



Canopy Road Cruisers

Group Riding



Group Riding Tips

by Tom Fisher
Chapter FL1-A2

As many of you know, I have not been riding motorcycles for long. I bought my first motorcycle about three years ago and now have accumulated about 18,000 miles of experience. Many of you have many, many more miles than this to your credit. So, I find it a little difficult to talk about the important topic of "group riding." With your indulgence, I will give it a try anyway.

When I first joined the Chapter and attended my first meeting or two, I had no idea that there was such a thing as a group ride. I figured that I would do much of my riding alone or maybe with a friend or two. Riding with more than that was a very new experience to me, and, in many ways, I was not ready for the challenges.

I have participated in some group weekend rides with our chapter. I also have ridden down the highways to attend a GWRRA-sponsored rally and have observed other chapters as they rode in groups. I have accumulated several impressions that I will share with you in this article.

I guess rides can be divided into two categories - destination driven events and route driven events. In the first instance, a group of people take off to attend some function together. Our chapter takes Saturday morning rides together or they go to another rally like in Panama City. Alternatively, a group of people can get together and decide to explore a particular part of the countryside or some combination of back roads.

Guidelines

Proper riding etiquette requires each rider to have his/her equipment in order, gas tank filled, and show up at the starting point on time. Someone is appointed to be the leader of the group and someone else is the designated tail gunner. The riders are expected to stay together in a staggered formation, preferably talking to each other on the CB radios.

All is well and good except ...

Suppose the group leader wants to keep a **pace** that is too fast for the new rider who is unsure of his/her skills? Suppose a rider in the group needs to take a **break** for coffee or to stretch yet he/she feels embarrassed to call for the group to stop just for his/her convenience?

Answer: *The pace should be set within the capabilities of the least experienced or unskilled rider of the group. The Road Captain should be aware of the skills of each rider. If not, inform him if you are not comfortable with a fast pace.*

Our Chapter usually stops every 50 miles or so. Inform the Road Captain or drag bike by CB or hand signal if you need a break. The safety and comfort of each member is important.

Group size

Suppose there are 15 riders enjoying a moderate pace down a two-lane road and a car driver wants to pass. This is a very unsafe situation since the passing vehicle may encounter an on-coming car and have no escape route into the line of bikers. (For this reason, it is best if large groups of bikes divide into sub-groups of four or five each.)

Suppose the group riders are riding down the highway in a pack at 65 miles an hour. What should the spacing between riders be? How can a rider be safe if he is in formation and violates the usual **four-second rule** of spacing in front of the motorcycle? Will he have enough reaction time to miss that dog or pothole?

Answer: *This is the basic guideline for staggered riding formation. The lead bike should normally ride on the left side of the lane for best visibility. The second bike rides on the right side of the lane, two seconds behind the lead bike.*

To figure two seconds, pick a marker on the roadside. When the lead bike passes it, count "one Mississippi, two Mississippi," and you should be at the marker.

The third bike rides on the left side, two seconds behind the second bike and four seconds behind the lead bike. This formation should be followed in normal riding conditions for the safety of all.

If there is an obstruction in one lane the leader may call for single file formation. In this instance there should be four seconds between each bike.

Suppose the group leader passes a slower vehicle and calls on the CB to say it is clear and the other riders can safely pass. Should such instructions be followed even when the following riders have extremely limited vision ahead?

Answer: *While the road captain and drag bike will look out for the safety of all group members, safety is ultimately each member's responsibility. You should **never** pull out into traffic without looking.*

Now, let us say you have reached your luncheon destination and everyone has been fed. Here we have another potential problem in that the group may not stick together for the return ride.

People may have a tendency to say, "I'm going back by another route." Or, "I intend to visit Aunt Mary while I am here." If your group has new members or people who anticipated the safety of the group for the day's enjoyment, it can cause a difficult situation if the group splinters and leaves the new rider to himself or herself. Better make sure everyone knows what is planned before the ride begins!

Team riding

Returning from the year 2000 Florida Rally in Tampa, I trailed a team of three riders going north on I-75. Their coordination was superb and a pleasure to hear on the CB and to watch as I followed them. The lead rider was quietly confident and clear with his instructions. The tail gunner displayed the same confidence and business-like manner. As they moved around vehicles, they took pains to "secure the lane" to make it safe for the other bikers to change lanes. They used the radio to provide instructions to each other about other vehicles and road conditions. They NEVER used the radio to gossip but, instead, concentrated solely on the business of keeping alive. I followed them from Wildwood to Gainesville and marveled at their skill.

By contrast, I was somewhat ahead of a group leaving the Ocilla rally on a Friday night. They were constantly yelling back and forth, "Where's Charlie? Have you seen Mary's trike? We're turning left... no, right!" And, ultimately, "We lost three of the group. I guess they can find their way home alone." Maybe I shouldn't read too much into this, but I guess you can see the point.

Group riding can be a lot of fun and provide the opportunity for socialization. The key to its success is in planning, on knowing each person's limitations and skill level, and on staying coordinated. If you are a participant, know your interests, your energy level, and whether you want to be part of a group rider where your individual freedom to maneuver will be limited.

Other tips

Trikes and bikes with **trailers** or **side cars** sometimes take turns slower and need more room to maneuver. They should ride at the end of the group, in front of the tail gunner.

Bikes without **CB radios** should be spaced throughout the group, with CBed bikes in front and behind them.