

# GROUP RIDING

## By Delf Hedde - Safety Director

When I took over the role as safety director, I conducted an informal survey about which safety topics our members were most interested to hear about. To my surprise, "Riding in a group" came our way on top of the list.

For a lot of motorcyclists riding in a group with other bikers is one of the greatest pleasures of riding. The pure pleasure it brings to enjoy their beloved machines, in beautiful surroundings, and in companionship with like-minded folks is a reason many people join motorcycle clubs.

On the other hand, group rides can be annoying or even outright scary. Few things annoy me more, than riding with someone, who has no idea about group riding etiquette. We all have been behind that person that randomly rides on the right, then on the left, then in the middle, lets the distance to the rider in front grow longer and longer, and then rapidly accelerates to catch up – doing all this completely oblivious to the chaos he creates behind him.

Group riding does not always mean riding in perfect formation, handlebar to handlebar in long lines. Every time you share the roads with other motorcyclists on your way to a common destination, you are on a group ride. Your group might be as small as two riders, or as big as several hundred (ever done a charity ride?).

Unfortunately, I find it extremely hard to talk to other riders about their lack of group riding skills. When I try to bring the topic up, 90% of the time the other rider turns defensive: "What are you trying to tell me? I have been riding for XX years. I know what I am doing!"

Group rides are a very fun experience as long as everyone is prepared and aware of their surroundings. Make sure you know your group's plans and procedures before you take off and you'll have a blast! If you're new to group riding, talk to an experienced group rider to answer any questions you may have. The more prepared you are, the safer you will be.

So, perhaps this is not a bad place to review some basic rules for group rides. There are a ton of examples to be found on the web. They all pretty much state the same set of rules. Let's have a look at the rules we have posted on the club website (<https://bmwnorcal.org/Safety>).

You or other riders in your group may be new to group riding and might feel unsure about the rules and expectations of the group ride. Knowing how to ride with others will help keep everyone safe.



Photo By Buddy Scauzzo

### **It is your responsibility to act and ride prudently; be alert, be safe.**

Giving up some of your autonomy is part of the price of joining the group. That does not mean, that you can turn your brain off. YOU are still responsible for your own safety. Be aware of what's going on around your (Environment, traffic, etc). Ride within your own skill level! If the group rides too fast for you – leave the group and find one that suits your own riding skill.

### **Be aware of other riders; ride consistently, ride considerably**

Act as a responsible team member. Consider the impact your actions have on the other riders. Don't get distracted by your coms, phone, music, maps, etc. We have had bad accidents when a distracted rider crashed into the rider in front of them. Don't be that rider!

### **Ride with a 2/1 second gap between motorcycles; try to keep the group together**

Keep a sufficient safety gap – but keep the group together. I have witnessed a bad accident, when a gap appeared in the group and a car driver took that as an invitation to overtake and try to get into the gap. This was not pretty!! Keep the gap consistent. Letting the gap grow and then speeding up to close it, creates a really annoying rubber band effect behind you.

### **Ride staggered formation when safe to do so (lead bike left), avoid "wandering"**

As mentioned above, this is one of the most annoying things "bad" group riders do: Instead of holding their position in the group, they wander left, right, spend some time in the middle of the lane, .... Completely oblivious to the chaos they create behind them. Don't be this guy!!

Riding in a staggered formation increases your safety effectively doubles your distance to the rider directly in front of you while still allowing the group to ride relatively close together.

### **Increase gap and ride single file in tight turns**

In situations where you need the full width of the lane, you obviously can't ride staggered. Increase the gap, ride single file and move back to staggered once the road straightens out.

### **Check your mirror for the rider behind you and pause at turns, pass hand signals back**

Ride as a team! Be aware of what is going on around you. As hand signals are passed through the group to you continue to pass them to the group behind you. This should require no explanation – but again and again, I see riders so busy with "other things" that they don't notice signals and therefore don't pass them on....



## Stay in your lane, especially on blind curves, and watch for oncoming traffic

Basic safe riding rules still apply when riding in a group. There is no safety in numbers.

Don't be stupid! If the groups pace to fast for you and you notice that you run wide on turns – get into another group!

## Close up in towns, 2 thru stop signs/signals, don't block intersections or roads

Speed up the process of getting through intersections with stop signs by closing the gap and riding next to each other (2 at a time) though stop signs. Apply common sense: Do not block intersections! Do not run red lights!

## Allow faster riders to pass. Don't crowd a slower rider, don't overlap wheels

This is a difficult one. A group ride is not a race! In general, you should keep your position in the group. Just because you ride further up front, you will not move faster. If the group moves to slow for you, get out at the next stop and find a faster group. On the other hand: If the group pace is to fast for you and the gap to the rider I front opens, then when safe move to the right and wave on following riders. Fall into the rear of the group and find a slower group at the next stop.

## Ride Leader will change freeway lanes approximately 1 mile in advance of exit when possible

There will be plenty of time to get into the right lane when getting to the exit. No reason to make unsafe lane changes on the freeway

## Visual head-check when changing lanes

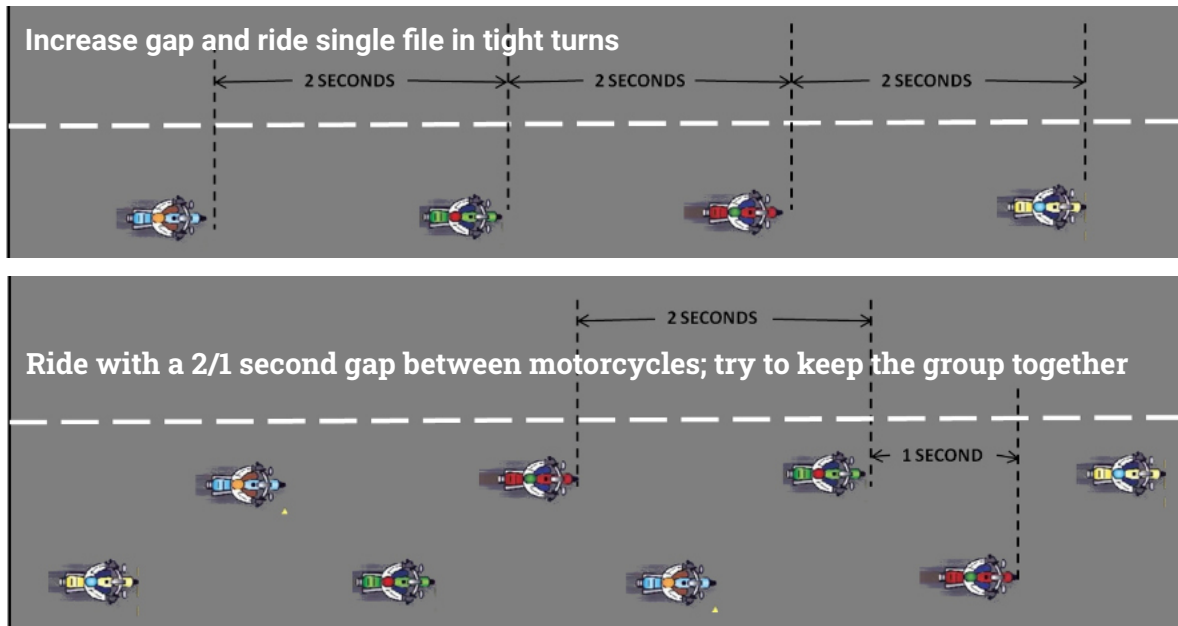
Once again: You are responsible for your own safety. Maintain safe riding habits

## Sweep will stop with a breakdown, other riders follow the ride leader to the next stop

Every group ride should have a dedicated sweep rider. This should be one of the most experienced riders. he sweep rider should have some basic mechanical knowledge, at least basic First Aid skills and be equipped to handle communications.

## Relax, don't panic, have fun, be considerate; and remember - you can say anything as long as it stays inside your helmet.

Or at least wait until the next scheduled stop ;-)



### For the Group Leader:

1. The group leader leads not because he is the fastest rider. He leads because he knows the route, has the riding skills to lead a group and is aware of his responsibilities. It is critical that the group leader when on a straight piece of road must maintain a steady position on the left-hand side of the lanes so the followers can maintain the staggered formation. If the leader starts moving across the lane, then it's a signal to those following that they should spread out, increase distance between riders and fall out of the staggered formation for a curvy section.
2. The leader should maintain a steady pace and not perform any necessary lane changes.
3. On a 3 lane freeway, the leader needs to move out of the right-hand lane. Staying I the right-hand lane is a problem for those following with traffic entering at junctions.
4. The group leader should follow traffic rules and never cross a double yellow line.

### For the following riders in the group:

1. There should be no reason for you to overtake the rider in front of you. If you absolutely have to: **Never, ever**, overtake a motorcycle ahead on right side.
2. On a turn, if the rider behind is not visible, wait until he/she catches up and can see which direction you turn. This way people don't get lost.
3. If the rider in front starts moving across the lane to take corners it is a signal to drop out of the staggered formation and increase the distance to the rider in front. Maintain the distance and avoid closing in on corners.

Group rides are a very fun experience as long as everyone is prepared and aware of their surroundings. Make sure you know your group's plans and procedures before you take off and you'll have a blast! If you're new to group riding, talk to an experienced group rider to answer any questions you may have. The more prepared you are, the safer you will be.