



December 3, 2010

Group Riding Guide

As a motorcycle club member the ability to group-ride, safely and efficiently, is paramount. When motorcyclists are riding in formation, consistent riding behavior by the group can minimize the possibility of confusion by surrounding traffic, leading to a much safer ride! Riding in a group is strictly voluntary and should be done only if you feel comfortable with your motorcycle and the riding habits of your particular riding group. Group riding is not for every rider. We encourage those riders who desire to ride on their own, to do so. We can always meet and fellowship at the next stop or the final destination!

Group or formation riding is a skill like most others. It is a skill developed through preparation, planning, and practice. . If you're interested in developing your group riding skills, contact one of our road captains to arrange some group riding opportunities. This

group-riding guide is designed to help you prepare for the club's group riding season. Much of the information contained here has been obtained from other riding sources such as the, Motorcycle Safety Foundation, the Goldwing Touring Association, and articles and recommendations from various other motorcycle enthusiasts. BSMCEB thanks all for their input.

Planning:

For planned group rides, Road Captains should take time prior to the ride to map out a travel route. The planned route should take into consideration, travel time, road conditions, and size of the group, weather, fuel, rest stops, food, and bathrooms. The ride planning process should try to anticipate factors that will impact our riders. Other group members should be proactive and notify the road captains prior to the ride date concerning guests, special needs, or to provide knowledge concerning the destination.

Prior to the ride date, the Road Captain identified to lead the ride should announce the meeting place and time, and the anticipated route.

Ride Day Preparation:

All Riders - Arrive prepared.

Prior to the morning of the ride, ensure that your bike is in good working order. Check the weather for the ride date and load any supplies you may need for the ride, such as a basic tool kit, owner's manual, snacks, etc.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation's T-CLOCS checklist is a great tool for ride preparation. The checklist covers common and important items such as:

Tires, Controls, Lights, Oil, Chassis, Stands (T-CLOCS)

This checklist is available online: <http://www.msf-usa.org/downloads/t-clocsinspectionchecklist.pdf>

Arrive on time with a full gas tank. Remember the first rule of group riding, start with a full tank and an empty bladder! Rule number two, don't be late. If kickstands are to be up at a specific time (e.g., 0800 hrs), the entire group will be leaving at that time. In many cases, the meeting place may be a gas station. This will enable all of the riders to

fill their tanks, get snacks, empty their bladders and fellowship with each other before the ride begins.

Road Captains - Hold a Pre-Ride Briefing.

Before departure, the lead road captain will gather the group and discuss with all of the participants, details such as, the route, rest, and fuel stops, and hand signals (see diagrams).

Assign the key riding positions. This is very important, and should not be taken lightly. The ride leader must know the route and recognize the needs of the group, i.e., fuel tank and bladder size!! At a minimum, there will need to be a front and a rear (rear road captain (aka "rear gunner"). If the group of motorcycles becomes larger, (greater than 5) assign both a middle road captain and a tail gunner. Both should be experienced riders who are well versed in group riding procedures. The ride leader should assess everyone's riding skills and the group's riding style. Ensure that weaker riders are taken into account, as are guest riders. Explain to the group and especially the guests, the type of formation that we will ride in, and how we will handle lane changes and traffic controls.

AT NO TIME DURING THE GROUP RIDE WILL WE EXCEED THE POSTED SPEED LIMIT!!

A safety lead may also be considered on the group ride. Their role would be to ensure that basic first aid supplies are available, as well as emergency contact number are available in case someone gets sick or injured along the way.

Keep the group to a manageable size

If necessary, break the group into smaller sub-groups, each with a lead and tail-gunner along with information about the route, rest stops and final destination

COMMUNICATIONS ON THE ROAD

Ideally, it is preferred that the front and rear road captains communicate with the aid of a CB radio. However, there may be instances when this is not available. In those situations, it becomes increasingly important that the ride leaders use, and the riders understand all of the hand signals that may be used during the trip.

Hand Signals.

During the pre-ride briefing, the ride leader and road captains should clarify the hand signals to be used and ensure that guests understand these signals. (See examples below) Hand signals will be used to transition the group riding formations and to indicate hazards, etc.

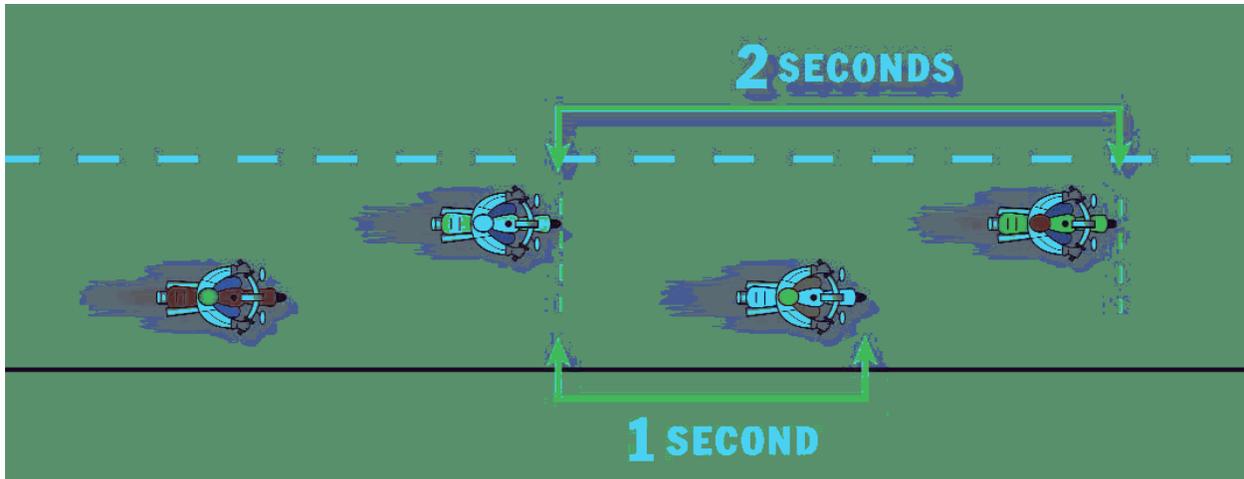
GROUP RIDING

The formation ride is impressive and can cause surrounding traffic to stare, wave, speed up, slow down, and take any number of other actions that may impact a riding group! We ride comfortably but cautiously.... SAFETY FIRST!

The **staggered** riding formation is the default highway riding formation for BSMCEB. (See diagram below) The staggered formation allows a proper space cushion between motorcycles so that each rider has enough time and space to maneuver and to react to hazards. The leader typically 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 the same pattern. Each rider should maintain at least two seconds between themselves and the bike riding on the side of the lane directly in front of them. On open highway with little traffic, a three-second rule may be even safer.

One of the reasons a group needs to ride in this close of a formation, is that when you are riding on a multi-lane highway, it is important to keep at least one (1) motorcycle of the group in the other vehicles side view mirrors. This way the operator of a vehicle next to the group will not think that they can move into your lane. This can happen when the group is spread out more than the two (2) second rule.

As we ride, don't center your focus on the bike in front of you - that's called tunnel vision. Scan instead, just as you do when riding alone. Keep a high visual horizon, looking down road prepares you for trouble and increases your ability to avoid hazards. You are strongly encouraged not to ride in the center portion of the lane where oil and debris tends to accumulate.



A **single-file** formation is preferred on a curvy road, under conditions of poor visibility or poor road surfaces, entering/leaving highways, or other situations where an increased space cushion or maneuvering room is needed. The ride leader will signal when to enter into a single file formation.

Side-by-side formations decrease rider reaction time, as they reduce the space cushion between riders. If you suddenly needed to swerve to avoid a hazard, you would not have room to do so. You don't want handlebars to get entangled. In most cases, we will not ride side by side on roadways.

One exception to this is approaching controlled intersections (Stop signs and Stoplights). As we stop for traffic signals, riders should fall into a side-by-side formation as we wait to cross the intersection. This allows group members to get across quicker.

Make sure that when stopping at a STOP sign, you come to a complete stop with one or both feet on the ground. A rolling stop may get you a ticket and ruin your ride for the day.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD ANY RIDER BLOCK AN INTERSECTION OR LANE TO ALLOW THE REST OF THE GROUP TO RIDE THROUGH IT.

Lane changes while in the staggered formation:

Lane changes in the staggered formation begin with the ride leader anticipating the change far in advance.

- Once the ride leader decides upon a lane change, he/she will signal using turn indicators and hand signals.

- The signal will be continued to the rear of the formation by each rider.
- Once the tail gunner recognizes the signal, the tail gunner will assess the traffic in the desired lane. When safe, tail gunner and *only the tail gunner* will move into the lane, thereby clearing the lane for the group.
- Once tail gunner has cleared the lane, the ride leader will change lanes and each successive rider will follow suit from front of the formation to the rear.

It is very important to explain this procedure thoroughly during the pre-ride brief. Many groups use a variation of this technique and guest riders may have an entirely different expectation than our group. For safety purposes, it is extremely important that everyone riding in our group understand how lane changes will be handled. It is the responsibility of the front road captain to provide feedback to the group at the next stop, if any of the riders in the group don't follow this practice.

Intersections

When approaching a vehicle facing toward you that is attempting to turn left, assume that driver does not see you and will turn directly into your path.

When first in line at a signal-controlled intersection without a left turn arrow, don't wait at the white line. Move forward on the green signal to the approximate center of the intersection and halt with your left turn signal activated and wait until the left turn movement can safely be completed. This will allow many of the (if not the whole) group to complete a turn at the same time and is not illegal in California.

When stopping at a traffic light or stop sign, catch up to the unit to your front and wait side-by-side. Bike on left is always first to commence moving.

When entering a through street, or highway, or turning at an intersection, the Group Leader should accelerate slowly and each pair of bikes should proceed through the signal together, slowly joining the group across the intersection. The leader will either wait safely at the side of the road, or ride slowly until informed by the tail gunner, that the group is together.

(Note: BSMCEB obeys all traffic laws!)

Periodically check the riders following in your rear view mirror:

If you see a rider falling behind, slow down slightly so they may catch up. If all the riders in the group use this technique, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up.

If you're separated from the group:

Don't panic. The pre-ride meeting should have explained the place to regroup. Don't break the law or ride beyond your skills to catch up. In the event of a mechanical breakdown or minor casualty, the rear gunner will be responsible to leave with the troubled rider to assist as needed. ***We believe that "no soldier or group rider should be left behind" to fend for themselves.***

For mechanical or medical problems, use a cell phone to call for assistance as the situation warrants.

Parking

When entering parking areas, we will transition to single file and slowly follow the leader to the designated parking area. Be alert! Don't just park anywhere! If possible, all bikes will stop side by side and back into our spot simultaneously. If the leader does not feel that there is enough room for all bikes, he/she will then tell you to find your own spot.

Try to keep the group together in an orderly fashion. It really looks good when a disciplined formation of motorcycles comes down the highway, exits in an orderly fashion, and parks all in a row. Spectators stop and watch an orderly group enter a parking lot, close up, and park; you can see the admiration on their faces. It makes you proud to be a part of that group of motorcyclists.

MSF's Guide to Group Riding: 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



You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front



Follow Me - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward



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



Highbeam - tap on top of helmet with open palm down



Pull Off - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder



Turn Signal On - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



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



APPENDIX:

Lane Change Alternatives:

Definitions:

(Note: some descriptions assume radio communications are available.)

Lane Changing, Fast moving Traffic, Passing other vehicles

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: The Lead Bike signals for a lane change and announces to the group via CB and turn signals that the group will be moving to the left, back to front. Then the Lead Bike asks the Drag Bike to secure the lane to the left to which the Drag Bike should normally respond with Stand by 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, that 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.

Passing

On a busy two-lane road, oncoming traffic typically prevents a group from passing a slow-moving vehicle while in formation. Each member of the group must accomplish two lane changes in order to pass, and this usually is done on an individual basis.

Regardless of what a rider is told by others in the group about oncoming vehicles, each rider must personally check to see that the oncoming lane is clear of traffic before entering it.

If oncoming traffic requires the group to pass individually, the Lead Bike will signal the group to move into a single-file formation and will announce that the group members are to pass the vehicle one at a time. The forward members of the group will gradually position themselves in single file in the left track to prepare to pull into the oncoming lane. The Lead Bike will usually wait for a gap in oncoming traffic that is big enough for more than one bike to pass, but this is not always possible. When a safe interval is observed, the Lead Bike will put its left turn signal on and pull into the oncoming lane. After passing the obstacle, looking in the rear view mirror for clearance and actually turning the head to be sure the lane is clear, the Lead Bike then signals that it is moving into the right lane and does so, taking its normal position in front of the slower vehicle(s) in the left track. The Lead Bike must then maintain or even slightly increase its speed.

As with a lane change to the right, each bike should be aware of the need to create a gap into which the next bike in succession can fit after overtaking an obstacle. For this reason, each bike should maintain speed after passing, until the Drag Bike has passed and the group has re-formed.

Special care should be taken when passing not to focus on distant oncoming traffic to the point of establishing target fixation. The rider should continue to scan the environment for hazards and should plan escape routes in case of the unexpected; for example, the obstacle may come to life again when he sees motorcycles passing him and may accelerate while the rider is still in the oncoming lane, exposed to additional risk. After he has passed the slower moving vehicle, the Drag Bike will usually notify the Lead Bike that the group is intact again by saying, We're family!□

Some Common Group Riding Terms:

Group: a small number of motorcyclists who ride together maintaining a generally fixed distance between bikes and maintaining fixed positions within the formation (usually no more than six per group). On rides in which participation by a large number of motorcyclists occurs, it is common to have riders divided into several groups and to name them Group 1, Group 2, etc. This facilitates radio communication when several groups are listening to the same broadcasts and traffic coordination on the same CB channel.

Road Captain: a person who devises group riding rules or guidelines for a club or chapter of a motorcycling organization, who communicates these guidelines to the club, and who generally plans and lays out group rides. The Road Captain may or may not ride lead for a particular ride.

Lead Bike: a person who rides in the most forward position in a group and who relays information to all other riders in the group via hand signals and/or CB communications. The Lead Bike determines the group's direction, speed, choice of lane, and formation. He or she often must make quick navigation decisions in the face of road hazards, changes in road surface conditions, poor signage, construction and other obstacles while maintaining control of his or her bike and communicating to those following. It is the responsibility of the Lead Bike to select a Drag Bike with whom communications will be coordinated during a ride. If there are three groups on a ride, there will be three Lead Bikes. If at all possible, the Lead Bike should be equipped with a CB.

Tail Gunner/Drag Bike: a person who rides in the last position in a group and who relays information to the Lead Bike regarding the other riders in the group, traffic patterns, equipment problems, etc. he or she observes. The Drag Bike must secure a lane for the rest of the group during lane changes into faster traffic (move first to block oncoming traffic) and close the door (move to block passing traffic) when a lane is lost in a merging lane situation. Usually this is the most experienced rider in a group, for the

Drag Bike is the rider who stops to assist a rider who has mechanical trouble, loses control, or drops out of a ride for some other reason. The Drag Bike should be prepared to render aid to a downed or disabled rider in a group while communicating the problem to the Lead Bike and others in the group. If at all possible, the Drag Bike should be equipped with a CB and, preferably, will have a co-rider who can assist with communications or traffic control if a serious problem arises. If there are three groups on a ride, there will be three Drag Bikes. The rider in this position is sometimes called the tail gunner.

Group Parking: a formation in which all bikes in a group follow the Lead Bike in single file into a parking lot, making a U-turn such that they can all line up next to each other in the space available with the rear of their bikes against the curb or edge of the lot, the front tires pointing outward.

Parade formation: a formation in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride two abreast.

Single file: a formation in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride in one track of a lane.

Staggered formation: a formation of motorcyclists in a group in which the Lead Bike rides in the left track of a lane, the next bike in the right track or slot, and the next bike in the left track, and so on. Bikes in a group generally maintain a minimum interval of two seconds travel time between bikes in the same track, and one-second travel time between each bike in the group. In a staggered formation, a rider still commands and may ride in the entire width of his lane as needed. Group riders may also ride single file or two abreast. The Drag Bike may ride in the left or right track depending on the number of bikes in the group. It is preferable for the Drag Bike to ride in the left track, so as to have the same visibility line as the Lead Bike.

Track: the zone of a lane in which a rider maintains his position in a group. A lane of traffic is divided into five zones: the left track is the second zone from the left, the middle of the lane (generally not used) is the third zone, and the right track is the fourth zone from the left. Two zones on the sides of a lane serve as margins. A rider may vary his path of travel from his normal track as is required by a road hazard or by an incursion into the group's lane by other vehicles.

Two abreast: a formation in which the members of a group ride adjacent to each other in pairs, used when riding in parade formation. Used after stopping at signs and traffic signals so that riders can get through an intersection quickly and together if possible. When departing from a stop, the rider in the left track normally pulls out before the rider on the right, returning to a staggered formation.

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