



SAFETY SKILLS by Don Gomo

Group Thoughts

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THE FIRST SAFETY TOPIC I covered when joining *American Iron Magazine* five years ago was group riding. Since then, we've covered an array of topics that are not only for riding in general but definitely can be applied to group riding. The information really hasn't changed over time, but I've had the opportunity to speak to several clubs

and HOG chapters on the subject. I noticed that there is one key component that most need a little better understanding of, the mental processing of our approach to group riding.

For many riders, joining a group ride is enjoyable and a great way to spend a day with friends. Sharing the road and riding experience can make for a great memory, but if we do not have our thought process down, it could turn into a bad memory that no one wants to relive.

We need to bring to mind that the first person responsible for our safety is ourselves. We should be riding at our best at all times to help reduce risk factors. By doing so, the rest of the group will benefit. If each rider in the group approaches the ride in that same fashion, risk factors are lower.

Ask riders "What is a group ride?" and the answers will vary a bit. Basically, it is a group of bikers meeting at one destination and heading to another. Simple enough, but certainly a thought process that often gets misconceived. Many have seen the Motorcycle Safety Foundation or RidersEdge videos on group riding, and while there is plenty of good information there, we need to keep in mind that the information should be considered a baseline for your ride and adjustments for each group will probably be needed.

Some past safety and skill subjects

that touched on age, egos, and understanding self-responsibility should be considered when adjusting for group rides. The effects of those topics could change how we ride. More time and space may be required than the minimums reviewed in those videos. Also, being open for discussion with members can allow for further adjustments.

We usually can tell a newer rider when he pulls into the parking lot, but can you tell how skilled a person is if he is just a little better? Probably not. Would you want to ride in a group with such a person — especially if you didn't know his capabilities? Again, probably not. Talk with the folks that you may not know who might be joining your ride. Get a feel for their skill levels and experience to make adjustments for them within the group.

Reading people can be tough; sometimes their egos can block proper decision-making. The "I know how to ride" thought can be a major source for risks. While some riders may know how to operate a motorcycle, being able to recognize that their skill level may require adjustments for the group can be hard to tell if they aren't knowledgeable or honest about their skills. It's easy to fall into the mental trap of thinking you're a better rider than you really are; remember that experience is not the same as skill. Experience may give one the ability to see things in advance, but if he

doesn't have the skills to adjust or correct things, what good is experience? Not everyone considers this, but it is something that can be possibly modified for or even corrected (pssst, a hint — rider training).

Some other mental matters could include what we think the ride should be like. If you feel that the group needs to be in perfect stagger formation, it will certainly irritate you if there is an open space in the group. If you're complaining in your mind about the space not filled, what are you not doing? You are failing to give 100 percent to the ride. Also, one thought that seems to bother people, especially newer riders, is What if I lose the group? Sure, it can happen, but hopefully your ride leader went over information during a preride meeting. If you do get broken away from the group, don't sweat it. You can either just meet it at the next stop/rest point, or head out on your own to finish your ride (perhaps you'll actually find a better route). Just remember, if you decide to head out on your own, get a message to the ride leader or someone in the group that you're okay. If they start stressing that you're lost or something happened to you, will they be concentrating on their ride?

If we step back and look at all the factors — our thought processing, possible misconceptions, and personal adjustments, and those of others riding with a group — there may be a way we can plan for a majority of them by using something many of us may not think about: common sense. So when you head out with your group, why not take a moment and plan on looking over your approach and how to make it safer. A change of mind can reduce some of those unwanted risks, and that's an idea we can all live with. **AIM**