

KEEPING IT UP *by Hein Jonker*

Group Riding

Motorcycling is primarily a solo activity, but for many, riding as a group -- whether with friends on a Sunday morning ride or with an organized motorcycle rally -- is the epitome of the motorcycling experience. Here are some tips to help ensure a fun and safe group ride:

Arrive prepared. Arrive on time with a full gas tank.

Hold a riders' meeting. Discuss things like the route, rest and fuel stops, and hand signals. Assign a lead and sweep (tail) rider. Both should be experienced riders who are well-versed in group riding procedures. The leader should assess everyone's riding skills and the group's riding style.

Keep the group to a manageable size, ideally five to seven riders. If necessary, break the group into smaller sub-groups, each with a lead and sweep rider.

Ride prepared. At least one rider in each group should pack a cell phone, first-aid kit, and full tool kit, so the group is prepared for any problem that they might encounter.

Ride in formation. The staggered riding formation (see diagram below) allows a proper space cushion between motorcycles so that each rider has enough time and space to maneuver and to react to hazards. The leader rides in the right third of the lane, while the next rider stays at least one second behind in the right third of the lane; the rest of the group follows the same pattern. A single-file formation is preferred on a curvy road, under conditions of poor visibility or poor road surfaces, entering/leaving highways, or other situations where an increased space cushion or maneuvering room is needed.

Avoid side-by-side formations, as they reduce the space cushion. If you suddenly needed to swerve to avoid a hazard, you would not have room to do so. You don't want handlebars to get entangled.

Periodically check the riders following in your rear view mirror: If you see a rider falling behind, slow down so they may catch up. If all the riders in the group use this technique, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up.

If you're separated from the group, don't panic. Your group should have a pre-planned procedure in place to regroup, don't ride beyond your skills to catch up.

For mechanical or medical problems, use a cell phone to call for assistance as the situation warrants.

Stop - arm extended straight down, palm facing back



Slow Down - arm extended straight out, palm facing down



Fuel - arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended



Speed Up - arm extended straight out, palm facing up



Hazard in Roadway - on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand



You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front



Comfort Stop - forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion



Turn Signal On - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



Refreshment Stop - fingers closed, thumb to mouth

