

*I came across this information in an article a while back and found it had a lot of useful information on group riding. I am not sure who the author was but I am passing it on for your consideration.*

## **1. PRE-RIDE INSPECTION**

### **Checklist:**

*Always do a quick check to insure your next ride is safe and trouble free.*

To help you remember what to check, remember this acronym **T-CLOCK**, which stands for Tires, Controls, Lights, Oil, Chassis and Kickstand.

These are simple, easy-to-access items that anyone who rides should be able to identify and check. And despite the length of the list, you can probably check everything in about five minutes. Depending on what you find, that could be the best five minutes you spend all day.

### **Tires and Wheels:**

Since these are what separate you and the road, they're probably the most important things to look over. A problem here will affect handling, sometimes severely. Are your rims free of dings? Are your spokes tight and straight? Check pressures in both tires. Since most manufacturers specify pressures for cold tires, this is the only accurate way to check them, as they heat up quickly on the road, raising the pressure. Consult your owner's manual or call your tire manufacturer's hotline for the proper pressures for your particular bike. If you own multiple bikes, it may be difficult to remember all those different tire specs. And since this is one of those critical things you should check often, you may want to make a checklist with each tire's recommended pressure, then hang it on your garage wall, or anywhere that's handy. While you're down there checking the tires, make sure you've got plenty of tread. You should have more than 1/16 of an inch (get a gauge) Remove foreign objects that may have lodged in the treads, and make sure there aren't any cuts in the tire. A scuff is nothing to be worried about, but if it's a deep scratch, you might want to have it checked.

### **Controls and Cables:**

A snapped throttle or clutch cable can leave you on the side of the road, so check them, Operate anything connected to a cable and make sure that levers and cables feel smooth and don't bind. Apply the front brake and push the bike forward. The brake should feel firm, and the front wheel should not move. Check the rear brake in the same fashion.

### **Lights:**

Seeing and being seen are the two best ways to avoid unwanted incidents on the road, so making sure your lights work is imperative to your safety. Start by turning on your ignition. Are the headlight's high beam and low beam working? Does the taillight come on? Does the brake light come on when you depress the brake pedal and lever? Check left and right turn signals, front and rear. Remember that the cause of a malfunction here could be a relay or bulb... Lastly, don't forget to check your horn.

### **Oil and Fuel:**

Running out of gas is a drag, but since many motorcycles don't have gas gauges, it's a very real possibility. Check the gas level in the tank, and be sure your fuel petcock isn't on "reserve," which could leave you with a big surprise if you roll to a stop thinking you've still have gas in reserve. And don't forget to reset the trip meter every time you fill up. Running out of gas can be inconvenient, but running out of oil can turn your bike into an inert display of public art. Even some new bikes can use enough oil to be down a quart between oil changes, so check it before every ride.

**Chassis:**

Though an improperly adjusted suspension may not seem critical, imagine your surprise as your bike behaves differently in the middle of a curve because you forgot to reset it after picking up your friend last night. Sit on the bike and rock it, making sure that everything moves smoothly and relatively slowly. If the front or rear end behaves like a pogo stick, a trip to your trusty mechanic should be in your immediate future. If you have an adjustable suspension, remember to read your owner's manual and adjust it properly for the load you'll be carrying and the type of riding you'll be doing.

**Kick Stand and Center Stand:**

The kickstand is a handy little item, it's what keeps your motorcycle off the ground. Make sure it's not cracked or bent. Check the spring or springs. Are they in place, and do they have enough tension to keep the kickstand safely up? Make sure the bolt is tightened up real tight.

Don't forget to look at the engine cut-out switch or pad, if so equipped. If everything's in place and operating properly you're done, and you're ready to roll. Enjoy the day!

**2. BEING A GROUP LEADER**

*Leading a ride of five other bikes is not easy and should only be undertaken when you are an experienced rider. Here are some guide lines . . . and Yes, just one other motorbike and the points below apply, although to a lesser extent*

Know your route. The bigger the group, the more critical this becomes. This includes distances between gas stations, places to eat, turn offs, intersections, road signs, road works etc.

Start the ride outside the town limits. A gas station with an ATM or a Tim-Ho's is an excellent venue to meet.

The group joining the ride must be fully informed of the route, distances, duration, type of road, gas stops and restaurant stops. Ascertain that everybody is in agreement with the planned ride.

The most important element of leading a ride pertains to the first three minutes after you pull away and the last three before you pull off the road. This period must be done smoothly and slowly to avoid a 'concertina-type ripple-action' running down through the line of bikes.

Only pull away when everybody in the group is kitted up, pillion passengers are seated and bikes running. Find a big gap in the traffic and smoothly pull away. Remain under 50 km until everybody has their positions. Slowly and smoothly gas it until you reach cruising speed. You have to think like a train driver with a string of clumsy and unresponsive carriages.

Minutes before you approach a rest or gas stop, begin to ease off the gas. Do not pass any other vehicles. If there is a vehicle in front of you, tuck in behind it. Allow the gaps between the riders to compact. Slow down a little more. The riders begin to catch on that a stop is imminent. Indicate your intention to turn off early but by this time our flashing indicator light should be a mere formality. Never do anything quickly, unexpectedly or that is unpredictable. The riders do not share one brain and communication ripples down very slowly as each rider catches on that something is about to happen. For example, if you miss a turn off, indicate that you are pulling off, ease off the gas and begin to look for a long, clear space where everybody can safely pull off and turn around with ample view of the road in both directions.

There are hand signals that are used by biking clubs, which can make communication more instant. Make sure everyone is familiar with the hand rules before starting out.

You have to collect all your riders together after you clear the limits of a small town because some may have been delayed. Therefore you have to travel slowly until the group is compacted again before beginning to gas it for cruising speed once more.

As the leader, passing a slow moving vehicle is very different because you have to continue to gas it for at least three hundred meters beyond the vehicle. This allows enough space for all the other bikers to use once they clear the vehicle themselves.

Many groups use the system of 'keep up with the rider in front of you'. This is potentially fatal as the entire ride is dictated by the fastest and most talented motorcyclist. A better system is 'keep the rider behind you in your rear view mirror'. This way the entire convoy of motorcycles keeps together at a speed dictated by riders of average ability. Should a motorcycle break down, the group will quickly know that something is amiss.

If you have any 'wannabe speed demon' in your group tell them to ride ahead . . . on their own. Your intimate knowledge of the route will allow you to agree on a common meeting place up ahead.

### **3. RIDING IN A GROUP**

*A ride always has a leader / point / captain. In bigger or more organized rides there is also someone appointed to ride last in the group*

#### **Before the Ride:**

There are a few things that you must know and do before joining a group ride. The most important thing is to contact the ride captain and ask him/her the maximum speed the ride is going to be to ensure that you will be riding within your capabilities. Also ensure that your bike is more or less equal in performance to the majority of the other bikes going along.

Ascertain the distance of the ride, the type of roads you will be traveling and the type of restaurants you may stop off at. This will also ensure that you take sufficient money with you.

There could be a thousand reasons why you may get separated from the group. This could be a problem if you do not know the area and therefore take a road map along with you. (or your H.O.G. Touring Atlas)

Arrive at the rendezvous point with a full tank of gas, oil and tires checked or, simply meet at a gas station.

Introduce yourself to the captain and find out where and when he intends stopping for fuel along the route. This is important if your bike has a smaller tank which is information he needs to know.

#### **During the Ride:**

Do not fiddle with your helmet, gloves, mirrors etc until the group is moving smoothly through straight unobstructed roadside. Accidents happen during the first few minutes before all the riders have settled.

Make sure that you are no further than three bikes from the front of the group. If the captain himself is inexperienced there could be a lot of action at the end of the group which you do not want to be part of.

In a country that rides on the left hand side of the road the group should ride in the following formation in towns and when traveling under 80 kilometers per hour. This keeps the group together but maintains safe following distances. The captain (point) naturally rides up front while the last biker probably has special duties that vary from ride to ride, club to club.

Over 50 km and on twisty roads the formation must become a straight line with one bike directly behind the other with the usual 3 sec following distance. Remember staggered formation on the straight and single file on the turns.

A lot of accidents occur at intersections when one rider stops suddenly while the rider behind him wants to go through the intersection. Ask the ride captain what the intersection policy for the ride is.

If the rider in front of you pulls off, do not follow suit. Stick with the captain and allow the more experienced riders to follow the predetermined procedures (if any).

Watch your following distance especially at intersections. Do not go through an intersection until you are sure that the rider in front of you is not going to stop. If you have a crazy rider behind you consider going through the (almost) red intersection rather than have him slam into the back of you when you try to stop.

Accelerate through and beyond a slow moving vehicle - do not ease off the gas once through as the guy behind you may still be gassing it and needs the space your speed is creating.

If the ride becomes more stressful than fun, or a big race, then gracefully drop out. These are your bones that are at stake!

**And its GOTTA BE FUN!**

#### **4. RIDE SAFETY: THE IMPORTANCE OF RIDE RULES**

##### **Group Riding:**

*A group ride could be defined as any group of two or more motorcycles riding together.*

There are more and more people getting together as groups not only for impromptu short excursions but also for organized rides. There are many specifics concerning group riding, including, instructions before the ride so everyone understands the hand signals, the route, how long between rest stops and a myriad of other necessary instructions. This article is not going to go into specifics, but rather into the general guidelines of group riding so as to have a safe ride; but not be so overwhelmed with things to remember as to take away from the enjoyment of the ride.

##### **Riding Formation:**

A Group Ride is normally composed of a Ride Leader and a Sweep or Drag Rider (bringing up the rear). For organized rides they usually have Radio or CB communication and knowledge of the route including not only the final destination, but also the stops along the route.

Normal riding as a group is done in a staggered formation. This is, basically, dividing a lane in half with each rider occupying his/her own half of the lane. It is each rider's responsibility to ride in the half of the lane as dictated to by the next rider in front. If the rider in front needs to change lane halves to maintain the stagger, then it is the following rider's responsibility to change lane position on down the line to accommodate this change. The Lead Rider usually starts the stagger in the left half of the lane position. While in staggered group riding, the normal stagger distance is 2-3 seconds, and no more than

a 3 second gap, in order to maintain a tight formation and not allow traffic to interrupt and break up the formation. This means that each rider will be 2-3 seconds behind the rider directly in front and using the same half of the lane. When coming to a stop, the group generally forms up two abreast / side by side. When the group starts off, the rider on the left starts first.

When riding in curves, the stagger is no longer warranted and a single file type of formation is normal. These changes in lane position should be dictated by the lead Rider. Holding two fingers straight up in the air (either the index and little fingers, or the first two fingers) indicates a staggered formation, while the index finger pointing straight up in the air is a direction for single file riding.

*So just remember staggered formation for straight line and single file on twists and corners.*

Single file riding allows the riders more freedom to negotiate the curves and to dodge obstacles while having the freedom to use the whole lane. In single formation the normal distance between riders is increased to 3 -> 5 seconds. For safety, the single file formation should not be elongated to such a distance that the rider in front cannot be seen. There are two reasons for this:

- ~ It is much easier to negotiate around corners by using the next rider's position to "see" further around blind curves
- ~ The rider can see and pass back hand signals indicating obstacles or other information ahead.

If any rider feels that the group pace is too fast for comfort, then he/she should motion the following bikes to pass until the only one left following is the Sweep/Drag Rider. Then ride at your own pace until the next stop; when you should inform the Lead Rider that you are uncomfortable with the pace. It will then be up to the Lead Rider to either separate the ride into two groups, or go at a slower pace so that all members of the group feel secure. Group riding should not be, and is never, a race! This just causes unneeded stress for those who just wanna enjoy the ride.

If a rider in the formation needs to pull out for any reason, the group will close up the gap and reorganize the stagger. Please do not pull off, also, unless you need to do so. The Sweep/Drag Rider of the group will aid the rider who has pulled over. He will also communicate (via radio) with the Ride Leader so as to apprise him of the situation. The next (last) rider then becomes the Sweep/Drag rider until the Sweep/Drag rider returns to the group.

When turning onto another road, if the next rider back cannot be seen, either due to having traffic in-between, or a large enough gap in the group for any reason; the last rider in the line must wait at the turn for the next rider to show up before leaving the turn so as to signal that the route has taken a turn. This will keep the group together on the same route even though there may be unforeseen gaps in the formation.

### **Passage of Information through Signals:**

During the ride, the Ride Leader will make various blinker light, hand, and leg signals. These signals indicate lane changes or turns, obstacles, increasing/decreasing speed, or whether to form a stagger formation or a single line. These hand signals need to be passed back through the group from the front rider to the next rider in line. That way each rider only needs to be cognizant of signals from the rider directly in front of him/her rather than everyone trying to keep an eye on the Ride leader.

Blinker lights should always be used to not only allow everyone to see the upcoming change, but to feed back acknowledgment. In a group ride, whether it be the Ride Leader or in the middle of the pack, the bike in front needs to see the blinker light of the following rider before turning in front of the following rider/bike (such as a right hand turn when the bike in the left stagger crosses over in the right stagger lane). This prevents the bike in front from crashing into the (surprised/unprepared) following bike/rider when making the turn. Assuming that the following bike sees your blinker light. Sometimes

riders don't notice blinker lights right away, so they should be turned on well before the turn. That way everybody in the group becomes aware that a turn is coming up.

If an obstacle is spotted in the road, it should immediately be signaled to the riders in back for safety. Sometimes, when the obstacle is spotted in a blind curve, and one doesn't want to take one's hand off the handlebars, the signal is often done with an outstretched leg (indicating which side of the lane the obstacle is located). This can be very useful when you don't want to take your hand off the throttle and the obstacle is on the right side of a blind curve. Some typical obstacles which should be signaled as to where they may lie in the lane are: sand/dirt/gravel/rocks, pot holes, dead animals, (pieces of truck tire treads) or road repairs. These obstacle signals should always be passed to the rear as soon as possible so as to give those riders the best opportunity to dodge them. Don't forget that the riders towards the rear in a group ride will not be able to see as much of the whole road surface as those in front due to the visual blockage of the front riders. Other hand signals include speed changes, directions for coming alongside or passing, need for food or rest stop, and other miscellaneous things like telling another rider that his blinker light is on unnecessarily.

### **Conclusion:**

Group Riding can be a lot of fun if all the members are comfortable within the group. If one or more members of the group are not comfortable; then this should be discussed at the next stop so as to accommodate or correct the cause of the problem. It's very easy to take each problem and, with a little tact, teach whoever might not have a sufficient understanding of these simple rules. We all can then enjoy the fine sport of motorcycling.

## **5. RIDING WITH A PASSENGER**

*Personally I like to ride solo, then there are no worries. There is always someone around that would like to experience what its like to ride on a motorcycle. And when that time arises, they have rules too!*

### **Preparing the Passenger:**

A passenger's ability to relax starts with the rider's preparations. Knowing that a rider has prepared their motorcycle to carry a passenger is reassuring. These preparations include ensuring that the motorcycle is capable of safely carrying two people and adjusting the suspension according to the owner's manual.

### **Never Assume:**

Give em the rules don't assume they know these things.

### **Protective Gear:**

Ensure that the passenger is properly attired, with helmet, boots, jacket, pants and gloves. You should want the passenger to have the same protection that you have.

### **Rider Mounts First:**

The passenger should wait until the rider indicates they can get on or off the motorcycle. This ensures the rider has control of the bike before the passenger adds or removes their weight.

### **Left Side:**

The passenger should mount or dismount the bike from the left. They should step up on the left foot peg, putting their weight over the center of the motorcycle as much as possible. In this manner, maintaining control of the motorcycle will be easier for the rider.

**Feet on Pegs:**

Once on the bike, the passenger must keep their feet on the pegs at all times (even at stop signs) unless the rider indicates otherwise. Taking feet off the pegs causes the motorcycle to be less stable and more difficult for the rider to control. If the passenger has their feet off the pegs while at a stop and the rider moves off unexpectedly, the passenger will most likely fall back and grab for the rider or even fall off the motorcycle. In either case, the result will probably be unpleasant.

*Ok you are ready to ride now.....*

**Braking:**

Let your passenger know that added weight will cause the motorcycle to be handled and stop differently. Pick a clear section of straight road and practice several quick stops. This lets both rider and passenger become accustomed to stopping the motorcycle. Also eliminates helmet knockin.

**Weight Shift:**

Explain that the passenger's weight will invariably shift forward while braking. The passenger should place their hands on the rider's thighs. If all else fails, they can squeeze the seat with their legs and lean their chest on the rider's back. The important thing is that they should never place their hand(s) on the middle of the rider's back. This concentrates the passenger's weight into a small area and makes it harder for the rider to maintain control.

**Leaning:**

Explain that turning a motorcycle requires leaning (at speed) or counterbalancing (slow speed U-turns). This is particularly important when dealing with beginner passengers, to prevent them from being startled or frightened, panicking and causing loss of control. Move with the motorcycle; no more, no less. This is particularly important while turning or cornering. Using the rider's hips helps the passenger stay centered with the rider and the motorcycle. Turning a motorcycle under control requires keeping the total vehicle weight (motorcycle and people) under control. Changes in placement of that weight causes major changes in the stability of the motorcycle. Passengers should hold on to the rider's hips; the rider typically remains in line with the motorcycle thus making a good reference for the passenger.

**NOTE:**

*Since unexpected passenger movement can cause loss of control of the motorcycle, people who are not in full control of their faculties or are unable to hold on with their own strength should never be put on a motorcycle.*

**Take Breaks:**

Many motorcycle seats are not designed with passenger comfort in mind and different people have different levels of tolerance. Breaks allow for both rider and passenger to get circulation running again and to enjoy the scenery.

**Conclusion:**

A good passenger moves in sync with the rider, seemingly becoming part of the motorcycle. This allows the rider better control of the bike instilling confidence and permitting both the rider and passenger to relax and have fun. Sharing this type of experience is fun and forms a big part of motorcycling. It all starts with the rider who is properly prepared and in control.

**And NO WIGGLIN....**