

Group Riding

Our Chapter's many and varied group rides generate a lot of participation by our members. Our group rides consistently turn out well. This is not by happenstance or luck, but results from our established protocol for conducting group rides and our cadre of dedicated Road Captains.

Before each ride, the Lead Road Captain briefs the riders on the Chapter's standard rules for the ride. These include the staggered formation, following distances, hand signals, changing lanes, merging vehicles, separated formation, hazards in road, following traffic laws, individual rider or bike problems, etc. These instructions are sufficiently detailed to allow a rider who is new to the Chapter to participate fully in the ride. The Lead Road Captain also notes any specific aspects of this particular ride that might affect safety. These might include traction concerns from rain, gravel, wet leaves, etc. or perhaps road obstacles such as construction, detours, or areas that will require increased rider caution. This process has proven effective in staging safe and enjoyable group rides.

While the Road Captains promote safety, each individual rider has the primary responsibility for his own safety and his actions that might affect the safety of the other riders around him. The safety tips presented below are from the perspective of the individual rider, riding in formation with other riders. They complement the safety precautions presented by the Lead Road Captain before each ride. We may be in a group, but we still have to ride defensively. We must be alert at all times and be ready to respond to any situation which threatens our safety.

The staggered formation puts a bike diagonally in front of you, generally one second ahead, and one directly in front of you, two seconds ahead. Avoid fixating your attention on the taillights of these two bikes because it might not allow sufficient reaction time if needed. Look ahead and be able to anticipate an action (braking, swerving, etc.) before you have to take it. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) recommends that a rider scan twelve seconds ahead and notes that an event that occurs only four seconds ahead may require an emergency response. Cover your brakes as you approach any area or situation that might warrant a reduction in speed.

The recommended one second and two seconds following distances are space cushions in front and rear of each bike and they are *minimums*. If you encroach to less than one or two seconds, then you deny yourself space for emergency action if needed. Moreover, your infringement also reduces the rear space cushions of the two bikes ahead of you, reducing their margins of safety. You do not want to run into the bike in front of you or pass a diagonal bike if either of them slows or stops abruptly.

The Lead Road Captain may signal for the riders to shift to single file to pass an obstruction or to address a challenging stretch of road. The recommended minimum distance for following a vehicle directly in front of you is two seconds. Therefore, when the group goes into single file, stay at least two seconds behind the bike in front of you.

In a staggered formation, a rider may reposition his bike laterally to avoid a road hazard or to enter a curve from the outside edge and then resume the staggered position after the hazard or curve. Since the forward and rear safety cushions are reduced as he moves laterally, he should do so carefully, with a head check on the following rider's position.

Ride your own ride, especially in curves. If you are not comfortable with the speed that the bikes in front of you take a curve, then slow down and take it at your preferred speed. Follow less closely around a curve, especially one that provides you a limited view. You may enter the curve and find that the bike in front of you has reduced its speed and you are rapidly overtaking it. Extending your following distance and looking as far into the curve as possible resolves this concern and maintains your space cushion.

The Lead Road Captain always sets moderate speeds for the group and riders should have no problem maintaining the formation under normal circumstances. Don't let an inordinate gap develop between you and the bike in front of you. This encourages other vehicles to pull into the formation. However, as vehicles approach the formation from an on-ramp, it may be reasonable to adjust your speed and respectfully wave them through the formation. When approaching an off-ramp, be alert for vehicles on your left who may cut across the formation to try to make the exit.

While riding country roads, we frequently encounter Stop signs with a limited view of approaching traffic. We stop at the sign, the bikes come together in a side by side closed formation, and proceed through it one or two bikes at a time. Although you may be eager to stay with the group, resist the urge to follow the bike in front of you through the intersection without stopping. Be sure to *see for yourself* that the way is clear. Sometimes one or more intersecting vehicles will stop to allow us to go through the intersection together. While taking advantage of this courtesy, we must be alert for other vehicles that may come upon the scene and attempt to pass the stopped vehicles.

When riding in a group, human instinct wants to keep the group together. However, at intersections it can't always be done. As the traffic light that we are approaching turns yellow, maybe one or two bikes can make it through without concern. Frequently, however, additional riders continue to run the light and may end up still in the intersection as the light turns red. This is not a safe thing to do. It's best to stop at the light, move forward after it changes, and rely on the "bread crumb" to get you and the following bikes back with the group.

The bread crumb procedure works well. The last rider to make it through a traffic light is designated as the "bread crumb." He stays with the main group until it makes a turn, goes around a traffic circle, or makes some other maneuver that would not be obvious to following riders. The bread crumb stops and positions himself in a *safe* location that is *visible* to the following riders as they catch up. He then leads them to follow the main group. Finding a safe and visible position to wait is not always easy to

do on the spur of the moment. The astute bread crumb mentally evaluates the possibilities in advance as the group approaches each possible location where he may have to wait.

Extraordinary or unsafe efforts by individual riders are not required to keep us together. The Lead Road Captain may pull over the formation for others to catch up, we have the bread crumb procedure and, as a last resort, the Rear Road Captain knows the route and destination. We always seem to end up together at the destination.

Group rides are great Chapter activities of riding and camaraderie. Let's ride safely and enjoy them.

Ernie Staples Sr.
Safety Officer
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