

The Basics of Group Riding

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Over the years we have covered the topic of group riding several times, yet this is the one subject I am often asked about by riders: What do groups need to do when heading out for a ride? From presentations and feedback, it seems that sometimes the basic information for a group ride is not taken into consideration, and from there other issues seem to pile up.

Many of us have seen the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) video about group riding, or, at a minimum, know the outline the video suggests that group riders review. What we need to remember is that the information given is a baseline, and each group needs to adjust accordingly, taking into consideration the proposed ride plus traffic, road, and weather conditions as well as the capabilities of each rider. If we start with the basics, we need to keep in mind that the definition of a group ride is that the bikers meet at point A and plan to head to point B—that's it. While it may be great for all of us to be able to ride together, many times, especially in congested areas, this may not be achievable. This is the importance of having a priride meeting to explain the routes, type of roads, etc. along with the location of the destination. In the event the group is broken up, ride participants can always meet at the destination; the "lost" riders might actually find a more enjoyable route to the destination than the one planned. Communication is key at the start of the ride as well as along the way.

When it comes to "keeping the pack together," even if the group is riding in the suggested staggered formation, the riders are really individuals traveling within a traffic pattern. This does not mean we own any section of roadway; other vehicles have the right

to mix within our group. Although this may be frustrating, it can happen. Typically, when a vehicle enters the lane we are in, it is normally because the motorist or biker needs to exit or turn soon. Most other motorists or riders really do not want to interrupt our group ride; some may even be unaware of bikers' presence, but, in any case, let others into the lane and give them ample space—they may do something unexpected.

One issue that happens way too often is that riders ride too closely to one another. They may be in the noted staggered formation but may not keep the suggested space/time minimum between bikes. This can become an issue if a dangerous situation develops. Unfortunately, when an accident happens more than one motorcycle in the group is involved, and it's not just because they were riding too closely together. The problem may be a combination of riding too closely together and not everyone in the group are equally skilled riders, so that all those in the group are not able to react quickly to a dangerous situation.

Some folks seem to believe that riding in a group is safer than solo riding. At times, that is far from the truth. Riding in a group may afford you more visibility and possibly someone in the group may be able to provide assistance, but other than that there are no safety benefits to riding with a group. You have to bear in mind that we are riding with

a group of mixed-skill levels, and some riders may not be able to react as quickly as others.

Spacing is important; if it takes you three to four seconds or more to adjust for an emergency, why would you ride two seconds from the bike in front of you? Doesn't make sense, yet people believe that if you have too much space between riders, the group becomes too long—so what! Again, remember we are individuals heading to the same location. We should always try to break larger groups into smaller ones when possible to avoid group traffic congestion. This is where the importance of communication comes into play and the need for that priride meeting.

Between sharing a route and the camaraderie, group riding certainly offers an enjoyable time, but it does have its risks. I only touched on a couple of points, but there is a whole lot more that can be reviewed: intersections, heavy traffic, the change from single file, etc. The big things to always consider is having a plan before heading out, communicating that plan, and recognizing

that situations can and will develop, for which you'll have to adjust.

So go out and enjoy those rides with your clubs and friends, but just remember to keep the basics in mind to make things safer and keep those good times rolling. **AIM**

