

GROUP RIDING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Michigan Masonic Motorcycle Association. Since its inception in May 2005, our Chapter has quickly grown to be one of the best in the Masonic world. This is in large part due to the continuing support of our Executive Board and the active participation of our membership.

Our reputation has been earned (and well deserved) by our membership as a result of logging hundreds of miles during Chapter sanctioned rides, events and other functions. While motorcycling is an enjoyable sport, it also filled with numerous inherent dangers. Riding a bike entails much more than simply climbing on, inserting a key, and riding off into the sunset. Motorcycles require periodic maintenance to insure they are in top running condition. And as riders we must prepare ourselves mentally for each and every ride.

Road conditions, weather, traffic volume, our destination and whether we are riding alone or with a group are just a few of the considerations we must take into account. Regardless of the circumstances and the riding conditions, safety should be first and foremost in our minds.

The intent of this manual and the information found herein will address strategies and group riding techniques employed by the Michigan Masonic Motorcycle Association. It will familiarize the reader with common Terminology, Group Riding Dynamics, Road Crew responsibilities, provide safety tips and much more. The methodology and riding practices have been adopted by and are practiced by our Head Road Captain.

The information in this manual is not gospel. There are many situations in which they don't apply. Some organizations may have different terms for these concepts, as well. However, these guidelines have been tested for many miles, and they have sound safety rationales to support them. Should you ever have a question or simply want clarification regarding the information found in this manual, feel free to contact a member of the Road Crew, or our Head Road Captain.

Ride Smart, Ride Safe and Ride Often.

There are several advantages while riding in a group: 1) a group is usually more visible to drivers than a solo rider, 2) other vehicles can better predict what a rider in a group will do because all members generally maintain fixed positions and fixed intervals between riders, 3) in the event of a mechanical problem or an accident, help is readily available. Someone always has a cell phone, usually some riders are trained in First Aid/CPR. 4) It can be a lot of fun.

Additionally, riders can learn a great deal about riding techniques, their bikes and the sport in general during interactions with other riders.

With that said, group riding is not for everyone. It requires a certain level of skill and self-discipline. To attempt to ride in a group without having good basic riding skills and a sense of what others in the group are likely to do – and what they expect you to do – is an invitation to an accident, one that may involve damage and injuries to more than one bike and one rider. It is also a matter of personality, in that group riding requires good communications, courtesy among riders and a willingness to look out for the safety of others while riding your own ride.

All riders participating in a group ride are expected to arrive on time at the departure point with a full tank of gas, in proper attire for the conditions, and physically ready to ride. All motorcycles should be in street legal condition. **ALL RIDERS MUST BE ALCOHOL AND DRUG FREE.** If a Road Crew member suspects a rider has been drinking or is under the influence of any drug which may inhibit his/her riding ability, that rider will be asked to leave the group.

If the rider brings a passenger, he or she is expected to be dressed in proper attire for the conditions and physically ready to ride as well. It is the rider's responsibility to insure the passenger is fully aware and cognizant of all safety concerns that govern group riding to include proper hand signals.

The following are only guidelines for riding in a group. People who ride in a group usually appreciate what they are expected to do, as well as what to expect from others.

Hand Signals: A method of communication used to notify riders in the group of road hazards, turn direction, lane merging, slowing, and stopping.

Lead Bike: The Lead Road Captain riding in the left front position of the group. Generally, the Lead Road Captains will occupy the left front and right front positions. The left front rider will determine the group's speed, lane choice and riding formation. The right front rider is responsible for communicating (using hand signals) any changes in road conditions, road hazards, poor signage, construction and other obstacles to riders behind him/her.

Road Crew: A Chapter member who volunteers their time with the primary responsibility of providing the safest group-riding environment possible. This includes but is not limited to pre-ride orientations, traffic control, logistical planning and security. Road Crew members are experienced riders who have received special training.

Single file: A formation in which all the motorcycles in a group ride in the same track of lane.

Staggered Formation: A formation in which the Lead bike rides in the left track of a lane, the next bike rides in the right track and the next bike rides in the left track and so on. Bikes generally maintain a minimum interval of two seconds travel time from the bike directly in front and an interval of one second travel time from the bike in the slot to their right or left.

Tail Gunner: Also referred to as '*Blockers*'. Select members of the Road Crew riding in the rear of the group. Their responsibilities include securing intersections, traffic control and assisting any riders leaving the group as a result of mechanical difficulties. In the rare instance where the group becomes split or separated, the Tail Gunners will assume the lead position of the newly formed group.

Track: The zone of a lane in which a rider maintains his position in a group.

Two Abreast: Also known as 'side by side'. A riding formation in which the members of a group ride adjacent to each other in pairs, often used when riding in parade formation. Used after stopping at traffic signals so that riders can get through an intersection quickly and together if possible.

Every rider and their passenger should become familiar with all hand signals used when riding in a group. All hand signals are passed using the left hand.

- Left Turn – Left arm extended straight out from the rider's body.
- Right Turn –Left arm extended straight out from the rider's body with the elbow bent at a 90-degree and the hand pointing upward.
- Slow Down –Palm of left hand shown to group, with pushing motion toward rear of bike.
- Stop – Left arm extended at a 45-degree angle toward the road, with a closed fist.
- Single File – Left arm extended overhead with the index finger extended.
- Staggered formation – Left arm extended over-head with the index finger and the pinky finger extended. A twisting motion at the wrist is then incorporated.
- Leaving the Group; Mechanical Problem – Left arm extended giving thumbs down signal.
- Leaving the Group, No Problems – Left arm extended giving thumbs up signal
- Road Hazard on Left – Left arm extended at 45 degree angle using index finger to point out Road Hazard.
- Road hazard on Right – Left arm curled around top of head using index finger to point out Road Hazard.
- Proceeding through a Traffic Signal – Left arm extended straight up and over your head, index finger extended and motioning forward.

The reaction time for riders when confronted with an unexpected threat is, on average, about one second. If the need to react is anticipated (such as when a turn has been indicated), then riders can usually react within about half a second after the bike ahead begins to react. When a group changes speeds very gradually, however, it usually takes two or three seconds for a rider to recognize this and begin to change his speed to maintain his position in the group.

This doesn't sound like much time, but experienced group riders manage their risks reasonably well with a minimum one-second interval between each bike and a minimum two-second interval between bikes that are traveling in the same track. When the group has more than six bikes in it, however, gradual changes in speed within the group can become tricky.

When the lead bike begins to accelerate, the second bike doesn't instantly start to travel at the faster rate. Instead, a gap grows between them while the second bike is reacting – and it continues to grow until the second bike is fully up to the increased, stable speed of the lead bike. Clearly, once the speeds are the same, the gap will remain the same size.

However, since most groups prefer to keep a one-second minimum interval between bikes (two seconds between bikes in the same track), the new gap caused by the Lead Bike's acceleration may be larger than is desired. When this occurs, the second bike must go faster than the first one for a brief time in order to "catch up".

If we assume that the Lead Bike speeds up from 60 to 70 mph over a period of two seconds, the second bike will have to ride at *75 mph* for two seconds (after his reaction time passes) in order to close the gap. The third bike will have to accelerate to 75 mph for four seconds (after his reaction time passes) and so on.

In a small group of only six bikes, the sixth rider will find the gap between himself and the fifth bike has grown to 143 feet before it begins to close, once he starts to speed up, given these average reaction times. And it will be at least 11 seconds after the Lead Bike first began to accelerate before the sixth bike does so.

If there were only six bikes riding the same track, this example is easy to follow. But when the group is larger, (Charity rides often have hundreds of riders), the 'rubber band' effect can be especially dangerous to all riders.

The responsibility for coordinating the overall efforts of the Road Crew falls on the shoulders of the Head Road Captain. The Assistant Head Road Captain and Senior Road Captains assist as needed in all related administrative and on-site activities. Road Captains and Assistant Road Captains are typically the most visible members of the Road Crew during a group ride, charged with the securing intersections and traffic control responsibilities.

Prior to any ride; members of the Road Crew conduct a pre-ride of the route to ascertain road conditions, hazardous intersections, construction zones, and other situations that might affect the safety of the group. The ride is timed and the mileage noted.

The pre-ride orientation is designed to address safety issues, hand signals, emergency procedures and all other relevant concerns for that particular ride.

The typical group ride will include two Road Crew Captains leading the ride and several members serving as 'Tail Gunners or Blockers'. The Tail Gunners are responsible for securing intersections, communicating any problems within the group to the Lead Road Captain while en-route and to assist any riders with mechanical breakdowns. And in the unlikely event the group becomes separated, the Tail Gunners will assume leadership of the group until the pack is rejoined.

The goal of the Road Crew is two-fold. The safety of every participant is first and foremost. Based on years of riding experience, every riding plan and strategy the Road Crew employs, has been proven. Though the Road Crew will do everything possible they deem reasonable, it remains that "Safety is an individual responsibility". All riders are expected to ride in a responsible manner so as not to endanger themselves or other riders. And the second goal of the Road Crew is make the group riding experience as enjoyable as possible.

Spacing

A group ride should appear to be one large body of motorcycles held together by an invisible thread that holds each motorcycle even with the bike next to it and spaced a safe distance behind the ones in front of it. Bikes should be spaced close enough to discourage other vehicles from entering the pack, yet allow ample room to stop in the event of an emergency.

New Riders

Group riding places individual riders at a greater risk. Because of the added variables when riding in a group, the individual rider is more dependent on the riding skills of those riders directly in front of, behind and to their side. Prior to every group ride, the Road Crew will ask if there are new riders or riders who prefer to ride in the front of the pack. The speed and riding style of the group will be tailored to meet the known riding ability of the 'least experienced rider' in the group.

Two-Second Rule

We often refer to the 'two second rule' when riding. That is, keeping a buffer zone of 2 seconds between you and the vehicle directly in front of you. If you were traveling 60 mph (88 feet per second) the minimum buffer zone would be approximately 176 feet or approximately 19 bike lengths. There are many different variables (such as road conditions, weather and individual riding abilities) when discussing the safe distance a rider should maintain from the rider in front. Each rider has his/her own comfort level when riding in a group or alone. The 'two-second rule' should serve as a guide and no rider should ever exceed their individual riding abilities and should always remain within their comfort zone.

Follow, Follow, Follow

The basic rule when riding in a group is to follow the bike in front of you. The Lead Road Captains are traveling a predetermined course at a safe speed for the group. Road Crew members will be passing the pack on the right or left in order to secure turning lanes, merging lanes or thru lanes of traffic. Never pull out of the pack or leave your lane of travel to follow a Road Crew member. The results can be tragic. The most common occurrence of this particular problem is when the group is merging onto a freeway. **The rule is simple; follow the bike directly in front of you.**

Leaving the Group (Planned Departure)

If you plan to leave the group, advise the Road Crew prior to departure. Communicate where your planned departure will be. The Lead Road Captain will position you so that your departure will have a minimal impact on the group. When you leave the group, give the 'Thumbs Up' and be sure you are seen.

Leaving the Group (Unplanned Departure)

If you are forced to leave the group because of a mechanical breakdown or any other emergency, exit the group in a safe and prudent manner. Give the 'Thumbs Down' signal and a Road Crew member will provide whatever assistance is necessary. No other members of the group should stop as this may cause an accident.

Accidents

In the unlikely event of an accident, do not stop. Remember, the rule is simple, 'follow the bike directly in front of you'. Road Crew personnel have been trained to deal with accident scenes. They will render whatever assistance is necessary.

Stopping for Traffic Signal Devices

Always remain alert, with your bike in gear. While in a group, we often encounter traffic signals, stop signs, railroad crossings and even unexpected construction delays. Because our Chapter generally rides in a staggered formation, when stopping in traffic for whatever reason, tighten the group. That is, stop in a two abreast or side by side formation. This will condense the group; close the gap and thereby allowing for a more expedient transition through the intersection. After proceeding through the intersection, reestablish a staggered riding formation.

Turns and Winding Roads

Pre-positioning yourself to execute either a right or left turn is a critical element that is often overlooked. Preparing to make a turn in a group requires you to focus your attention not only on the bikes in front, but also the bikes to your side. In a staggered formation there is usually not a rider directly next to you. However, always check and be sure. Be aware of the road conditions as well. Many times intersections have loose gravel, are littered with miscellaneous car parts, broken glass and fluids (including oil) that can make the turn hazardous. Make certain you have downshifted and are in the appropriate gear to negotiate the turn safely.

Lane Changes

The Lead Road Captain initiates lane changes. He/she will communicate via CB radio to the Tail Gunners his intent to change lanes. When traffic permits, the Tail Gunners will secure the appropriate lane, and inform the Lead Road Captain the lane is secure.

The Lead Road Captain will then signal his/her intent using both hand signals and turn signals and move into the desired lane. All bikes will 'follow the leader'. The lane change will begin at the front of the pack and progress to the rear of the pack. When the entire group has completed the lane change, the Tail Gunners will advise the Lead Road Captain the lane change is complete.

Make sure your bike is in good riding condition. One way to accomplish this is by using the T-CLOCK(S) pre-ride inspection format.

T- Tires and Wheels

Air Pressure, Brakes, Tread Depth, Cracks, Dents, Loose Parts

C- Controls

Levers, Switches, Cables, Hoses, Throttle

L- Lights and Electrical

Insure all are in working order

O- Oil and other Fluids

Check levels, and leaks

C- Chassis

Frame, Suspension, Belts and Chains

K- Kick Stand

Make sure you are dressed appropriately; helmet, eye protection, sturdy boots, leather jacket, and gloves. Carrying rain gear and sun block are always a good idea.

Keep a safe distance between you and the bike in front of you. Know the stopping distance of your bike as well as its handling characteristics.

Stay alert to speed changes within the pack. Avoid the 'Rubber Band Effect'.

Be aware of your surroundings at all times to allow for an escape route in the event of an emergency.

Never ride in someone's blind spot.

Use your mirrors.

Know the hand signals and use them.

Should the group be stopped by law enforcement, stay on your bike. The Lead Road Captain will handle the situation.

When approaching an intersection with a signal light, DO NOT signal to the rider behind you your intentions of going through the light and then suddenly stop. A collision will likely ensue.

Prior to departure turn off passing lamps. Only Road Crew personnel will travel with passing lamps illuminated. This allows the Lead Road Captains to visually see the Tail Gunners' at the rear of the pack.

ALCOHOL IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. If alcohol is detected, you will be asked to leave the group.

Hot dogging and unsafe riding in any manner will not be tolerated and you will be asked to leave the group.