

# Group Riding 101 – ROAD RULES

If you're going to ride with a group, whether it's a formal club or just a few friends, you need to understand the rules, customs, and courtesies of team riding.

Riding with an experienced group can offer a greater level of safety by increasing your visibility to other traffic and giving you "extra eyes" to watch your back, but the key word here is "experienced". Many groups hit the road like S.O.B.'s (Swarms of Bees), cutting into fast-moving traffic and darting wildly from lane to lane. Unless your affairs are all in order, that's dumb.

## GOOD RIDING PRACTICES

1. Arrive at the group rendezvous at least 30 early with a full tank. It'll keep you from holding up the group and embarrassing yourself.
2. Listen carefully when the Road Captain (ride leader) discusses routes, planned stops, etc. If you'll need to stop for gas, to take medicine, or for any other reason before a planned stop, tell the Road Captain and Tailgunner up front and find out when/where you can meet up with the group again.
3. Follow the Road Captain's instructions re: where you should ride within the group. In many groups, new riders (those not experienced in GROUP riding) are initially placed at the back with the Tailgunner to make sure they arrive at the end destination. This allows the new rider to practice and develop his/her skills without holding up the rest of the group. Once new riders are able to keep up, corner smoothly, etc., they'll be able to ride in various other positions.
4. Once you get underway, don't clown around by zigzagging in your lane, tailgating the rider in front of you, moving in and out of the formation, etc. You'll endanger yourself and others.
5. Avoid public displays of temper (like screaming obscenities or flipping off people in cars) if you expect to be invited back. In some groups, that might be acceptable behavior, but not in STAR Chapter 394.
6. Pass back all hand signals initiated by the Road Captain, and be prepared to initiate a "single file" signal yourself if your travel lane becomes unsafe or uncomfortable (bad road surface, crumbling shoulder, narrow lanes, etc). Traditionally this has been a judgment call left to Road Captains, but in our club each individual member has the authority to make that call.
7. Don't suddenly split off from the group for personal reasons (i.e. to take a picture or make a casual phone call) unless you've told the Road Captain **and** Tailgunner up front that you plan to do that, or unless it's for a mechanical or medical problem. If you do choose to leave unexpectedly, wave the others on, making it clear that you aren't in need of assistance. Otherwise you're apt to inconvenience the whole group, or at least the Tailgunner, by making them stop and turn around to check on you.

8. Gas up when everyone else does so you'll be on the same general gas-stop schedule. Making the group stop 50 miles after THEY all got gas but you didn't because you "didn't need it yet" will not make you a popular guest.

## LET'S RIDE!

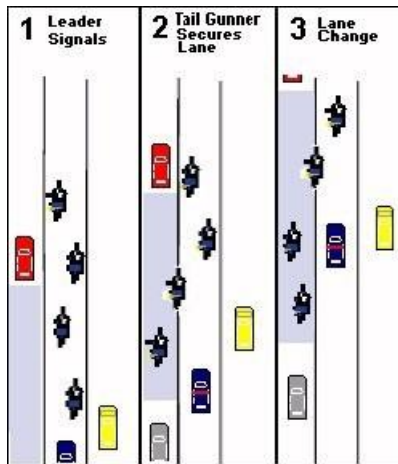
**Staggered Formation:** The bikes form two columns, with the Road Captain at the head of the left column. The second bike will head the right column, and will ride approximately 1 second behind the leader at a diagonal (in the opposite side of the lane). The other riders will position their bikes NO CLOSER THAN 2 seconds behind the bike directly in front of them, or 1 second behind the diagonal bike. This formation gives each rider sufficient space, and discourages other vehicles from cutting in. The last rider, or Tail Gunner, may ride on whichever side of the lane he prefers.

**Gap in Formation:** If a void is created by a rider leaving the formation, all riders in that column should move forward to close the gap rather than switching sides of the lane. For example, a void in the left side of the lane should be filled by all the left-side riders moving forward while the right-side riders maintain their positions.

**Road Captain:** A good Road Captain will always remain aware of the length of the column(s), and properly gauge the time/space needed for the formation to pull out, to change lanes before exits, etc. When pulling out from a stop, he will keep the group's speed down until the last bike pulls out, at which time the whole group can accelerate smoothly. He'll usually avoid the temptation to make a right turn on red when leading a group, and he'll usually wait at a stop sign until the last bike stops before pulling out again. For safety, he'll sometimes break a large group into several smaller groups, with a gap of a few extra seconds between each group.

**Tailgunner:** Serves as the eyes of the Road Captain and assists with lane changes. He watches the formation, and informs the Road Captain of any potential problems within the group or of hazardous conditions approaching from the rear, such as vehicles trying to cut into the formation. Also assists with lane changes by blocking the new lane to allow the group to move over safely.

**Lane Change Into FASTER Lane:** If the group needs to move into a faster lane, or *potentially* faster-moving lane (even if no traffic is currently in sight from the front of the formation), it is safest to allow the Tailgunner to move first, blocking the desired lane from the back where he/she has a clearer view of upcoming traffic. The Road Captain signals his/her intention, then the Tailgunner moves over when it is safe to do so. The rest of the group then fills in the new lane from the rear after **checking individually** that it's safe to do so. In heavy traffic, this sometimes means staying in place and signaling for a car to continue forward to clear the formation, with the bikes pulling in behind it as it passes.



**Lane Change Into SLOWER Lane:** It is necessary to change lanes from the front if you're moving into a lane in front of a particularly slow vehicle, or when merging onto a highway, or when moving into a new turnout lane. When passing, the Road Captain signals, passes the slow-moving vehicle, and pulls in front of it, **maintaining passing speed until the last bike (Tailgunner) has moved over**. If the Road Captain passes, then slows down, it will leave other riders stranded without room to safely move in front of the slower vehicle.

**Getting Separated:** If the formation becomes separated due to traffic signals; the Road Captain and others in the first group will continue along the planned route at a slow pace, approx. 5 mph UNDER the speed limit. The last group will proceed at a faster pace, approx. 5 mph ABOVE the speed limit until the groups are reunited. If the separation becomes too great, the Road Captain will find a safe place to pull over with the group and wait till the others catch up.

**Emergencies:** In an emergency, the Road Captain will move the formation to the shoulder as soon as safely possible. If a bike breaks down, DO NOT STOP. The Tail Gunner will stay behind with the problem bike. The Ride Leader will either lead the group to a safe stopping place and wait for a report, or continue on the planned route, depending on the group's normal procedures.



**Start your engines**



**Stop**



**Go ahead and pass me**



**Bikers ready**



**Hazards on the road**



**Don't pass me**



**Stop your engines**



**Turn off your turn signals**



**Single riding**



**Left turn**



**Slow down**



**Staggered riding**



**Right turn**



**Speed up**



**Time for a pit stop**