

Group Riding White Paper



<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Ride Leaders</i>	4
Road Captain	4
Ride Captain	5
Tail Gunner	5
Road Guard	6
<i>Formation Riders</i>	6
<i>Riding Formations</i>	7
Single Column	7
Passing	8
Staggered Columns	9
Passing	9
Riding Bars	10
<i>Segmented Formations</i>	10
Merging Traffic	10
Skill Level Segmentation	11
<i>Simple Lane Changes</i>	11
Left lane change	11
Right lane change	12
<i>Block Lane Change</i>	13
Left lane change	13
Right lane change	13
<i>Rear Fill-in Lane Change</i>	13
Left lane change	13
Right lane change	14
<i>Pre-Ride Meetings</i>	14
<i>The Buddy System</i>	14
<i>Tells</i>	15
<i>Maneuvering</i>	16
Parking Lots	16
Parking	16
Entering & Exiting Roadways	17
<i>Proper Conduct</i>	17
<i>Riding Rules</i>	19

Introduction

By reading this document you agree to hold harmless all individuals and/or organizations associated with development and/or presentation of this document.

You should take appropriate steps to educate yourself to the risks of operating, or otherwise traveling on a motorcycle; and seek appropriate training and instruction such as that available through the Motorcycle Safety Foundation before engaging in formation group riding.

Formation group riding is more than just a bunch of riders getting together and traveling from one place to another. In order to do so safely there must be mechanisms for inter-group communication as well as an established agreement of conduct. Each rider is solely responsible for his/her own choice to join the group. In doing so, each rider submits to the authority of the ride leaders for as long as he/she remains in the ride formation.

We all have our individual riding preferences that we are free to exercise when on solo rides. However, for reasons of safety and group integrity, it is important that we yield our individual preferences to those established by the ride leaders when involving ourselves in a formation group ride. Conformance to group-established rules and conduct are compulsory.

If you find yourself on a group ride you feel is unsafe, make the appropriate signal to indicate to the Tail Gunner that you have a problem (raise your hand). The Tail Gunner will indicate to the Ride Captain that he/she should take the formation off the road for a stop. You can voice your concerns at that time, or simply choose not to continue with the group ride. If for any reason raising your hand or continuing with the group is unacceptable to you – then just find a safe way to exit the formation and simply go your own way (understand, however, that you put the Tail Gunner in an unusual position if you suddenly depart the formation as he/she has responsibilities for those who stray from the formation – attempt to signal your intention to the Tail Gunner). Never put yourself or another rider at risk.

What are the formation group riding rules? How are you supposed to conduct yourself? The purpose of this White Paper is to address these topics, first by defining what a formation group is: its leaders and participants; then providing some real world examples of how the riding rules apply along with other related issues such as fuel stops, parking, etc.

Formation group riding is serious business if the group is to proceed safely. And safety within the formation relies to a great degree on the expectations of each rider and their conduct (while riding, during roadside stops, fuel stops, etc.).

If you invite an outsider to the ride – or any rider not familiar with the group (or formation group riding) – it is your responsibility to forewarn them of the expectations that will be placed upon them. Be sure they understand the riding rules and are capable, and willing to accept them as their ride responsibility.

Most riders who come on our group rides have taken the Motorcycle Safety Foundation course, you should too. Also, you must have a current valid driver's license with a Motorcycle classification.

Your motorcycle must also be properly maintained and in good working order at the time of the ride. If you're battery has been low and susceptible to not being able to start your bike, then don't bring it on the ride. Are you leaking enough oil that you have to add it every 100 miles? Then be courteous and don't go on a group ride.

Ride Leaders

The ride leadership is comprised of the following roles: Road Captain, Ride Captain, Tail Gunner, and Road Guard. These are appointed positions.

Road Captain

The Road Captain invokes tactical applications of the strategic decisions made by the Ride Sponsors. He will approve the ride plan regardless of its planner, designate Ride Leaders, and make determinations as to the logistics of the ride. In doing so, the Road Captain will take into consideration the abilities and preferences of the participating riders, and make decisions based on his experience in these matters.

Before beginning any ride, the Road Captain will address the riders, reviewing the Riding Rules if necessary (and repeat them as necessary whenever a new rider(s) join the group). The Road Captain should also present the route and any significant details related to weather, or other conditions, which he/she believes the riders should have knowledge of which may affect their desire, or ability, to participate on the ride.

The Ride Captain needs to assess the capabilities of each motorcycle to determine maximum fuel intervals based on the motorcycle that can travel the shortest distance before hitting reserve, and to get a feel for how fast the group can move. Lowered bikes will not be able to go quickly through tight turns, smaller displacement bikes may not be able to maintain higher speeds on the interstate; the composition of riders and their bikes will help the Road Captain determine what strategies he/she chooses to employ during the ride (such as pace, passing, and fueling intervals).

The Road Captain will declare his/her selections for the other ride leader positions to the group riders and explain to the group the function of those leaders.

Ride Captain

The Ride Captain is designated by the Road Captain on a ride by ride basis. He/She has proven the ability to manage a formation group ride in a variety of traffic situations on freeways, highways, roads, and other areas such as fueling stations and parking lots. During this process he/she has competently demonstrated the ability to direct normal lane changes, block lane changes, rear fill-ins, single formation and staggered formation evolutions. He/She has also exhibited situational awareness by reacting to situations which may develop over the course of a formation group ride.

The Ride Captain understands the methods and philosophies employed by the Tail Gunner and Road Guards. The Ride Captain should be aware of the skills and abilities of the least capable rider in the formation and take this into account when planning and executing maneuvers. The Ride Captain must also be aware of any toll crossings, or entrance fees that may be collected and collect those monies from the riders before beginning any leg of the ride that may require those fees.

Tail Gunner

The Tail Gunner is last rider in the formation. No rider will fall behind the Tail Gunner. The Tail Gunner attempts to ride in such a way as to make himself/herself visible to the Ride Captain as much as possible. The Tail Gunner rides with the high beams on and having triple lights (light bar) is preferable. The Tail Gunner has many responsibilities for shepherding the group, many of which involve anticipating what the Ride Captain will do next.

The Tail Gunner is responsible for knowing how many riders are in their formation and making sure that all riders are present and ready to ride before giving the thumbs-up signal to the Ride Captain prior to the start of the ride, or any leg thereof.

The Tail Gunner will conduct a visual inspection of each bike to determine any obvious mechanical problems that might present a hazard, or be a likely cause for failure over the course of the ride. For example, this inspection might reveal insufficient tire pressure, cords showing through the tire tread, leaking brake fluid, inappropriately rigged aftermarket equipment, or other items that may cause a motorcycle to be disqualified from participating in the group ride.

The Tail Gunner is designated by the Road Captain on a ride by ride basis. He/She has proven the ability to handle a variety of traffic situations on freeways, highways, roads, and other areas such as fueling stations and parking lots. He/she has safely participated in normal lane changes, block lane changes, rear fill-ins, single formation and staggered formation evolutions. He/she has also demonstrated assisting the Ride Captain in these

evolutions by securing the appropriate lanes and riding consistent with the rules of group riding. The qualified Tail Gunner has exhibited situational awareness by reacting to situations which develop that may have an effect on the formation as well as anticipating potential actions of the Ride Captain.

Road Guard

The Road Guard provides safe contiguous passage for the formation through areas where un-fragmented passage of the formation is warranted; particularly where potentially hazardous conditions are present. The Road Guard generally responds to prompting by the Tail Gunner and commences his/her duties following acknowledgement by the Ride Captain.

Road Guards often work in tandem and respond to the commands and prompting of the Ride Captain and/or Tail Gunner. They perform their duty by first proceeding to front of the formation and taking a position next to the Ride Captain. At the Ride Captains command to execute, the Road Guard will then proceed to secure a blocking position in the roadway, behind which, the formation may pass in relative safety.

The Road Guard is designated by the Road Captain on a ride by ride basis. He/She has proven the ability to respond correctly to the directions of the Ride Captain in a safe, controlled, and forthright manner. The qualified Road Guard has received instruction and is deemed competent to execute the duties of the position.

Formation Riders

Formation group riding is not for everyone; it's common for even experienced riders to be uncomfortable when riding in formations with other motorcyclists. There is a premium on a rider's ability to maintain competent control of his/her motorcycle in all riding situations while engaged in a formation group ride. Riders who are learning their limitations and those of their motorcycle should not choose to participate in formation group rides because each rider's ability, or lack thereof, directly affects the safety of the formation.

Basic Formation Rider – This individual is typically an experienced motorcycle rider who demonstrates competent control of his/her motorcycle. This person may or may not have prior formation group riding experience.

Qualifications - The Basic Formation Rider demonstrates competent control of his/her motorcycle in a variety of common riding scenarios. He/She has, or gains the demonstrated ability to successfully participate in normal lane changes using the Gradual and the S-Curve methods. He/She can maintain correct spacing while riding in a formation. He/She can

successfully complete single and staggered formation evolutions consistent with the rules of formation group riding.

Advanced Formation Rider – This individual is an experienced motorcycle rider. He/she knows his/her limitations and those of his/her motorcycle. This person has participated on formation group rides and is not only comfortable in this setting, but is an example for the Basic Formation Rider.

Qualifications – The Advanced Formation Rider has the demonstrated ability to successfully participate in normal lane changes, block lane changes, rear fill-ins, single formation and staggered formation evolutions consistent with the rules of formation group riding. He/She also exhibits situational awareness by reacting to developments which may affect the safety of the formation.

A formation rider's conduct has significant impact on all riders in the formation. Being noticed typically means your doing something wrong, probably related to holding your line or keeping your spacing. Your goal as a formation rider is to blend in so that other formation riders don't feel the need to direct extra attention towards you and, consequently, distract them. They will have to pay more attention to you than might otherwise be necessary, thus, taking their focus and attention off other aspects of the ride that they might otherwise engage themselves, such as anticipating formation movements, reading their "tells" (explained later), or keeping their own spacing.

Riding Formations

The Ride Captain will select from a number of riding formations based on the conditions present. On narrow two-way roads or highways, single column is the most common choice. On the interstate, often a staggered formation will be the appropriate choice. Whatever the choice, it's important that you understand the hand signals associated with each choice, are able to pass those hand signals on correctly, and finally, that you know how to properly and safely position yourself in that formation.

Single Column

The Ride Captain signals for a single column formation by extending the left arm straight up; the first finger will also be extended straight up. When you receive this hand signal, you will mimic the signal so as to pass it along to the next rider. If all riders have kept correct spacing, merging a staggered column into a single column will be graceful and safe. If your spacing is bad, well, you've created a safety issue to those riding near to you and behind you. For this maneuver, you will likely be shifting from the staggered formation, although you may arrive at this point from a number of other situations, such as riding "bars", or entering a roadway where no current formation has yet been established.

From the staggered formation, both columns should merge by working in the direction that the Ride Captain has positioned himself/herself. There is a reason for this. The Ride Captain may have noticed a large truck overtaking the formation and generating blow-by. In order to keep the formation as safe as possible, the Ride Captain may signal for a single column formation and take up a position at the far right side of the lane. You will not benefit from the Ride Captain's experience if you're not following the standard he/she has set. There is obviously a premium here on following this example. If you fail to do so, then the riders behind you are getting the wrong message and may suffer harm due to your actions.

There are many reasons and situations that might cause the Ride Captain to select a single column formation that proceeds specifically down a narrow portion of a lane including the presence of emergency vehicles, pedestrians, road conditions (potholes, black ice, etc). The onus is on you to pay attention and follow the example set by the Ride Captain so that those following you will benefit from the Ride Captain's decisions. The Ride Captain is an experienced rider and has the best view of the road.

Passing

While proceeding in the single column formation, the Ride Captain may choose to pass another vehicle on the highway. There are 3 primary instances in which this might occur.

The first takes place on a two-lane highway. The Ride Captain will lead out around the vehicle and roll on the power. While overtaking the vehicle the Ride Captain will extend his/her left arm out to the left and give a "thumbs up" to indicate that the next rider can safely pass the vehicle. Each rider, in turn, follows this pattern. When the passing situation becomes unsafe for any reason, the sign will be changed to a "thumbs-down" position. At this time no other riders should attempt to pass and room should be made by those in front of, and behind, the vehicle being passed to allow those riders who are in the passing lane to safely return to the proper lane.

The second situation also takes place on a two-lane highway. This time, however, there is a passing lane and the Ride Captain chooses to move the formation into the left lane and overtake vehicle(s) in the right lane. If you're watching your "tells", you may notice the road sign indicating a passing lane approaching. At this time the Ride Captain may use a hand signal to indicate that the formation should tighten up (decrease the spacing interval). The Ride Captain would do so by extending his/her left hand straight up with all fingers extended, then closing his/her hand into a fist and repeating. With all this information you should be anticipating a passing maneuver. Again, when the Ride Captain leads out around the vehicle, keep up with the pace and be expeditious. It's best if you don't wave "thank you" to the vehicles on your right as you pass, stay focused on the task at hand. The Tail Gunner will take care of the public relations.

There are a few critical points of concern with respect to the two passing maneuvers mentioned above. When passing, do so as expeditiously as possible. The Ride Captain will make a pass and continue to ride at an increased pace until all riders have completed their pass. It is critical that you stay right on the pace of the Ride Captain so that ample room is created between the riders that have passed the vehicle and the vehicle itself. This will allow space for those still passing to return safely and comfortably to the lane. Remember, if you slow down they will be approaching you at a higher rate of speed and then be required to complete their pass by applying the brake – and that presents safety issues.

Staggered Columns

The Ride Captain signals for a staggered column formation by extending the left arm straight up; the first finger and pinky finger will also be extended straight up in the “hook-‘em” horns fashion. When you receive this hand signal, you will mimic the signal so as to pass it along to the next rider.

Filling out the staggered formation begins with the Ride Captain taking foremost left hand position and the second rider taking the foremost right hand position spaced at the designated distance behind the Ride Captain (this distance will be determined by the Ride Captain during the pre-ride meeting – usually somewhere between 1 and 1.5 seconds for the stagger, 2-3 seconds front to back). Each rider will then take up the correct staggered position in the same pattern until all positions are filled.

Do not attempt to switch between columns when filling out a multi-column formation. In other words, fill positions by moving forward within the columns, not left and right between them. Near the back of the columns it may become necessary to move laterally in order to complete the formation, but do so only when it become necessary.

When coming to a traffic control, whether it’s a stoplight, stop sign, flagman or other device, the group should tighten up into a side-by-side formation (also known as “riding bars”). It reduces the amount of space the group requires and is a courteous way to share the road with other vehicles.

Passing

On a two lane highway situation, the methods for passing a vehicle while traveling in a staggered formation are the same as those given for the single column formation except that the riders must begin to merge the columns as they move into position behind the vehicle being passed. It’s better not to merge too early because that lengthens the formation and increases the possibility that not all of the riders will have an opportunity to complete the pass.

When passing traffic on a multi-lane highway by virtue of the traffic lane occupied by the formation moving at a higher rate of speed than the adjacent lane(s), there are considerations to keep in mind. For example, if you’re passing a

semi-truck, the Ride Captain will likely hold back at a safe distance until enough space is created beyond the semi that the entire formation will be able to pass by. The Ride Captain will pass by the semi at an increased rate of speed so as to spend the minimal possible time along its side. You should do the same; again, keep your spacing based on the example set by the leaders. Trucks change lanes, retreads blow off, rocks are propelled from underneath; there are many good reasons not to tarry alongside of semi-trucks.

Riding Bars

Riding bars is the same as a staggered formation without the stagger. Simply stated, it's side-by-side riding. The hand signal for riding bars is the same as that for a staggered formation except that the left hand is not rocked back and forth. Front to back spacing is the same as that designated for a staggered formation.

Segmented Formations

The riding formation may become segmented due to a number of circumstances, such as a merging vehicle or a traffic control (stoplight). Other times, segmented formations may be planned, for example, to allow fast paced and slow paced groups to proceed along a twisty section of road providing desirable riding conditions for a wider range of skill levels.

Merging Traffic

Traffic may attempt to merge with the formation whether invited to or not. And it is key to consider this: that you have the ability to invite vehicles to merge into the formation. By not keeping your spacing (lagging behind) you create an opportunity for vehicles to penetrate the formation uninvited – this creates a multitude of problems and safety issues, try not to let this happen.

In other situations, such as vehicles entering the interstate via the acceleration lane, it may be necessary to allow that vehicle to safely merge into the formation. Doing so requires coordination between all riders in that area of the formation. When done properly, only one space will be created for each vehicle by the formation and the appropriate rider will indicate to the operator of that vehicle that he/she should place the vehicle in that space. If a space has been created for a vehicle then all other riders should maintain proper spacing so that the operator of the vehicle does not become confused and attempt to merge with the formation at the wrong place.

The bottom line however, is that “might is right”. You can't physically stop an automobile from doing whatever the operator decides to do. If a vehicle makes a move in your direction, get out of the way. As a rider in the formation, you should be prepared to

make room for another rider caught in this situation. On highways, check the on-ramps for possible traffic and prepare early to take appropriate action.

Skill Level Segmentation

In larger groups there is invariably a wider range of skill levels represented. We all have our preferred riding styles and want to express ourselves through that style as often as possible. To accommodate this variety, the formation can be segmented into two or more individual formations. The Ride Captain will take the formation off the road at an appropriate place and indicate to the riders that multiple formations will be formed based on whatever conditions apply (usually a fast and slow paced group). Each formation will have designated ride leaders and proceed from that point as unique formations.

Communication between segmented formations must be maintained. To do so, consider the following signaling practices. The fast formation will lead the way and proceed to the next significant junction or turn-off. There are two choices here based on circumstances.

The first is to allow the fast group to continue on, leaving the Tail Gunner and another rider to wait at the junction until the next formation is sighted before riding on to catch up to the fast group again. A signal between the Tail Gunner from the lead group and the Ride Captain from the trailing group can be arranged to indicate whether a problem may exist with the trailing group. Flashing the high beam on and off could indicate a problem with the trailing group. The Tail Gunner from the lead group would wait to learn what the problem is and what message should be carried to the lead group.

The second applies for any other reason. The lead formation(s) should never proceed beyond the next turning point or junction unless it would be unsafe to remain at that location.

Simple Lane Changes

Left lane change

The Ride Captain will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then initiates the lane change, after the Tail Gunner has secured the indicated lane, by extending his left arm and first finger to his/her left and then proceeds to change lanes. SUBSEQUENTLY, all other riders replicate the hand signal and change lanes too. The important concept is that NO ONE changes lanes until the bike in front of him has initiated the lane change. The Ride Captain will not be able to see that the Tail Gunner has secured the desired lane if you have moved out into that lane early.

Right lane change

The Ride Captain will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then initiates the lane change by extending his left arm and first finger in the same fashion as a left lane change except that the elbow is bent in a 90 degree angle with the forearm and finger pointed skyward, and then proceeds to change lanes. SUBSEQUENTLY, all other riders replicate the hand signal and change lanes too. The important concept is that NO ONE changes lanes until the bike in front of him has initiated the lane change. The Ride Captain will not be able to see that the Tail Gunner has secured the desired lane if you have move out into that lane early.

Block Lane Change

Left lane change

This can be used interchangeably with the Simple Lane Change. It requires a little more work, but it is well worth the effort. It's quite impressive to watch, and gives the riders a tremendous feeling of "togetherness". This may sound a little complicated, but is actually very simple to do. The Ride Captain will put on his directional signal (left blinker) as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on so the riders following him get the signal. The Tail Gunner secures the indicated lane. The Ride Captain then raises his left arm straight up. Each rider replicates this signal. Then, as the Ride Captain lowers his arm, he actually initiates the lane change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes in unison with the Ride Captain and each other. This allows the entire formation to moved from one lane to another as a single block.

Right lane change

Exactly the same as the (left) Block Lane Change with the only difference being that the directional signal indicator will be indicating a right lane change (right blinker) and the formation will be moving to the next nearest lane to the right. Don't be confused, the right blinker will indicate a right lane change even though the commencement signal is the left arm being lowered to the left.

Rear Fill-in Lane Change

Left lane change

This maneuver was designed to serve a special purpose. The situation is that the Ride Captain wants to move the column a lane to the left but there is not ample space in that lane to move the entire formation into. So the Ride Captain, recognizing this fact, signals for a rear fill-in maneuver by putting on his/her directional signal (left blinker). As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on so the riders following him get the signal. The Tail Gunner will then secure the indicated lane. The Ride Captain then raises his/her left hand to his/her left shoulder. At this point the Ride Captain will push his/her left hand away from the body so that the left arm and hand are extended perpendicular to his/her body (straight out to the left). This signal informs the LAST formation rider to begin a lane change as soon as it is safe to do so – behind the vehicle(s) that are occupying that next left lane and currently exist between the Ride Captain and Tail Gunner. As those vehicles continue to move past the formation, the formation riders will

continue to fill-in the lane behind them until all riders have completed the rear fill-in lane change.

This is sometimes necessary if a long enough gap cannot be maintained in the new lane, for example, when trying to move from the right lane to the center lane and vehicles from the left lane keep cutting into the opening.

Right lane change

This maneuver is the same as the (left) Rear Fill-in, with the only difference being that the directional signal indicator will be indicating a right lane change (right blinker) and the formation will moving to the next nearest lane to the right. Don't be confused, the right blinker will indicate a right lane change even though the commencement signal is the left arm being "pushed" to the left.

Pre-Ride Meetings

The success of most rides depends a great deal on the expectations of the attendant riders. The more information they have with regard to the route, stops, road conditions you expect to be encountered, and who will fill the ride leader roles, the better able they will be to mentally prepare themselves.

The Ride Captain should provide as much useful information as possible including who he/she has designated as the ride leaders (Tail Gunner, Road Guard), and give an overall picture of how he/she expects to lead the ride (pace, frequency of stops, anticipated food breaks). The Ride Captain should review the Road Rules (hand signals, etc.) and other pertinent items such as setting an understanding for conduct and timing at stops, for example: non-fuel related stops will be brief unless otherwise indicated, probably no longer than 5 minutes. Make sure that everyone who wants to be paired with a riding buddy has one.

The Buddy System

Having a riding buddy can truly add to your group riding experience in significant ways. By selecting a riding buddy you enter into an agreement with that person to watch out for each other out there on the road, you will fuel-up together, provide useful information to each other relative to riding performance (spacing, holding a line, reading the "tells", etc.). Your riding buddy will also be your failsafe against being left behind if you happen to be otherwise engaged when the group forms-up to depart.

At fuel stops, you should park at the fuel pump side-by-side with your riding buddy and share a fuel nozzle. If agreeable, simply take turns paying for each other, it all works out in the long run and will significantly decrease the time required for the group at fuel stops.

You and your riding buddy should perform a pre-ride check of each other's bikes. Get familiar with how the saddlebags, T-Bags, or other components are strapped onto the bikes. With this knowledge you will be able to properly assess whether or not a hazardous situation is in the making when traveling down the road and some piece of equipment on your riding buddy's bike appears to be unstable.

At stops, you and your riding buddy will be able to humbly and meekly advise each other as to how you've performed on the recent leg of the ride. Comment on spacing, holding the line in the column, reading "tells", anticipation, etc. You or your riding buddy may also have advice on individual riding skills like cornering. Don't push your opinions on your riding buddy, and likewise, carefully evaluate any opinions you may receive. Let this be an information sharing, or intelligence gathering function more than a teacher-student type relationship.

Tells

Tells are anything in the environment around you that allow you to gather intelligence relevant to the safety of your journey; road signs, sounds, visual clues (dust/sand storms), or anything else that can warn you of imminent change. Read your "tells" and be vigilant in searching for them. In a passing situation on a two-lane highway you may notice a vehicle parked on the shoulder up ahead on the far side of the road. Is there an operator behind the wheel? Is there a possibility that the vehicle may enter the roadway? What if it does and executes a U-turn?

If you're in a staggered formation and notice that there are a number of vehicles traveling closely behind the Tail Gunner and also notice a road sign indicating that you're approaching a passing lane, you might anticipate that the Ride Captain will issue the hand signal to tighten up the formation. In doing so, the Ride Captain is preparing to move the formation into the slower (right) traffic lane in the passing section and hoping to allow as many vehicles to pass as possible before the passing lane ends. The Tail Gunner should be cognizant of this fact and move over at the appropriate time to secure the left lane, also known as "closing the door" so that the formation can remain contiguous.

Help out from the back by reading your "tells" and anticipating the Ride Captain intentions. The longer it takes for the back end of the formation to tighten-up on this maneuver, the less likely it is to be successful at its completion.

Maneuvering

In particular, it is low-speed maneuvering that will account for the vast majority of bikes being put down on the asphalt. You really need to focus on what you're doing in parking lots and roadside situations – don't let yourself be distracted.

Find a large empty parking lot and practice your low-speed maneuvering until you're comfortable riding your motorcycle in decreasing radius circles. Do this until your handlebars are hard over and you can complete at least 3 complete circles at the tightest turning circle possible. Then do the same in the opposite direction, you will find that it is more difficult in one direction than the other.

Parking Lots

There are many potential risks in a parking lot such as vehicles pulling in and out, slippery surfaces (wet concrete, oil on the asphalt), children running unattended, pot-holes, missing manhole covers; the list goes on.

You need to identify the risks prior to engaging in activities that involve moving your motorcycle. Be aware of what your fellow riders are doing as well.

On a recent ride I witnessed one rider accelerate from a stopped position in the parking lot of a gas station to make an entry onto a roadway. At his beginning position he was at rest on top of a manhole cover. When he accelerated, the manhole cover shot right out from under the rear wheel exposing at least two hazards to the riders behind him. One was the projectile (the flying manhole cover), and the other was the big hole in the pavement where the manhole cover used to be.

Parking

Why does parking seem to be so difficult? In my experience it's because ride discipline breaks down too early. Stay in formation as long as possible and allow the Ride Captain to establish a parking pattern if possible. The more riders that veer off in their own direction the more opportunity there is for collisions and confusion. Keep the discipline.

Once you're satisfied with where your motorcycle is parked, put the kickstand down immediately, and get the front wheel turned over in the appropriate fashion – usually hard over to the left. Inspect the pavement, or other surface, to be sure that it is suitable for sustaining the weight of your bike for the duration of your intended stay. If it's really hot out and you're parked on asphalt, the kickstand may eventually penetrate the surface and your scooter will be laying on its side after awhile.

Getting the kickstand down immediately will prevent you from forgetting to deploy it if you decide to remain in your saddle for a while and remove your helmet and gloves. It happens more often than you'd expect; that someone will simply get up off their bike with the kickstand up and walk away. I've seen it several times.

Let's be courteous as group in parking lots. Four bikes should fit in a single parking stall unless they're "baggers", in which case perhaps only 2 or 3 might fit. It would be rude for a group of 10 bikes to use up 10 stalls.

Entering & Exiting Roadways

The point of extremis is the condition where two vehicles are in a situation where both are required to take evasive action in order to prevent a collision. Don't get into this situation.

When entering a roadway you need to consider many things: the speed and density of the traffic on the roadway, the skill level of the riders in your formation, the type and condition of the riding surface, both on the roadway, and on the entry surface.

You should have been surveying the traffic long before you actually arrive at the entry point of the roadway. If you need to pause to take a long look for the first time as you approach this point, you're way behind the eight ball. Continually glance down the road and identify the hazards as you approach the entry point. Once you've committed yourself to the roadway, carefully get your motorcycle pointed straight down the road as quickly as safely possible, and then accelerate expeditiously and assume proper spacing. The longer it takes to get all riders out on the roadway, the longer we are collectively exposed to this greater risk area. Pay attention to the riders near you. Those on the inside of the turn may not have the proper low-speed turning skills required to successfully negotiate a tight right-hand entry turn and may drift wide to the left.

When exiting a roadway pay close attention to the transition area between the roadway and the shoulder or off-roadway surface. If it's dirt or loose gravel you need to be sure and get down to a safe speed before you transition onto that surface so you don't wash out, plan to do so in a way that doesn't require aggressive braking or maneuvering.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, you need to exercise good judgment based on the abundance of information available to you when you roll into a position to enter or exit a roadway. If you can't safely perform the maneuver at that moment, then don't! You must be aware of the situation at hand, understand the skills required to perform the maneuver, and know that you can successfully complete the maneuver before you commit yourself to it.

Proper Conduct

There is usually a significant effort required by a ride planner to get a large group of riders together, in a common place, at a given time, so that you can enjoy a group ride. If you're not one of the planners, don't offer your opinion unless it's solicited. Why, because it's hard enough trying to get everyone on the same page without the extra help. If you feel like planning, plan your own ride. Until you've tried to do this you won't know how frustrating it can be just to listen to everyone's ideas about the ride. Riders

who show up and ride without voicing their opinions about how to make the ride better are desirable and will get more invitations in the future.

Be considerate, it's that simple. Don't be the last one ready when the group saddles up and prepares to take the roadway. The basic rule here is to show up early to the meeting place and be fueled up and ready to go before the appointed time. Be early so that any unforeseen delays will not prevent you from being ready on time.

At any stop made by the group be sure to take care of your personal business first, such as clothing changes, mechanical adjustments, or using the restroom before you engage in social conversation. You should be ready and able to move your motorcycle into the formation with 30 seconds of the Ride Captains signal. That includes helmet on, gloves on, jacket on, bike running and moving within 30 seconds. Make that your goal. Smokers, you should attempt to work out a strategy that doesn't inconvenience your fellow riders.

Under no circumstances will any illegal activities be tolerated or condoned.

Riding Rules

The purpose of riding in an organized group instead of an undisciplined pack is to provide the additional safety that a well-organized group inherently generates. This comes from within the group and from the outside. When a group rides in an orderly fashion, people don't get in each other's way, and the organization of the formation itself discourages cars from attempting to cut in. Trucks have been observed moving to the far side of their lane to minimize windblast when they see a well-ordered formation "single up" and move as far away from the truck as their lane allows.

EVERYONE riding with the club is expected to follow safe group riding practices. Anyone compromising everyone else's safety, will be warned, and if their actions continue, will no longer be welcome to ride with the club.

Formation riding will most likely be in a standard State Patrol (staggered) formation. In staggered formation, the bikes form two columns, with the leader at the head of the left column, so he will be able to view all bikes in the formation in his/her rearview mirrors, and be able to see around vehicles the group approaches. The second bike will head the right column, and will ride approximately 1 second behind the leader (and in the opposite side of the lane). The other riders will position their bikes 2 seconds behind the bike directly in front of them, which puts them 1 second behind the diagonal bike. This formation allows each rider sufficient safety space, and discourages other vehicles from cutting into the line. The last rider, or Tail Gunner, may ride on whichever side of the lane he prefers. He will have to change sides during the ride, based on the situation at the moment.

Ride Leader:

The Ride Leader must be aware of the length of the columns, and must gauge the passing of merges, highway entrances and exits, etc., to allow for maximum safety and keeping the group together. He must make sure that he leaves enough time/space for the formation to get into the appropriate lanes before exits, etc. All directions come from the Ride Leader. The Ride Leader makes all decisions regarding lane changes, stopping for breaks and fuel, closing of gaps, turning off at exits, any concerns of what lies ahead, accepting/rejecting radioed messages from other individuals, and so on. No individual will assert himself independently without direction from the Ride Leader to do so.

Tail Gunner:

The Tail Gunner serves as the eyes of the Ride Leader. He watches the formation, and informs the Ride Leader of any potential problems within the group. He watches other vehicles, and informs the Ride Leader (and anyone else with radios) of hazardous conditions approaching from the rear, such as vehicles trying to cut into the formation and trucks passing with potentially dangerous wind blasts. He will watch for merging lanes, and will move into a merging lane (or stay in a merging lane just vacated by the group) in order to "close the door" on other vehicles that may otherwise find themselves trying to merge into the formation. At the Ride Leader's request, the Tail Gunner changes lanes before the formation, to secure the lane so the formation can move into it.

New Riders:

The position of new (inexperienced with GROUP riding) riders within the group is significant. New riders should be positioned as close to the front as possible.

Lane Changes:

All lane-changing starts with a radio request from the Ride Leader to the Tail Gunner. The Tail Gunner will (when it is safe to do so) move into the requested lane and will inform the Ride Leader when the lane is clear.

At this point, the Ride Leader has three options:

Simple Lane Change:

This is an ordinary lane change, and can be used in most situations. After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then initiates the change. All other riders change lanes too. The important concept is that NO ONE moves until the bike in front of him has started moving.

Block Lane Change:

This can be used interchangeably with the Simple Lane Change. It requires a little more work, but it is well worth the effort. It's quite impressive to watch, and gives the riders a tremendous feeling of "togetherness". This may seem a little complicated, but is actually very simple to do. After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too. This allows the entire formation to move from one lane to another as a single block.

Rear Fill-in:

This is sometimes necessary if a long enough gap cannot be maintained in the new lane, for example when trying to move from the right lane to the center and vehicles from the

left lane keep cutting into the opening. After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the leader (usually at the suggestion of the Tail Gunner) will call for the group to fill in the space from the rear. He signals this by raising his hand to shoulder height and "pushing" it towards the new lane. All riders repeat the signal, and the last bikes move into the space in the new lane ahead of the Tail Gunner, then the next-to-last bikes move in ahead of those, and so on until the Ride Leader finally moves into the space ahead of the entire formation.

Emergencies:

In the unlikely event of an emergency condition, the Ride Leader will make every attempt to move the formation to the shoulder in an orderly manner. If a bike breaks down, let the rider move to the right. **DO NOT STOP.** The Tail Gunner will stop with the problem bike. The Ride Leader will lead the group to a safe stopping place.

Tolls:

The Ride Leader should be aware of tolls and collect money from all riders in advance. When the formation arrives at the toll booth, the Ride Leader pays for all bikes, and all bikes proceed through the toll. Many toll booths have counters that count the number of vehicles coming through. To accommodate these, ride through the toll booth one at a time. If some people in the group are using EZ Pass, they will split out from the group, and the formation will reform on the other side of the toll booth. Make sure the Ride Leader knows in advance how many bikes he is paying the toll for.

Hand Signals:

Each rider (and passenger) should duplicate all hand signals given by the rider in front of him, so that the signals get passed all the way to the back of the formation. The following signals are used in addition to the standard (right turn, left turn, slow/stop) hand signals.

Block Lane Change:

The leader (after having the Tail Gunner secure the lane) raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too.

Fill In From Rear:

After having the Tail Gunner secure the lane and putting on his directional signal (which is repeated by each rider), the Ride Leader raises his left hand to his shoulder and "pushes" his open hand toward the lane into which he wants to move. This signal is repeated by all riders, and each rider in turn, rearmost first, moves into the space ahead of the riders behind them.

Single Up:

When conditions warrant single file (narrow road, anticipated wind-blast from trucks, obstruction, pedestrians, etc.) the Ride Leader will raise his left hand straight up, holding up just his index finger. All other riders will repeat this, and the two columns will merge into one.

Staggered Formation:

After singling up, when single file is no longer necessary, the Ride Leader will raise his left hand with thumb (or pointer finger) and pinky out, other fingers closed, rotating his wrist back and forth (indicating left, right, left, right). All other riders will repeat this and resume staggered formation.

Tighten Formation:

When the Ride Leader feels that the formation should be tighter (bikes closer together) (usually after being informed by the Tail Gunner), he raises his left hand with fingers spread wide and repeatedly closes them into a fist. All other riders repeat this and close up all unnecessary space in the formation.

Road Hazard:

This is the one signal that can be initiated by ANYONE. Anyone seeing a hazardous condition on the road surface (road-kill, oil, gravel, significant pot hole, etc.) will point at it. All following riders will repeat this, and all riders will avoid the hazard.

*** Disclaimer:**

These rules are provided as a guideline for safe riding. Each member participates in activities solely by choice and participation itself relinquishes any responsibility of this or any other organization for any and all liabilities resulting in participation in any club related event or activity. All activities and events must comply with any and all state or local laws and ordinances. Any personal injury or property damage resulting during a club activity, or at anytime, becomes the responsibility of the individual parties involved, and at no time shall this organization be held liable.