



# Riding Buddies

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It doesn't take long before someone asks "Where we going today?" for a Sunday morning ride. At that point riders are optimistic about a day spent in the saddle, flying down the road to some far away destination and making memories. Unfortunately, some group rides don't turn out so well.

When it comes down to it, riding a motorcycle is not a team sport. It's more of an individual experience. This disguised solitude can cause hesitation to speak up or say something in fear of looking stupid. Nobody wants to be the lead rider with corny rules or a participant admitting they don't understand the group's riding norms. However, group rides go much better when there is clear two-way communication.

Caution: choose your riding buddies carefully. While you may find easy friendships in the parking lot, understand that once the kickstands go up you may not have as much in common as you thought. Some riders are willing to accept more risk than others.

Skill level and endurance can also complicate things. Many riders overestimate their abilities. When riding in groups, people assume fellow bikers have adequate skills and can fully control their machines. To further add confusion, different groups have different expectations, techniques and procedures for conducting a ride.

So that all riders have a good time and

return safely, here's some group riding advice. These tips don't cover everything and may be controversial to some, but they are a good starting point.

## Tips for Lead Rider (aka Road Captain)

- Have a route planned ahead of time. Consider stops and destinations along the way. Plan stops away from alcohol and forbid its consumption on any ride you lead. This may not get you cool points, but alcohol use is responsible for at least one-third of motorcyclist fatalities.
- Have a pre-ride discussion or script. These talks are essential at the beginning of a new riding season or if first-timers show up. This is a good time to explain expectations regarding behavior, gear, pace, etc.
- Keep group size small, ideally less than five bikes. It may be better to break into several smaller groups if turnout is high.
- Explain protective gear requirements. Like it or not, the leader sets the tone on this. If one of your riders goes down, will you be comfortable with the outcome?
- Be aware that people need breaks. Riders have different bathroom, fueling, hydration and health requirements. Expect the number of breaks and their durations to increase with each additional rider to the group.
- Know participant riding abilities or at least try to gather this information by talking to them one-on-one a bit beforehand.
- Try to know something more about the

participants other than "Bob on the FJR". Having riders create an In Case of Emergency (ICE) contact in their cell phones is a good idea.

- Explain the particular rules and procedures for the ride. Leaders should try various methods and decide what works best for them, because they are responsible for executing the ride. It's okay to have different group riding procedures depending on who's at the front.
- Encourage

communication and questions. Be friendly, approachable and perceptive of others' body language or remarks.

## Tips for Ride Participants

- Check over your motorcycle before leaving home for proper legal requirements and mechanical operation. Pack gear that might come in handy if the weather changes.
- Arrive to the ride with a full tank of fuel.
- Listen closely to the ride organizers. Don't dismiss the information as useless or over-kill. If you have a question, ask.
- Know the destination, stops and separation plans before the ride starts.
- Ride within your skill range at all times (of course this assumes you know your skill range).
- Create a 360 degree space cushion around you at all times. This includes being on the lookout front and rear for quick stops.
- Don't rely on what the rider ahead does to judge your corner entry speed.
- If the group stops at a bar, drink non-alcoholic beverages. Also realize that your fellow riders may be impaired. Impaired riders could crash and possibly take you out in the process.
- To increase your confidence riding in groups, seek to improve your abilities. Others will expect you to have skills and they may come in handy if another group member has a problem near you.

## Sample Group Riding Procedures

The following procedure was developed through a combination of my experience and The Pace (and Pace 2.0) riding method by Nick Lenatsch. Make any changes you feel are necessary. But whatever you choose, make sure all those in attendance are informed and have a chance to ask questions.

- "Faster" riders up front, "slower" riders in back (this way people can ride at a pace suitable to their skill level or riding style)
- Stagger riders, give yourself a MINIMUM 4 second following distance between you and the rider directly in front of you, single file in corners
- As you would normally check your mirrors while riding, just keep the rider behind you in the group in your mirror, if a turn is made that might confuse the rider behind, make sure they see where the turn is before you continue on
- If you lose the rider behind, stop and it will work its way up the chain to the lead rider until things get sorted out



## **- STREET SKILLS -**

When our group gets separated, it's usually the result of a rider turning without making sure the rider behind notices. But be careful not to get too obsessed looking out for the rider behind that you lose track of what's happening in front of you.

If you ride with others regularly, it may be beneficial to get trained in CPR and First Aid for obvious reasons.

If something doesn't go well on a group ride, consider how well the expectations were spelled out ahead of time. Sure, even with a pre-ride statement and organization things can go wrong. But safety, enjoyment and great memories increase significantly when all riders are informed participants.

### **Sample Pre-Ride Script**

"Let's have a great ride today. Is your bike ready? Gassed up? Tires checked today? Is your gear ready? Are you prepared in the event of weather changes or a crash? Is your brain ready? Safely riding in our group requires focus and concentration. This ride will be a [spirited, parade, relaxed, etc.] ride. [Brief summary of route plan including possible stops.] Feel free to ask questions and communicate anything that you have on your mind, in private to lead rider if you are bashful. We are non-judgmental, so speak up. We prefer limiting size to 5 riders max in each group; however larger groups may be acceptable."