

Staying Together

WHEN IT COMES TO SHARING the experiences of riding, nothing



beats the fun of being with a group that enjoys it as much as you do. With the growth of motorcycling's popularity, many have found group riding a great way to enjoy the company of friends and family. Yet, whether we ride solo or in a group, risk is always a part of the ride. Last time, we discussed the basic guidelines for group riding, but since there are so many variables to consider, let's review some additional steps we can take to minimize the risks.

Communication is a major factor in making any ride a success. As you preview the rules with your group, don't forget to go over riding's most important dos and don'ts. One hazard many groups are guilty of causing is blocking traffic at intersections. Blocking traffic is a hazard for many reasons. Besides being illegal, it puts riders in harm's way, leaving them no escape route and little available reaction time should an emergency arise. Developing a false sense of security is another trap that group members can easily fall into. Continuing to ride without looking for traffic is not a good practice. If a car does not see the group blocker, there is a chance that the vehicle will not stop in time for the blocker and the other bikes in its path of travel.

As part of the briefing, all riders should also be told that they are responsible for their own safety, so they must stop completely at every posted intersection and before they pull into traffic. Sure, it's nice to keep everyone together, but is risking one's safety worth it? You can always consider having a designated meeting spot or a safe area to pull over to regroup in case traffic gets into the mix of the group. The regrouping idea also works well when part of the route may be through a town or city.

One thing people worry about when riding with a group is falling behind because of traffic conditions. Getting separated from the group can easily happen when riding through areas with multiple traffic lights, and even more so if the route includes a few turns. What can you do about this? First, remember the communication factor. Tell the group everything they need to know about the route before setting out.

There are other steps you can take to prevent the group from disbanding, such as developing a buddy system where members keep tabs on riders in back of them. With a buddy system in place, if part of the group gets caught up at a light, the rest of the group knows to decrease speed until everyone reunites. What if traffic doesn't allow them to slow down and a turn needs to be made before those in back can make visual contact? Then the last rider should place himself by the turn where he can safely stay until the second part of the group rejoins the ride. If you're in a larger city or metropolitan area where traffic usually moves quickly, handing out directions for the route and cellphone numbers may be better options, as well as choosing a meeting destination, as previously mentioned. Once again, communication is the key to making the ride a success. Try to cover all bases at the pre-ride meeting, but also ask if anyone has additional questions. While there is nothing wrong with asking, some folks feel they should just follow the pack and everything will work out all right. But the fact is, communication and information works both ways. Being a responsible rider requires being informed, so don't let folks be shy about asking questions. Knowing where they are headed eliminates confusion, which helps reduce that four-letter word in motorcycling — *risk*.

Many people believe that riding with a group is safer than riding alone. While group riding may have an advantage in terms of making you more visible, it could also become far more dangerous if proper procedures are not followed. That's why you'll be glad that you've prepared everyone well for the day. And if at the end of the ride everyone is still together, and they want to do it all over again sometime soon, then you can bask in the knowledge that you made the group ride a successful one — and a safe one. **AIM**