

Riding Rules

The purpose of riding in an organized group instead of an undisciplined pack is to provide the additional safety that a well-organized group inherently generates. This comes from within the group and from the outside. When a group rides in an orderly fashion, people don't get in each other's way, and the organization of the formation itself discourages cars from attempting to cut in. I have even seen trucks move to the far side of their lane to minimize wind blast when they see a well-ordered formation "single up" and move as far away from the truck as their lane allows.

Once riding rules have been adopted by a club, EVERYONE riding with the club is expected to follow them. Anyone violating the rules, and compromising everyone else's safety, will be warned, and if their actions continue, will no longer be welcome to ride with the club.

The following rules are compiled from a number of sources. Most clubs that ride in orderly formations follow similar rules. Details may vary from one club to another, sometimes because of the style of riding they do, or sometimes because there are a number of reasonable options, so they chose the one they prefer.

1. Formation

Riding will be in a standard State Patrol (staggered) formation. In staggered formation, the bikes form two columns, with the leader at the head of the left column, so he will be able to view all bikes in the formation in his/her rearview mirrors, and be able to see around vehicles the group approaches. The second bike will head the right column, and will ride approximately 1 second behind the leader (and in the opposite side of the lane). The other riders will position their bikes 2 seconds behind the bike directly in front of them, which puts them 1 second behind the diagonal bike.

This formation allows each rider sufficient safety space, and discourages other vehicles from cutting into the line.

The last rider, or **Tail Gunner**, may ride on whichever side of the lane he prefers. He will have to change sides during the ride, based on the situation at the moment.

2. Ride Leader

The Ride Leader must be aware of the length of the columns, and must gauge the passing of merges, highway entrances and exits, etc., to allow for maximum safety and keeping the group together. He must make sure that he leaves enough time/space for the formation to get into the appropriate lanes before exits, etc.

All directions come from the Ride Leader. The Ride Leader makes all decisions regarding lane changes, stopping for breaks and fuel, closing of gaps, turning off at exits, any concerns of what lies ahead, accepting/rejecting radioed messages from other individuals, and so on. **No** individual will assert himself independently without direction from the Ride Leader to do so.

3. Tail Gunner (aka: Sweep)

The Tail Gunner serves as the eyes of the Ride Leader. He watches the formation, and informs the Ride Leader of any potential problems within the group. He watches other vehicles, and informs the Ride Leader (and anyone else with radios) of hazardous conditions approaching from the rear, such as vehicles trying to cut into the formation and trucks passing with potentially dangerous wind blasts. He will watch for merging lanes, and will move into a merging lane (or stay in a merging lane just vacated by the group) in order to "close the door" on other vehicles that may otherwise find themselves trying to merge into the formation. At the Ride Leader's request, the Tail Gunner changes lanes before the formation, to secure the lane so the formation can move into it.

4. **New Riders**

The position of new (inexperienced with GROUP riding) riders within the group is significant. New riders should be positioned as close to the front as possible

5. **Lane Changes**

All lane changing starts with a radio request from the Ride Leader to the Tail Gunner. The Tail Gunner will (when it is safe to do so) move into the requested lane and will inform the Ride Leader when the lane is clear.

At this point, the Ride Leader has three options.

1. **Simple Lane Change.** This is an ordinary lane change, and can be used in most situations.

After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then initiates the change. All other riders change lanes too. The important concept is that NO ONE moves until the bike in front of him has started moving.

2. **Block Lane Change.** This can be used interchangeably with the Simple Lane Change. It requires a little more work, but it is well worth the effort. It's quite impressive to watch, and gives the riders a tremendous feeling of "togetherness". This sounds a little complicated, but is actually very simple to do.

After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too. This allows the entire formation to move from one lane to another as a single block.

3. **Rear Fill-in.** This is sometimes necessary if a long enough gap cannot be maintained in the new lane, for example when trying to move from the right lane to the center and vehicles from the left lane keep cutting into the opening

After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the leader (usually at the suggestion of the Tail Gunner) will call for the group to fill in the space from the rear. He signals this by raising his hand to shoulder height and "pushing" it towards the new lane. All riders repeat the signal, and the last bikes move into the space in the new lane ahead of the Tail Gunner, then the next-to-last bikes move in ahead of those, and so on until the Ride Leader finally moves into the space ahead of the entire formation.

1. **Emergencies**

In the unlikely event of an emergency condition, the Ride Leader will make every attempt to move the formation to the shoulder in an orderly manner. If a bike breaks down, let the rider move to the right. DO NOT STOP. The Tail Gunner will stop with the problem bike. The Ride Leader will lead the group to a safe stopping place.

2. Tolls

The Ride Leader should be aware of tolls and collect money from all riders in advance. When the formation arrives at the toll booth, the Ride Leader pays for all bikes, and all bikes proceed through the toll. Many toll booths have counters that count the number of vehicles coming through. To accommodate these, ride through the toll booth one at a time.

If some people in the group are using EZ Pass, they will split out from the group, and the formation will reform on the other side of the toll booth. Make sure the Ride Leader knows in advance how many bikes he is paying the toll for.

3. Hand Signals

Each rider (and passenger) should duplicate all hand signals given by the rider in front of him, so that the signals get passed all the way to the back of the formation. The following signals are used in addition to the standard (right turn, left turn, slow/stop) hand signals.

Block Lane Change

The leader (after having the Tail Gunner secure the lane) raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too.

Fill in from rear

After having the Tail Gunner secure the lane and putting on his directional signal (which is repeated by each rider), the Ride Leader raises his left hand to his shoulder and "pushes" his open hand toward the lane into which he wants to move. This signal is repeated by all riders, and each rider in turn, rearmost first, moves into the space ahead of the riders behind them.

Single up

When conditions warrant single file (narrow road, anticipated wind-blast from trucks, obstruction, pedestrians, etc.) the Ride Leader will raise his left hand straight up, holding up just his index finger. All other riders will repeat this, and the two columns will merge into one.

Staggered Formation

After singling up, when single file is no longer necessary, the Ride Leader will raise his left hand with thumb and pinky out, other fingers closed, rotating his wrist back and forth (indicating left, right, left, right). All other riders will repeat this and resume staggered formation.

Tighten Formation

When the Ride Leader feels that the formation should be tighter (bikes closer together) (usually after being informed by the Tail Gunner), he raises his left hand with fingers spread wide and repeatedly closes them into a fist. All other riders repeat this and close up all unnecessary space in the formation.

Road Hazard

This is the one signal that can be initiated by ANYONE. Anyone seeing a hazardous condition on the road surface (roadkill, oil, gravel, significant pot hole, etc.) will point at it. All following riders will repeat this, and all riders will avoid the hazard.

Ten Commandments Of Riding

1. *Never pass the Road Captain.*

The Road Captain is responsible for getting the group to the intended destination safely and on time. He or she sets the pace for the group and insures all traffic laws are obeyed. The Road Captain has control of the route and can change the route if weather or road conditions make it necessary for a safe trip.

2. *Ride Staggered, (2 to 3 seconds behind the bike in front of you)*

This allows room for you to move right or left to avoid obstacles in the road without endangering other riders. 2 to 3 seconds is recommended as a minimum but not more than 4 seconds. To measure the distance, pick an object such as a mail box, road sign or road marker. As the bike directly in front of you passes the object start counting, 1001, 1002. At the end of 1002 you should be passing the object yourself. Do not allow large gaps between yourself and the bike in front of you. More than 4 seconds creates a gap that can allow other vehicles to enter the group. Long gaps invite vehicles to cross or enter the road from side streets endangering yourself and other riders. Keep the gap small but follow at a safe distance.

3. *Do Not Change Lanes, fill in directly in front of you.*

Changing lanes is not a safe practice. If a gap develops between you and the bike in front of you, you can fill in straight ahead by notifying the bike just ahead of you in the other lane. This can be done by a short blast of the horn as you approach. Slowly pull alongside of the rider and pass with caution. If you have a preference of lanes you should get into that lane as the group lines up to depart.

4. *Do not pass the rider next to you unless he knows you are coming, or they signal you to do so.*

Sometimes it is necessary to pass another rider. If you are filling in a gap or instructed to do so, give a short blast of your horn and pass with caution. Be sure you have the attention of the rider you are passing.

5. *Observe all traffic devices & speed limits.*

While traveling in large groups it is inevitable the group will encounter traffic lights. Never run red lights trying to keep up with the group. If part of the group gets caught by a red light the Tail Gunner will alert the Road Captain of the situation. The Road Captain will reduce speed till the rest can catch up. If the delay is extended the Road Captain will find a suitable place to pull the group over and allow the rest of the group to catch up. Never ride beyond the speed limit in order to catch up with the group. The Tail Gunner will notify the Road captain when the rest of the group has caught up and normal speed will be resumed for the group.

6. *Cross 4-way stops (2) bikes at a time.*

4 way stops are not uncommon in our area and can be a major problem while trying to keep unwanted vehicles from entering the group. Many times the Road Captain will stop and allow other traffic to pass through the intersection out of turn while the group bunches up. This helps clear traffic and gives the group a better chance to stay together. While approaching the intersection group up as close as possible and align yourself with the rider next to you. Proceed through the intersection 2 bikes at a time. If no cross traffic is present you can use the "rolling stop" method. That is, pull up to the stop sign looking both ways, slow to a quick or near stop and then proceed through the intersection. Many times other traffic will allow bike groups to proceed through unimpeded. When they do so be sure to tip your head in acknowledgment to show your appreciation.

7. Know all hand signals & pass them on when you see them. See Hand Signals Below

8. Ride within your capabilities.

Riders should never test the limits of their abilities while riding with a group. On occasion we'll have the opportunity to ride some of the back roads where curves can be not only fun for the experienced but dangerous for the inexperienced. The Road Captain will explain the route before the ride and describe the terrain we'll be covering. Newer riders along with riders that prefer a more cautious pace through curvy roads should ride towards the back of the group while riders that prefer a faster pace should ride towards the front of the group. Never put yourself or others in danger, always ride at a pace that you are comfortable with. If the group becomes separated the Road Captain will find a safe place to pull over and wait for the rest of the group.

9. The Road Captain will discuss the route and answer any questions.

Most all rides are well planned in advance. The Road Captain will explain the route and describe the terrain we'll be covering. If you have questions or information about the route be sure to bring it to the attention of the Road Captains.

10. Safety Check your Bike. Tires, gas & oil. Preferably before you arrive.

For your safety and the safety of the group, always make sure your bike is in good condition. Before you leave to meet the group make a quick inspection of your bike. Look for loose or missing bolts and hardware, make sure your tires are inflated properly and check you oil level. Most of our meeting places are at or near a gas station so give yourself time to gas up before the scheduled departing time.