditions are not met (for example, if a rider is drunk or a bike is mechanically unfit to ride).

If a rider brings a co-rider (a passenger) for a group ride, he or she is expected to manage and attend to that passenger's needs personally, before the riders' meeting. The following guidelines are suggested for preparing a co-rider for a group ride:

Do not permit a co-rider to mount the motorcycle until all riding gear is on and fastened securely (beware of outside pockets!). The co-rider should not mount until the rider is seated and holding the motorcycle, vertically, and then not until the rider asks that he or she is ready for the co-rider to get on. The passenger's feet should remain on the pegs or floorboards designed for them at all times, until disembarking.

A co-rider needs to know generally what he or she should and should not expect in terms of comfort and safety considerations. If the co-rider wishes to communicate with the rider, the rider should explain how to do this: by thumping on the rider's head? Intercom? Shouting in the rider's ear? Will the co-rider be responsible for copying hand signals given by the rider to others in the group? Suggested jobs for the co-rider during the ride: Watch out in traffic for anything that may detract from a safe ride: two pairs of eyes are better than one. Do not assist the rider by leaning in turns, but look over the rider's inside shoulder on curves. Wave at all other bikers, children, anyone who shows interest in the riders, and law enforcement officers on their feet. And – smile!

In group riding, if the rider (with or without a co-rider) wishes to slow down or stop during the ride, for any reason whatsoever, he or she may drop out of the ride. If at any time a co-rider becomes uncomfortable during the ride and wants the rider to slow down or stop, for any reason whatsoever, the rider should be prepared to do so as quickly and as safely as possible. It is courteous to notify or signal to the other riders in the group before doing this unless it is not convenient or possible to do so. Unless the Drag Bike clearly understands the reason for a rider's decision to drop out, normally the Drag Bike will notify the Lead Bike of a problem and will stop with the rider who is stopping, to render aid if needed, or to determine his intentions about rejoining the group ride.

## **Normal Group Riding Maneuvers**

### **Entering Traffic**

When the Lead Bike for each group sees that all riders are helmeted, sitting on their bikes, motors running and ready to depart, he or she will check for traffic and enter the roadway. Usually the Lead Bike will not attempt to exit a parking lot unless there is room for all or most of the group to follow immediately. If the group is split, the Lead Bike will normally take the slow lane and keep the speed relatively low until the group can form up in the positions the riders will keep for the duration of the ride. This may mean traveling slower than surrounding traffic, to encourage four-wheelers to pass and allow the group to form up. Occasionally this cannot be accomplished until the group has made a lane change or entered a freeway, depending on where the entrance ramp may be.

**Regardless of the Lead Bike's signals, a rider is responsible for his or her own safety at all times.**

### **Ride Your Own Ride!**

Once all members of the group are together, the group will take up a staggered formation and will stay in it most of the time during the ride, unless the Lead Bike signals for a change or the need for a change is obvious. Reasons for changing out of a staggered formation could be a passing situation or poor road surface (single file), dog or other animal charging the group (split the group), or coming up to a traffic signal (two a breast while waiting for a light).

### **Changing Lanes**

When a group of motorcycles is changing lanes, many safety considerations come into play. Should every rider move into the adjacent lane at the same time? If not, should the Lead Bike go first, or should the Drag Bike move first to "secure the lane"? When the Drag Bike radios to the group that the lane is secured, is it really? What if another vehicle sees a gap in traffic and tries to cut into the group? If part of the group gets separated from the other riders, should everyone change relative positions (tracks) so that the new Lead Bike is now riding in the left tract? The recommended procedure for a group lane change maneuver depends on how the surrounding traffic is moving at the time. The goal for the bike which moves first is to create a gap into which the other bikes can fit.

**Regardless of what other riders in the group are doing, each rider must personally check to see that the new lane is clear of traffic before entering it.**

### **Changing Lanes into Slower-Moving Traffic**

In most jurisdictions traffic laws prescribe that, on a road in which there are two lanes of traffic moving in the same direction, the lane on the right will be the slower lane. If a group of motorcyclists is going to move into the slower lane from the faster one, the first bike in a group which moves is responsible for creating a gap into which all the

following bikes can fit. This is accomplished by maintaining a constant speed in order to enlarge the gap after the first bike moves. Each bike moving in succession should also be aware of this dynamic. Thus, the group moves from first to last. (An exception is the Drag Bike, which may move on its own for reasons explained later.)

The first bike to move under these conditions will be the Lead Bike. In many cases this is done as “A Pair of Bikes,” the maneuver is accomplished in this way: the Lead Bike signals for the lane change and announces to the group via CB and/or hand signals that the group is moving to the right, front to back. Then, after checking *by actually turning the head* to see that the new lane is cleared of traffic sufficient for one bike to safely enter it, the Lead Bike moves across the tracks of the current lane, taking up a position in the left track of the new lane where the Lead Bike usually rides. By maintaining the maximum speed which the traffic in that lane will allow, the Lead Bike creates a gap into which the next bike in the group can insert, moving into the right track there. Each succeeding bike follows this pattern: signal right, move right in your own lane, head-check, enter new lane, maintain speed to create gap, and take up regular position (left or right track) in the new lane.

The Drag Bike in this pattern is normally the last to enter the new lane, unless “closing the door” was possible. As the bikes move quickly and re-form their group, it is rare that a four-wheeler will move up into the gap in the new lane. If a cage moves into the gap, the next bike to move must truck in behind it and wait for the group to slow up, encouraging the cage to pass. When the cage passes the slower forward group, the whole group can re-form into a normal riding configuration.

### **Changing Lanes into Faster-Moving Traffic**

The same basic lane-changing principle for entering slow-moving lanes also applies when a group is entering faster-moving traffic where at least two lanes of traffic are moving in the same direction; that is, moving from the right lane to the left. The first bike to move creates a gap for the remaining bikes. Since traffic is pulling away from the group as each member enters the lane, this maneuver is done back to front.

The maneuver is accomplished in this manner. Also can be done “in Pair of Bikes”, the Lead Bike signals for a lane change and announces to the group via CB and turn signals that the group will moving to the left, back to front. Then the Lead Bike asks the Drag Bike to “secure the lane” to the left. All station-keeping bikes maintain their position while this occurs, putting their own turn signals on to indicate the move to be made. The Drag Bike then moves first when a space in the lane to the left opens up and radios to the Lead Bike and the group, “The lane is secured.”

No one is to change lanes at this point, however! First, each rider must make certain the lane is clear by actually turning his head to insure that there is no other vehicle still approaching the group in the left lane. If a vehicle is still moving up beside the group, the Drag Bike will usually say, “After the red truck,” or “After the station wagon,” etc. Whether or not a warning is given by the Drag Bike (who may have other concerns with the traffic to his rear), each rider must do a head-check before entering a faster-moving lane.

The second bike to move will be the one in front of the Drag Bike. That rider moves across the tracks of the current lane, does a head-check, changes lane and then takes up a position in the track of the new lane where he was originally riding. By dropping to a speed slightly slower than the rate at which traffic in that lane has been traveling, each bike creates a gap into which the next bike forward can insert. Each rider follows this pattern: signal left, move left in your own lane, head-check, enter new lane, maintain (slower) speed to create gap, and take up regular position (left or right track) in the new lane.

The Lead Bike in this pattern is normally the last to enter the new lane. As the bikes move quickly and re-form their group, it is rare that a four-wheeler will move up into the gap in the new lane. If a cage moves into the gap, the next bike to move must wait for the cage to pass, so that a gap appears again. Then the maneuver can be completed and the group can re-form into a normal configuration.