

BASICS

Group riding is a common way to share riding experiences, camaraderie, and to collectively depart from and arrive at common points. According to GWRRA, the ideal size of a group is 3 to 7 bikes. Groups frequently exceed this number, and when they do, it is even more important to exhibit good group riding skills. Consider these tips when riding in groups.

TRACTS:

Imagine the lane you're riding in is divided into thirds; left, middle, and right. Normally, on good roads and multi lane roads, the bikes in a group will ride in the left and right tracts in an alternating (staggered) pattern. The odd bikes (1, 3, 5, etc.) will ride in the left tract, and the even bikes will ride in the right tract. Staggered positioning allows us to maintain two-second spacing, increases our visibility, and increases maneuvering room. We have two full seconds between us and the bike immediately in front of us which allows time to react. We are one second behind the bike forward and to the left or right of us (in the other tract) which provides maneuvering room. With only one second between bikes in opposite tracts, other vehicles have difficulty getting between bikes. We are therefore treated as a single vehicle when a non-motorcyclist wants to pass us.

Additionally, staying in the appropriate tract and maintaining the proper distance (in time) makes a formation look good, and allows it to function well, especially when it comes to spacing. When riding on narrow roads or roads without a shoulder, it is prudent and safer to ride "single file" which may suggest the center tract, but each rider should choose and change tracts at will based upon road conditions and possible hazards. Note that the bike that was in front of you in the opposite tract (1 second ahead) is now "directly" in front of you. You will therefore need to increase following distance to 2 seconds between his/her bike and yours. Generally, the lead bike will signal when to ride single file (holds up left hand above head displaying index finger) or staggered formation, designated by holding up two fingers (typically the index finger and the pinky).

SPACING:

Spacing between bikes should be time based, not distance based. Choose a stationary object ahead as a point of reference. When the bike in front of you (in your tract) passes the stationary object, start counting seconds (one thousand one, one thousand two). When you reach 2 seconds (when you finish saying one thousand two) you should be passing the stationary object. If you reach the object too soon, you are too close to the bike in front of you. If when you reach 2 seconds (when you finish saying one-thousand two) you have not reached the stationary object, you are leaving too much space between your bike and the bike in front of you. NOTE: you should be only 1 second behind the bike immediately in front of you in the opposite tract, when riding in staggered formation!) It is much safer for the entire group if the following distances are maintained according to this guideline.

TIPS

Note: Although the ideal group consists of 3 to 7 bikes, it is common to ride in larger groups. If the route traveled is remote with very little traffic, larger groups are quite acceptable. However, when travelling on busy roadways, consider breaking into smaller groups. This of course will require additional riders stepping up to be a "Lead" or a "Drag." See "**Large Groups**" below.

ROUTE:

Make sure everyone knows the route, and especially what to do at "Decision Points." Decision Points are those places during a ride when a decision has to be made about which direction to go. For example, a "T" intersection, or a 'Y' in the road, or a right or left turn onto another road. If the group has become split up, maybe due to slow riders in the back or riding through a town, failure to pay attention at Decision Points can result in the group permanently being split up. At all decision points, regroup to ensure you remain a Group.

NEW MEMBERS:

There is debate on where a new member should ride in the formation. Many references state to place the "newby" in the number 2 position. It is my opinion that placing a new member in the second last position has more educational benefit. In this position, s/he can view a group of experienced riders in front of him/her and observe how they ride including techniques such as cornering, defensive driving, etc. Many of us learn by example. If the new rider sees only 1 bike in front, it is not easy to learn the spacing, tracking and other riding techniques from observing a single bike.

SIGNALS:

Many Goldwing riders and some other bikes may have CB communication. When riding with bikes without electronic communication, it is prudent to use the CB radio AND hand signals (such as single and double file, "U" turns, pointing to hazards in the road, etc.). Each bike in the formation should repeat the hand signal to insure all bikes behind them have seen the signal. If there are two or more bikes with no CBs, we make sure that they are separated by at least one radio equipped bike. This policy ensures that there is always one bike in radio contact with the group who can give hand signals to the bike immediately following him/her. This is part of our pre-ride coordination. Another great reason to learn and practice hand signals is to alert another team member of a road hazard or direction change, when someone is chatting on the CB. There is no way to break in when someone is transmitting.

LEAD and DRAG:

The lead and drag bikes can make or break a good group ride. The lead bike should know the route thoroughly, and allow ample time for lane changes, turns, exits, etc. The lead bike should pause briefly at stop signs to allow the group to bunch up before proceeding. The lead bike should also wait for a sufficient break in traffic for the entire group to get out. When pulling out, the lead bike should proceed slowly (traffic permitting) to allow all bikes to pull out before reaching the speed limit. When it is dangerous for the entire group to make a turn or proceed through a stop sign together, the lead bike should recognize that and communicate it to the group. The group can always proceed individually, and regroup further ahead on the road. When riding on "twisty" roads or roads with limited forward views, the lead bike should communicate to the group when an oncoming vehicle is detected. There is additional benefit in further describing the vehicle by type (car, truck, van, 18-wheeler, etc.) and color. This can prevent a surprise to a bike when taking a tight turn. There is a lot that the lead bike can and should do to keep the group together and safe.

The drag bike should communicate regularly with the lead bike as to the status of the group. For example, the lead bike should be notified if the group gets separated at a traffic light, or by a vehicle breaking into the formation (should have ridden closer!). Also, the drag bike should communicate with the lead bike once every bike has made it through a stop light, stop sign, onto the highway, etc. An advantage the drag has is the view of seeing highway entrance ramps and intersections after the lead bike has passed them. The drag can warn of a vehicle entering the highway or approaching the intersection while the group is passing it. Much of the responsibility for safe group riding lies with the lead and drag bikes, however, never rely on anyone but yourself for your own safety!

LANE CHANGES:

Lane changes for the group should typically be at the direction of the lead bike. It is clever and safe for the lead bike to request that the last bike (drag) secure the lane that is desired. Once the drag safely changes lanes and secures the desired lane, the drag bike should acknowledge that the lane is secure, and inform the group of any vehicles remaining in the lane. These vehicles must be allowed to first pass the group prior to the group moving over. Each bike is responsible for checking for clearance prior to making the lane change. On roads where there are occasional passing lanes ("Slower Traffic Keep Right") it can be dangerous when the group takes the slower lane if there is not enough road for a passing vehicle to overtake the entire group. (This type example justifies the smaller group approach). It may be worth considering keeping the "fast lane" to discourage passing in these short passing lanes. Additionally, the lead bike should communicate to the drag bike sufficiently ahead of time when approaching the merge to allow adequate time for the drag to secure the lane.

LARGE GROUPS:

Large groups are acceptable when riding on remote, mostly unoccupied roads. However, getting there from the meeting place should be accomplished by splitting into smaller groups (3 to 7 bikes). Lead and Drag bikes must be identified for each smaller group, and will be identified as lead group 1, lead group 2, etc., and drag group 1, drag group 2, etc. When conditions permit for combining groups, the lead bikes in groups 2 and higher have the responsibility for making the determination to combine with the group in front and “stand down” as a lead bike. When doing so, the lead bike from group 2 (or higher) should communicate to the lead bike of the group s/he is joining something like the following: “This is group 2 lead joining group 1 and standing down. Your new drag bike is...” When traffic or conditions warrant, it is the responsibility of group 1 lead bike to call for the splitting of the large group back into the initial groups.

COMMON (easily described) HAND SIGNALS:

Note: when the lead bike gives a hand signal, s/he should also communicate using the CB radio.

- Single File:** Raise left hand above head with only index finger extended
- Double file:** Raise left hand above head with index finger and pinky finger extended (like signaling 2 outs in baseball)
- Hazard in Road:** Point with index finger of left hand. If hazard is on the right, use the CB or have your co-riders point using their right hand with index finger extended. Only as a last resort, and only if the hazard is very significant, should you consider removing your right hand from the throttle to point. (Some say never to use your right hand for a hand signal. If using the right hand can avert a tragedy, I would encourage it.)
- Waterboy signal:** A good way for the lead bike to signal a "U" Turn is to raise the left hand, index finger extended, and rotate the arm/hand in a clockwise direction (as viewed from the bottom).
- Slow Down:** Extend left hand downward with palm facing back.
- Speed up:** Extend left arm downward, and using left hand, simulate turning a throttle as if to accelerate.
- Need Gas** With left elbow outward and upper arm 45 degrees below horizontal, point to your gas tank with left index finger.
- Comfort stop** Upper arm extended horizontally, forearm straight up, fist clenched, make short up and down motions.