

Langley H.O.G. Chapter

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The following article on group riding was taken directly from the H.O.G. Website and has not been altered or edited. It has however, been reformatted for your viewing pleasure.

Riding In Groups

Whether it's as part of a large organized ride (as we describe in this article) or with a small group of friends heading out together to enjoy an afternoon, group riding presents special challenges – and offers unique rewards.

In about 45 minutes a riders' meeting will begin, where everyone will be briefed on the plan for the day's ride. Kickstands go up at 9:30 sharp – but your planning for this ride actually began a few weeks ago.

Before the Ride

Before you signed up for the ride, the first thing you did was ask yourself if the demands of this particular ride are within your comfort zone. Is the distance one you can handle comfortably? Are the roads within your skill level? If you're not sure, talk to the ride organizers. Don't be afraid to ask questions – and don't feel pressured to take part in a ride you're not comfortable with.

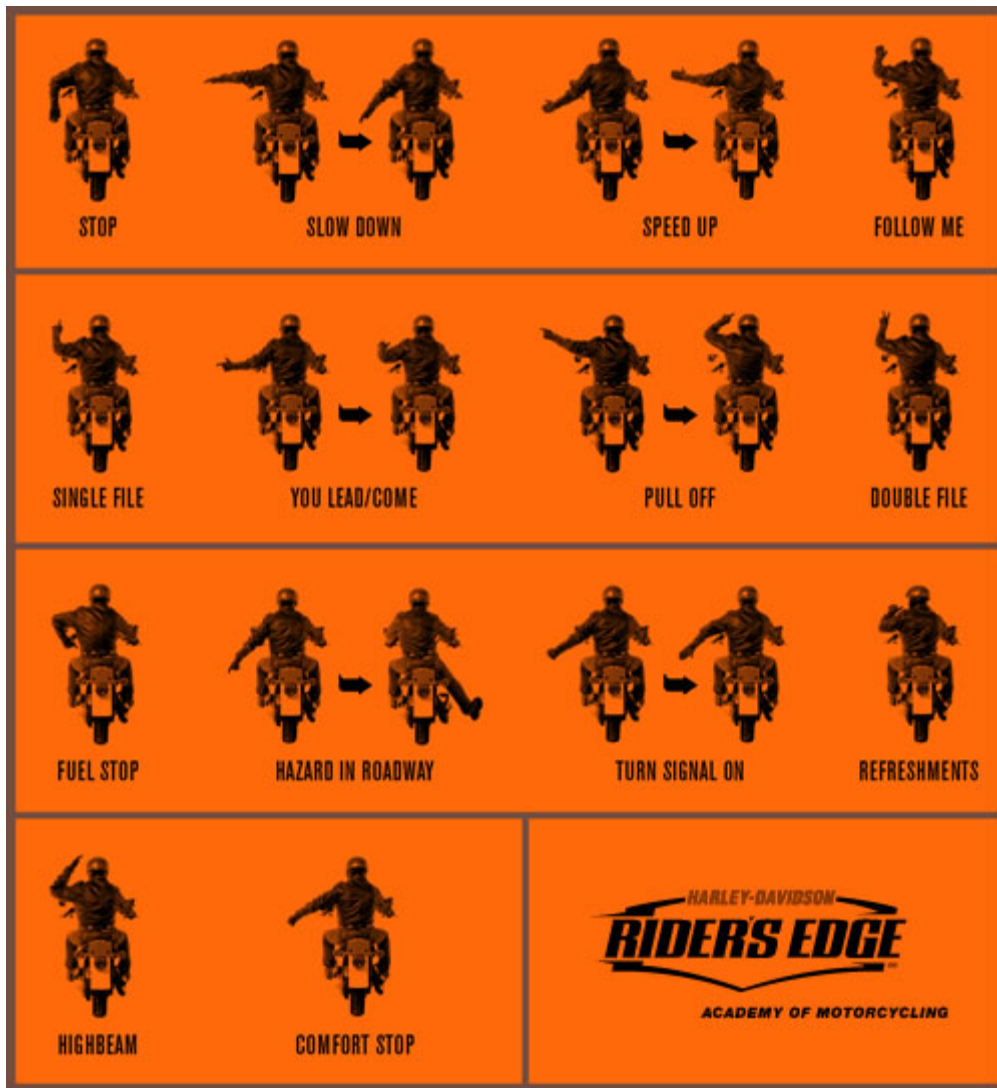
On the morning of the ride, you began your day by giving your bike a thorough pre-ride inspection. Then you selected the proper riding attire for the day. Even though it's expected to be sunny and warm, you packed some heavier clothes and raingear in your saddlebags – right next to your cell phone, first-aid kit, tool kit, and owner's manual – just in case.

Back at the diner, as the breakfast dishes are being cleared away, the Ride Captain authoritatively taps a spoon on his water glass and officially calls the riders' meeting to order. After a few welcoming comments, he or she goes over the ground rules for the day and passes out a packet of information.

This includes a map outlining the day's route, an itinerary detailing the planned stops, information about the availability of food and fuel along the way, and a cell phone contact number for emergencies. Knowing how important it is that everyone is on the same page before the ride begins, all the riders pay close attention.

The Ride Captain advises riders to break into smaller groups of five to seven bikes each for the ride and discusses the plan for re-grouping should anyone become separated. Knowing ahead of time where to re-join the group will reduce the pressure to "make the light" or hurry through a difficult left turn.

The Ride Captain concludes the meeting by going over the basic group riding hand signals, a useful tool to help communicate with other riders and keep the group together. Hand signals vary, so make sure you're familiar with the ones being used. Some of the more common signals are shown below.

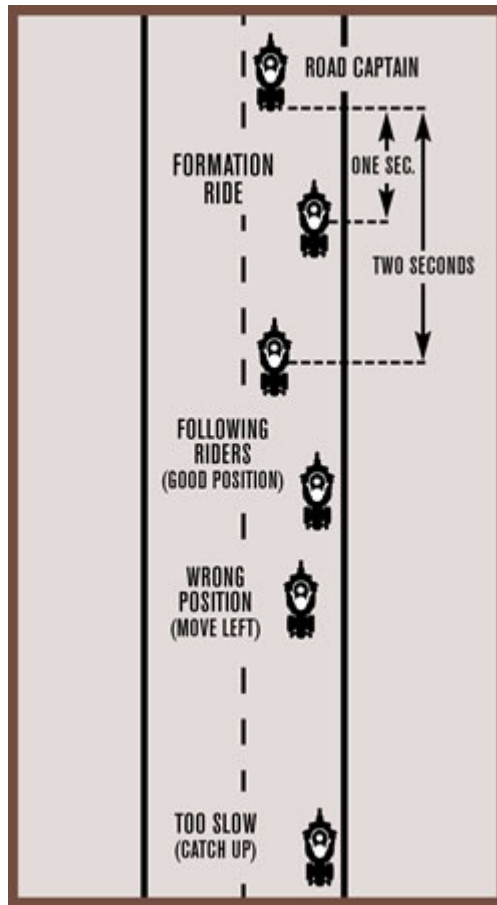


Riding in Formation

One of the first things you'll have to learn as a group rider is how to ride in the proper formation. Riding side-by-side is never recommended, as it does not give either rider an adequate space cushion or room to maneuver. Instead, it is recommended that you ride in a classic "staggered formation" in most circumstances. In this formation, the leader rides in the left third of the lane, while the next rider stays at least one second behind in the right third of the lane. Ideally, each rider should be two seconds behind the rider directly in front of him/her (but only one second behind the "staggered" rider ahead – see diagram below).

Advantages to the staggered formation include:

- It takes up less space on the highway than a single-file line.
- It provides adequate space cushion for each rider.
- It is easier for other motorists to see and is less likely to be separated by other traffic.



Staying Together

One of the biggest challenges confronting your group will be keeping everyone together. Hand signals help but only if they are properly used by an experienced group leader. The lead rider should anticipate challenging situations and signal far enough ahead that word "gets back" through the pack in time to make proper adjustments.

In addition to the group leader, the other position that demands experience is the "sweep rider," or last rider in the group. This person is responsible for making sure that no one gets separated from the group and that no one gets left alone on the side of the road in the event of a breakdown.

Intersections

Groups of motorcycles have a visibility advantage over single bikes, but intersections are still the area of highest risk. All intersections should be approached with caution, and riders should proceed through them only when it is safe and legal. Blocking an intersection without prior permission and a proper escort is almost always illegal. And always put personal safety ahead of staying with the group.

The general rules above apply to all intersections; below are some guidelines and tips that apply to specific types of intersections:

Left turns at a protected intersection with a left-turn arrow: Tighten the formation to allow as many riders as possible to pass through quickly. Do not ride side-by-side; make the turn single-file or in a tight, staggered formation.

Left turns at a protected intersection with NO left-turn arrow: Proceed with caution and in single-file, with each rider proceeding through the intersection only when it is safe and legal.

Intersections with a two-way stop (traffic light or "STOP" signs): While waiting at a traffic light, it may be appropriate to close up the formation and wait side-by-side. However, when the light turns green, riders should pull away one-by-one and re-establish formation.

Intersections with a "YIELD" sign: Turn your head to check for traffic before merging.

Interstates and Freeways

A staggered formation is essential on freeways and interstates. Enter in single-file and form up only after safely merging. The lead rider should maintain a merging speed that will allow enough space for following riders to safely merge. Be alert that cars entering or exiting may cut through your formation if your group is traveling in the far right lane, and consider moving the group over one lane when approaching a merging situation.

Exiting an interstate always requires a single-file formation. This allows a better space cushion and more time to react to whatever is at the end of the exit lane or when merging onto another roadway.

Passing

On freeways and interstates, pass as a unit. When it is safe and legal, the lead rider should signal the lane change when he or she has determined if the group can change lanes and pass together safely. When passing a semi-trailer truck, consider just three bikes passing at a time. This allows for more flexibility if the truck does something unexpected and evasive action is required.

On a two-lane highway, pass one at a time and only in marked passing zones. After completing the pass, the lead rider should return to the left lane position and continue at a passing speed to leave room for the next rider. Then the next rider should move to the left position and watch for a safe chance to pass, then return to the right position after passing, and open up room for the next rider. The rest of the group should follow the same pattern.

Roadside Emergencies

If a member of your group has mechanical difficulties or is involved in a crash, the following riders should all stop, including the sweep rider and the chase vehicle (if your group has one). The riders ahead of the incident should continue on to the next scheduled stop area, since doubling back could cause additional safety problems.

The sweep rider should assess the situation and, if it appears there will be a delay, send one rider ahead to meet the rest of the group at the next scheduled stop area. If medical assistance is necessary, the sweep rider can use a cell phone to call 9-1-1.

Roadway Hazards

In general, maintaining a good space cushion and following distance throughout the ride will allow riders to react to debris such as sand, gravel, and oil. Avoid riding over debris unless you have no choice and use hand signals to alert other riders to approaching hazards. Ride as smoothly as possible, and avoid sudden changes in speed or direction. The same is true for wet roadways.

When entering a construction zone, it is best to ride single-file, reduce speed, and increase your space cushion. This will allow riders to respond to changing road conditions more freely.