

## **Planning and Leading Group Rides**

### **Suggestions for Ride Leaders**

#### **New England Riders**

The following guide is intended to cover the fundamentals of planning and leading a group ride. It is not a definitive source of information on the subject. For every suggestion on how to lead a group ride there are numerous alternatives and exceptions. And as always, there is no substitute for good judgment. For additional information you may wish to visit the web sites listed in the back of this guide.

Note: also see the NER guide, "Suggestions for Group Rides." It too has suggestions for group riding.

#### **A pre-ride meeting before the ride begins.**



## **Planning and Leading Group Rides**

### **Suggestions for Ride Leaders**

#### **New England Riders**

1. So why lead a group ride? Here are the actual words from a few of your fellow New England Riders when they were asked that question -
  - a. When planning a ride I keep thinking about how much folks will enjoy it...
  - b. I like to share great roads with friends
  - c. I want to give back to the group that accepted me so graciously and with hopes of encouraging other NER'ds to do the same.
  - d. By sharing the responsibility of finding the roads, places to eat and all else that goes along with putting together a ride, I feel that I have helped more people get out to ride...
  - e. Leading a successful ride is rewarding and satisfying to me. It's a nice boost!
  - f. ...morning of the ride anticipation seems greater when I'm going to lead the ride.
  - g. But most of all...IT'S FUN!

It does take a little more effort to plan and lead a group ride but the rewards are great – and it is fun. After all, it's all about enjoying the ride and making friends along the way.

2. Ride Planning – things to think about when planning rides.
  - a. Pick the dates that work for your schedule. Don't overly worry if there is another ride planned for that weekend. There are always riders who cannot go on one ride but can on another. Enjoying the ride with fellow riders is what's important – not the number of riders attending.
  - b. You are the ride leader, you get to pick where you want to go.
    - i. Maybe the roads you know well are good to start with. Or perhaps, explore new areas and then take some friends so they can enjoy what you found.
    - ii. There are rides that are just about the riding while there are other rides that are destination rides and yet others that may include stops for special events, museums, music, etc. Again, it's your ride. What would you enjoy? Chances are some other riders would too.
    - iii. Try to pick a start meeting point with a gas station near by so all can fill up.
  - c. Duration of ride – a few hours, a full day or overnight – the longer it is the greater the planning needed.
  - d. Number of bikes & co-riders.
    - i. Larger groups may limit your choice of food, fuel and comfort stops as not all locations can accommodate larger groups.
    - ii. In heavy city traffic half dozen bikes is hard to keep together. On a remote road in New England a dozen or more is easy.
    - iii. When the group gets too large it is best to split it into multiple groups each departing several minutes apart. Some experienced ride leaders suggest groups of only 6 bikes, but under the right conditions others are comfortable with 12 or more. CB communications can help to manage larger groups.
    - iv. Limit the number of bikes? For any number of reasons you may want to limit the number of bikes on your ride - and that is OK. Maybe a number that you feel comfortable leading or the number of riders that a restaurant can accommodate, etc. It's your ride.
    - v. On your first ride as a ride leader you may only want a few bikes. With experience you may be open to have more riders join you.

### 3. Ride planning tools.

- a. Maps have been used to plan motorcycle rides since there were motorcycles. Today, online mapping sites like <http://maps.google.com>, <http://maps.yahoo.com>, <http://local.live.com> can also be helpful, and they are free.
- b. Microsoft Street & Trips is probably the most widely used mapping software in the motorcycling community. GPS's and their accompanying software programs are being used with more regularity.
- c. Some tools (MS S&T being one) enable you to specify the start time and the time planned for each comfort and fuel stop. It then provides the expected time of arrival at each spot along the ride and the ride completion time. It makes it easy for others to join a ride while in progress as it can be predicted when you will arrive at various locations.
- d. It can be helpful to copy and paste the directions into a spreadsheet to edit them and enlarge the type size for easy reading in a tank bag. An example can be found at: [http://www.fesmire.com/maps\\_and\\_directions.htm](http://www.fesmire.com/maps_and_directions.htm)
- e. Ask your riding friends for ideas on good roads, eats, accommodations, etc.
- f. Points of Interest are listed in mapping software and GPS's in addition to the Internet.

### 4. Fuel & comfort stops –

- a. Fuel stops. Most bikes can go at least 100 miles without refueling. When picking gas stations consider how many pumps they have vs. the number of bikes in the group. A typical refuel/comfort stop with 4 gas pumps for 12 bikes is 30mins.
- b. Comfort stops – time between stops. The more people there are the higher the likelihood that someone could use the facilities in 60 minutes, and that someone is very uncomfortable in 90 minutes. If a rider becomes distracted due to a physical condition they will not enjoy themselves and they could represent a safety risk as they may not be concentrating on riding. Humor aside, think safety and common courtesy when planning stops.
- c. Comfort stops – picking locations. The more toilets the better but hopefully there are at least two. Again, with 12 bikes, some with co-riders, it typically takes at least 30 minutes with two toilets before the group is ready to depart.
- d. Check for adequate parking for all bikes at each food, fuel and comfort stop. Give higher weighting to those with large open areas of asphalt vs. pot holed gravel.

### 5. Food stops

- a. Size does matter when looking for a place to feed a large group. It is easy to find a place to eat for a few people, but when the group is 12 bikes, and half are riding two-up, it becomes more of a challenge.
  - i. Everyone loves a diner or most any other place you would like to eat. It's your ride; plan it so you enjoy it.
  - ii. Talk with the management of the eatery you are considering.
  - iii. Can they handle a large group of your size?
  - iv. Can they set table space aside for you?
  - v. How busy is the establishment at the time you plan to arrive?
  - vi. Can you arrive before or after the their busiest time?
- b. Reservations? It is always a good idea if the restaurant will accept them.
- c. How long does it take for a group to eat? A lunch at a diner for a group of 12 bikes often takes 90 minutes from the time you arrive until you are departing.
- d. Online dining sites such as <http://Roadfood.com>, <http://www.dinercity.com/>, <http://www.ilovediners.com/>, and others can be helpful.

6. Motels –

- a. Finding them. All the normal resources are available including asking folks you know in the area to make recommendations, motel sites on the Internet, or take a ride to the overnight area and scout around for a motel that fits your groups' needs. Small cities and big towns usually have a number of choices. Finding an acceptable motel in remote areas may be difficult.
- b. Check it out on a scouting ride. If you are not familiar with the motel stop in and ask to see the rooms. Would you want to stay there? Would your significant other? Is the parking lot asphalt, well lighted and safe for overnight parking?
- c. Reservations or just show up? Some folks love to tour and as the day is ending find a motel for the night. This is fine for a lone rider but when you need 12 rooms it's better to have reservations. Most motels will block out a set of rooms for a period of time to allow your group the opportunity to reserve them. (Sometimes there are group discounts available)
- d. Check to learn if there are any major events in the motel area during the dates of your ride as rooms could be scarce.

7. Pre-ride the route? – If the group consist of a few friends perhaps not. But if it is a larger group, by all means pre-ride! Check the accuracy of directions and check out each planned stop. Getting lost with a few friends can be fun at times. Getting lost with a large group usually isn't.

8. Post an invitation to the ride.

- a. Communicate aspects of the ride, i.e. ride meeting location & closest gas station, pre-ride meeting time, ride start time, ride duration, route, planned pace, highlights of the ride (twisties, sweeper, scenery, gravel roads and highways, special stops, points of interest.)
- b. Remind riders to arrive early, have a full tank of gas, use the facilities and be ready for the pre-ride meeting.
- c. You may want to keep track of the number of riders by asking them to respond to your post.
- d. Weather – should you cancel the ride? It is your ride and it's your decision.
  - i. After all of your planning and anticipation this can be a tough call. Do you want to ride in the predicted weather? Would others? Would the ride be unsafe? Keep in mind, some folks love riding in the rain while others do not. Some are not deterred by high heat and humidity, others are, and some riders have heated gear and cold temperatures do not faze them. In the end you make the decision if the ride is on. If it is, each rider will decide for themselves to join you or not.
  - ii. In the summer lightning can be most dangerous for motorcyclists. Consider canceling the ride if predicted or if underway, seek shelter for the group.

9. Ride pre-meeting check list - things to review

- a. Welcome riders & introduce yourself and sweep rider
- b. Outline itinerary for the day. Review route and stops.
- c. Pass out directions & maps for those who don't have them
- d. Talk about staggered formation basics and likely single file conditions on the route
- e. Review the hand signals you may use during the ride & remind riders to pass them along in the formation.
- f. Go over how to handle group separations.
- g. Check that everyone has a full gas tank and ask if anyone's bike will need gas in a shorter distance than you have planned for the fuel stops.

- h. Go over the pace for the ride
- i. Ask if there are any new riders, or new to group riding riders – place them up front, behind and to the right of you, the ride leader.
- j. If there are trikes or sidecar rigs position them in the group - sidecars up front, and trikes in the rear. Remind all riders that these bikes have the whole lane; they do not ride staggered formation.
- k. Remind all riders to “Ride your own ride” – “You are responsible for your safety.”
- l. Questions?
- m. Ride safe and have FUN!

#### 10. Good ride leader practices

- a. Safety is always the number one priority in group rides
  - i. Inexperienced group riders should be placed in the front of the group - behind and to the right of the lead bike. It is a matter of safety. If there should be an emergency, this is where they will do the least amount of harm should they not be able to maintain control of their bike. Also, if they cannot keep up the ride leader will be able to see it and adjust the pace accordingly.
  - ii. Tell riders what to expect on the next leg of the ride if appropriate – gravel, switchbacks, single file areas, scenic views, etc.
  - iii. Pace – it is always a good idea to ride the “as advertised” speeds. Some riders may feel comfortable at or +5 mph above the speed limit but not at a spirited pace going through twisty roads. Others may be bored moping along at the speed limit when there are great twists in the road.
  - iv. Due to relative stopping distances, trikes are best placed at the back of the group, just forward of the sweep rider. Hacks (sidecar rigs) on the other hand are usually behind the ride leader as they often have longer stopping distances. Each of these vehicles utilizes the whole lane – they do not use staggered formation.
- b. Stop at stop signs. Come to a complete stop and wait for all in the group to catch up and stop. It is best when riders stop side by side. These two steps help keep the group compact and together when you pull out. It also minimizes the rubber band effect.
- c. From stop signs or stoplights - pull out at a steady acceleration to within 5-10mph of the speed limit. Do not slow down as this can jam up riders in the intersection and cause them to brake while turning. Once the group is all together resume full speed.
- d. As the ride leader it is good to stop at yellow lights - it helps keep the group together.
- e. When the group is broken up due to stop lights or traffic you can –
  - i. Keep going but reduce the speed until the group is all together
  - ii. Use CB to keep track of the groups’ progress. Slow the pace.
  - iii. Pull over when safe and wait for the rest of the group.
- f. When you know upcoming road conditions are best ridden single file, use hand signals (and CB) so the group can change formation and be prepared.
- g. When in or approaching areas with high traffic observe if the group is riding in a tight 2 sec. – 1 sec. formation. If not, call for the group to tighten up by using a hand signal (and CB).
- h. When pulling into a parking lot try to avoid leaving the end of the group stopped on the roadway.
  - i. It is helpful if the group is in single file formation before exiting roadways.
  - ii. Keep the group moving into the parking lot by leading them to the far end of the lot before stopping.
- i. Highways under light traffic conditions are an easy and safe way to travel in a group. Under heavy traffic it is still relatively safe but it can be more of a challenge.



Depending on a number of factors, riding in the left, middle or right hand lane could be the best, safest choice.

- i. Consider, how long will you be on the highway, how much traffic is entering/exiting, the speed of traffic, etc.
- ii. As with an individual bike traveling on the highway, look for a “pocket” within traffic that provides ample distance to other vehicles, as this may be the safest location to position the group.
- iii. Single file is usually best on highway entry and exit ramps as it provides riders with the greatest amount time and space for maneuvering and merging with other vehicles.
- j. Passing vehicles. It may be necessary to pass slow moving vehicles however, it should be done with caution. Make your intentions clear to the group with turn and hand signals (and CB). Note: see the NER guide, “Suggestions for Group Rides” for information on group passing. Also, see “Using a CB for added safety” in this guide.
- k. Rubber band effect - what the ride leader can do to minimize it.
  - i. Accelerate smoothly and change speeds gradually
  - ii. Announce speed changes beforehand with hand signals, CB, or both.
  - iii. Remind riders to keep looking beyond just the bike in front of them
  - iv. Slow the pace until the group is together again.
  - v. Suggest that when the group is split, riders smoothly accelerate to rejoin the group.
  - vi. Limit the number of bikes in a group
- l. What does the sweep rider do?
  - i. He/she is there to keep an eye on the group and lend assistance to any rider who encounters problems. Typically, when a bike falls out of formation one other rider will stop with the sweep rider to help or to act as messenger to the ride leader. The ride leader will pull the group over when it’s safe, then wait.
  - ii. If equipped with CB, the sweep can also keep the ride leader informed of the groups’ progress during the ride.

### **Looking out from inside the diner.**



11. Using a CB for added safety – In group rides the primary reason to use the CB is to help move the group safely. It is advisable for all who have a CB to stay on the channel designated by the ride leader so they know what is going on. Here is an example of an actual conversation between a ride leader and sweep.

Lead: Left turn at the light

Sweep: Thank you (the thank you is just a confirmation of hearing the sender - it is assumed that all other CB users got the message)

Lead: road kill center of lane

Sweep: thank you

Lead: very tight right turn

Sweep: thank you

Sweep: five bikes got caught at the light

Lead: thank you

Sweep: we are through the light but two cars are between us

Lead: thank you

Sweep: We are all together again (once we rejoin and are one continuous group)

Lead: thank you

Lead: bicycle on the right

Sweep: I didn't get that, say again please

Lead: bicycle on the right

Sweep: thank you.

Sweep: There is a big gap in the group. Please slow down 5 mph.

Lead: Slowing 5 mph

Sweep: We are all together again

Lead: thank you

Lead: turning right onto route 27

Sweep: thank you

Sweep: all made the turn, we are together

Lead: thank you.

Another exchange between the lead bike and sweep – this time on the highway. Ed is the lead bike & Bob is the sweep.

Ed: Bob secure lane one please (lanes are numbered from the left)

Bob looks and moves to lane 1, then lets Ed know he occupies the lane

Bob: lane secured

Ed: thank you

Ed puts his turn signal on and the group moves into the lane.

Bob: we are all in lane 1

Ed: thank you

Bob: Ed, the group is riding well together, very tight.

Ed: It looks that way from up here too.

**Note: unless all riders have a CB, hand signals should also be used for group riding safety.**

**Please also see “Suggestions for Group Rides” for additional ideas on leading group rides.**

## **Giving Credit to great organizations**

Some of the information presented here has been drawn from the following publications. It is fortunate that so many fine organizations put their group riding information on the Internet so that all riders can benefit. It saves lives as it helps all motorcyclists ride safer. Additional information on group riding can be found at their web sites:

### **Sunset H.O.G., Beaverton, OR**

Dynamic graphic demonstrates some of the principles of good group riding practices.

<http://www.sunsethog.com/groupRiding.html>

### **GWRRA – Gold Wing Road Riders Association**

See “GWRRA RIDER ED SEMINAR MATERIALS” at the bottom of the page. There are materials on a multitude of riding related topics including group riding.

<http://www.gwrra.org/regional/ridered/seminars.html>

### **Sunshine Chapter H.O.G.**

“Suggestions for Safe Group Riding”

<http://www.magpie.com/nycmoto/packrules.html>

### **North Metro Chapter, Minnesota Wings**

“Common Sense Group Riding Rules”

<http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/downs/2207/gpride.html>

“Suggestions for a Group Ride Leader and Tail Gunner”

<http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/downs/2207/rideldr.html>

“The Group Trip”

<http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/downs/2207/gptrip.html>

### **The Motorcycle Safety Foundation**

This is THE organization for learning how to ride well with safety in mind.

<http://www.msf-usa.org/>

They also have numerous publications including a handbook call, “The MSF Guide to Group Riding” which can be ordered in packs of 10 at:

<https://store.msf-usa.org/Store/StoreItems.aspx?cid=4>

### **Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center**

“Introduction to Group Riding”

<http://www.dps.state.mn.us/mmssc/latest/MMSCHomeSecondary.asp?cid=5&mid=84&scat>

### **CarolinaMotorcycleEvents.com**

<http://www.carolinamcevents.com/articles/ridingguide.html>

### **The Master Strategy Group**

Request “Guidelines for Group Riding” be emailed to you. It has some different ideas

<http://www.msrgroup.org/GUIDE.html>

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The New England Riders forum: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/NewEnglandRider/start>

New England Riders web site: [www.newenglandriders.org](http://www.newenglandriders.org)

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