

# Riding Drag Is Anything But

While a tour group is highly dependant upon the skills and judgment of the lead bike's rider, in many ways they are more dependant on the drag bike for successfully arriving at their destination.

Let's first discuss the drag bike's obvious role during group lane changing maneuvers. Almost always, a lane change is initiated by the lead bike, but there are times when the drag bike should do so. For example, if the group is traveling on a freeway and the drag bike observes that an 18-wheeler is harassing the group (tailgating or honking its horn), the proper response of the drag bike is to increase the distance between himself and the next bike in front of him and to radio ahead to the lead bike recommending an immediate lane change to the right, and why.

If the lead bike requests a lane change, the drag bike must first determine that it is safe to do so. If it is not, he must tell the lead why he is unwilling or cannot do so at this time. That is, the drag bike determines if and when a lane change that is requested by the lead bike is to happen. (Note that if the group moves into a slower moving lane from front to back, much like a normal car passing maneuver, the lead bike does not request a lane change at all - he announces it - and the drag bike's responsibility is to announce when the maneuver is completed.)

[Important! The proper response from the drag bike to a request to obtain a new lane for the group should ALWAYS be: "Stand By". To say something like "OK" can be confused by some to mean the lane has been obtained and it is time to move over. It is NOT safe to change lanes until the drag bike subsequently says "The lane has been secured - following the red car", or something to that effect. If the drag bike denies the request for a lane change he has already told the lead bike (and all listeners) to 'stand by' and so merely then updates that advisory with why the request is denied.]

Assuming it is safe to change lanes, the drag bike moves into the requested lane and signals the lead bike that it has been obtained. He must also advise as to the traffic situation as it relates to the lane change.

Additional responsibilities of the drag bike: checking that all bikes have raised their side stands when the group begins its ride; assisting any member that is forced to leave the group for mechanical, medical, or personal reasons (lost confidence, for example); observing the riding performance of all of the other bikes to determine if there might be a particular rider who is mismatched in terms of riding skills compared to the group; watching for any unsafe driving habits of individual riders or the group at large; [closing the door](#) in situations where a lane is about to be lost; and to watch and report any lighting, tire or luggage problems with any of the bikes in the group.

Being at the back of the group, the drag bike is in the ideal position to perform these responsibilities and having these responsibilities requires that the drag bike is best prepared to honor them. The drag bike should have a comprehensive first aid kit, fire extinguisher, the ability to turn on blinking warning lights, and reliable communications capability. The drag bike rider should be currently trained in first aid and CPR as well as having attended an MSF Experienced Rider Course (ERC).

If a member has failed to raise his kickstand, a quick radio broadcast by the drag bike gets that problem fixed before the group moves at all.

When the group makes a stop, the drag bike sees all the stop lights and will report any that are failing. He does the same if he sees failing turn indicators (or those that are left on). Luggage that has slipped, trunk or bags that are left open or have their latches spring open, will be observed and reported by an alert drag bike. (These are things that each member of the group should watch for in behalf of all the bikes ahead of them.)

If a bike must leave the group for any reason, it's the drag bike that must determine if assistance is required and to provide it, if necessary. If a member of the group must stop at the side of the road, the drag bike will stop with him, radioing the situation to the lead bike (so that a new drag bike can be designated and the group can find a safe place to leave the road.) If a major problem exists the drag bike radios ahead and asks the lead bike to furnish whatever additional assistance is required. For example, BEFORE starting CPR, a quick medical alert must be broadcast so that the lead bike can arrange for trained assistance. By the way, all else being equal, this is why one should choose a drag bike that has a co-rider - to allow constant radio support while first aid attention is being rendered.

During the ride the drag may well see that one of the group's members slows down dramatically when entering curves. This is a sure sign that that rider is being pushed beyond his individual riding skills. The drag bike should take it upon himself to do two things in this case:

- ▶ **He should request the lead bike to slow down**
- ▶ **He should be sure that the individual having the control (or confidence) problems is moved towards the back of the group, preferably to the last position in the group that rides in the 'slot' (right half of the lane). This change of group position is often best done when the group makes its next stop, but sometimes it must be done immediately.**

If the drag bike observes that a rider does not appear to have control of his bike adequate to continue the ride as a member of the group, then he MUST so advise the lead bike and request that the group make an immediate stop to resolve the problem. In almost all cases the resolution will involve INSISTING that the impaired bike leave the group and be escorted to a safe destination. It is typical that the drag bike will act as the escort.

In severe cases, typically those involving drugs, alcohol, or medical problems, the impaired driver must not be allowed to drive their bikes at all, if they can be stopped, and one of the co-riders might be asked to drive it to a safe place for overnight storage, for example. In this case the impaired driver should NOT be allowed to assume co-rider status!! Some other form of transportation needs to be arranged.

If either the lead or the drag bike insists that an individual not be allowed to ride with the group, the group MUST NOT allow that individual to continue to ride with them. If the individual in question refuses to leave, then the group should simply stop and not proceed while he continues to remain.

The lead and drag bikes are a team designated by the group to conduct them safely to their destination. These are not symbolic positions. They require maturity, experience, training, cooperation, good communications, and good judgment. And, occasionally, your thanks.