

# ILLINOIS FREE SPIRIT RIDERS – GROUP RIDE GUIDE

The following are suggestions only, not to be considered rules. They are guidelines and not mandatory in order to be members of IFSR, however, the more we as a group think and ride alike, the safer and more fun the rides will be.

Riding in a group is strictly voluntary and should be done only if you feel comfortable with your motorcycle and the riding habits of your particular riding group.

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## Responsibility of Ride Leaders:

- Leadership of the group while in transit
- Be firm and decisive
- Explain routes to predetermined destinations
- If distance dictates, select some rest stops and stick to the plan
- Explain the formations to be used during transit; staggered formation should be used for nearly all the group rides.
- Try to find out the riding skill level of the group members you are leading, so that you do not attempt to lead beyond their ability.
- Explain the two-second rule and the necessity to keep closed up(see MSF recommendations on page 8).
- Explain the lane numbers (lane #1 is the fastest or left lane)
- The Ride leaders should select their own Back Door Sweep.
- Maintain the integrity of the group
- If the Back Door advises that a member of the group is having a problem and is leaving the group, the Ride leader should bring the group to a safe place to pull off and wait for the Back Door to report.
- Recognize and obey all vehicle code rules and regulations. (Watch speed limits).
- Slow down if necessary, when the Back Door tells you part of the group didn't make the light, etc.
- Lane Changes (2 lane - 2 way traffic): If it looks like it is going to be a long drawn out process to get all of the bikes in your group around a vehicle, consider slowing down instead and keep your group intact.
- Lane Changes (highway with at least 2 lanes for your direction): refer to the section on lane changes for more detail.
- Keep in mind that the Ride Leader's job is not to be a tourist, but to maintain the group in a safe manner. If you want to just enjoy the ride, don't volunteer to be the leader!
- You and/or your co-rider should point at any hazards you may see on the road for the bikes behind you.

## Back Door

- Probably the most misunderstood and underrated job in the group rides.
- The Lead Bike leads the group, but the Rear Bike controls the group.
- Responsibility:
  - Again, the safety of the group and to maintain the integrity of the group.
  - Be the "eyes" of the leader and the "voice" when necessary. (Example: "Rider #3, close it up please"; vehicle passing on right; etc.)
  - Advise the Ride Leader, if part of the group gets stuck by a light, another vehicle cuts into the group, etc., then also let him know when the group is back together again.
  - Assist in most, if not all lane changes. Note: Never attempt to hold back other traffic to enable the group to change lanes...it's unsafe, not wise and **illegal**.

- To assist in lane changes at the discretion of the leader.
- Watch for any hazards or problems with any of the group's motorcycles.
- Assist any rider in the group that needs to pull over. Advise the Ride Leader and pull over with the other rider.
- If a member of the group goes down, transmit "BIKE DOWN! BIKE DOWN!" on the CB and stop ASAP to help and/or direct traffic away from the accident.
- If any member indicates by voice or action/attitude that they don't wish to or are unable to follow the rules of the group, the Ride Leader/Back Door, has the responsibility and duty to remind that member of group safety.
- The bottom line is "Safety First" and we should all assume the responsibility for the safety of fellow group members.

## Group Riding Techniques

### Pre-ride

- Always arrive on time, or earlier if possible. Think about this, someone has planned a route, the stops, everything, and here you are late, and the parking lot is empty. The ride meeting is over, you know nothing about where they were going, or what route. If you want to be included, then get there on time.
- Group riding is disciplined riding and if following the rules of the group is not for you, then don't get in the group and meet everyone later at the destination. For those who do enjoy group riding, one slack rider, who does not keep the proper distance, either too close, or too far, can spoil their day. Remember the two second rule, explained elsewhere.
- The size of the groups will differ due to various conditions and will be determined during the Pre-Ride meeting. The quantity of willing Ride Leaders will sometimes determine the amount of groups. Ideal group size for most rides will be from 3 to 7 bikes. The larger the group, the more care must be taken and usually, the more risk there will be.
- Positioning: The Ride Organizer should have all Ride Leaders pull to an area where their groups will be able to form-up behind them. Riders without CBs probably should be placed directly in front of the Back Door, giving them more opportunity to notice the turn signals of the bikes in front of them. If you have a "preferred riding location", like being on the inside or outside of the lanes, let the Ride Leader know, during the pre-ride discussions.
- It's best to keep the groups in an odd number. The Ride Leader is always in the left tire track and this would put the Back Door bike also in the left tire track. This way they both have a similar view of the next lane.
- If your gas tank is smaller than the other bikes in your group, let the Ride Leader know how many miles you can go before needing to gas up.

### Starting The Ride:

- Follow the directions of the Ride Leader. You have chosen to participate in the ride so when the Ride Leader requests you line up at a certain location in preparation for departure, do it. You should have discussed any of your little quirks at the riders meeting.
- Gas and relief stops: remember the first rule of group riding, start with a full tank and an empty bladder.
- Be ready to go when the group departs. Do all the necessary things right after you stop, don't wait until the last minute. If you want to gossip with someone, go ahead and put the helmet on and visit, but be ready to jump on the bike.
- If you want to ride fast, leave first. If you want to ride slow, leave last. Do not start out in a group and then shoot out of formation and zoom down the road. You have just shown your disregard for the group's safety and ticked several people off.

## During The Ride:

- Advise the Ride Leader and Back Door if you are having any kind of problem and especially if you need to leave the group for any reason. Do not pull out of the group, without warning them!
- Headlights should be on low beam if you're not in the #1 or #2 slot.
- Never over ride your own, or your machine's ability. Remember, you are responsible for your own actions!
- Don't be over confident. Safety will be your primary concern for the entire ride. Remember our previous discussion of group riding. Do not let anyone else do your riding for you. Do not create an unsafe condition.
- The two second rule: The leader starts out in the lane's left track. The second bike is in the right track of the same lane and is only one second behind the leader. Then the third rider will be in the left track of the lane, two seconds behind the leader. The fourth rider is in the right track of the lane, two seconds behind the second bike, and so on down the line. Maintaining this formation, and these distances will discourage other vehicle from cutting into the group. However, if a vehicle does try to cut in between riders in the group, back off and let them in. Safety of the group, is the first concern.

Note: One of the reasons a group needs to ride in this close of a formation, is that when you are riding on a multi-lane highway, to keep at least one (1) motorcycle of the group in the other vehicles side view mirrors. This way the vehicle next to the group will not think that he can move into your lane, when in fact, there is another motorcycle, which is not in his mirrors, already there. This can happen when the group is spread out more than the two (2) second rule.

- It is illegal and very dangerous to move into single file and ride the right shoulder in order to allow another vehicle to pass you. If a vehicle attempts to pass you, you may have no choice but to do this. Keep in mind, that if another vehicle is coming at you, it may cause the vehicle passing you to push you all the way off the road. It could also cause a chain reaction with other vehicles also passing you at the same time. It'd be better to pull off the road at the first safe spot and wait it out, or pick up the group's speed.
- Do not post road guards, i.e. block intersections, to allow the group to pass unimpeded.
- Don't center your focus on the bike in front of you—that's called tunnel vision. Scan instead, just like you do when riding alone.
- The distance between two or more groups can vary depending on the type of roads, intensity of traffic, and many other factors. The groups should not ride so close to the preceding group that in fact they become one large group. There should be enough room between groups that it is obvious to other vehicles they can pass a group safely.
- If the group comes upon a motorcyclist or anyone stranded by the road, the Ride Leader should let the Back Door know so he can stop to see if assistance is needed. Here again, the group should find a safe place to wait for a report from the Back Door. (The universal HELP SIGN for a motorcyclist needing help is a helmet by the side of the road as you approach.)
- If a rider exits the group while the ride is underway, (non-emergency, e.g. the rider breaks off to return home), the next rider should change position and take the exiting rider's space. All subsequent riders should do the same to fill the gap left by a rider in front as they change position in the formation.

## Twisties

- On mountain type roadways and curvy roads, ride single file and each rider use the "line" that is most comfortable. Allow the bike in front of you a little more room (12 seconds), but remain as a group. Resume the staggered formation, when the road straightens out. Do not try to out ride your riding skills. If the bike in front of you is dragging his foot pegs in the curves, do so, but only if you feel confident. The bike probably just needs more air in its suspension anyway. In any group of riders there will always be a varying degree of riding skills. If you are new at group riding, ask someone who has been riding behind you how you have been doing. Hopefully, you'll get an honest answer. Like anything else it takes practice to watch the motorcycle in front of you, the one in front of him, the one behind you and the one behind that one. You will soon get so that you are watching every bike, from the Ride Leader to the Back Door.

- When not familiar with the road—Slow Down. Speed is still the #1 cause for motorcycle collisions, as is driver error.
- The three (3) second rule (or more) applies, even if the Ride Leader forgets to mention it. (The three second rule means 3 seconds minimum between each and every motorcycle.)
- You should know about counter steering if you have taken a motorcycle safety course. That is, to initiate a right turn, push on the right grip. To turn left, push on the left grip. The key, is to use counter steering, or "push steering" all the time whenever you ride.

## Intersections

- When approaching a vehicle facing toward you that is attempting to turn left, assume that driver does not see you and will turn directly into your path.
- When first in line at a signal controlled intersection without a left turn arrow, don't wait at the white line. Move forward on the green signal to the approximate center of the intersection and halt with your left turn signal activated and wait until the left turn movement can safely be completed. This will allow many of the (if not the whole) group to complete a turn at the same time in a legal manner.
- When stopping at a traffic light or stop sign, close the gap between each motorcycle without being exactly next to each other...each motorcycle should be afforded the complete use of the lane he/she is in at all times. Bike on left is always first to commence moving.
- When entering a through street, or highway, or turning at an intersection, the Ride Leader should accelerate slowly until informed, by the Rear Door, that the group is together.

## Stops and Final Destination

- To the extent possible and reasonable under the circumstances, keep the same position during transit and after stopping for gas, etc. Re-take that previous position so you are aware of the bikes around you.
- If the Team Leader or the Back Door approaches you at a stop or final destination, remember, they have the group's best interest at heart, or better yet our safety. Listen to what they have to say, you may be in their place one day, and you'll want others to listen to you. Of course, they will be the very example of tact and diplomacy, when they critique your riding skills. But listen, it just might save your life and the lives of others.

## Parking

- When entering parking areas, go to single file and slowly follow the leader to the designated parking area. Be alert! Don't just park anywhere! If possible, back into your spot, side by side. If the leader does not feel that there is enough room for all bikes, he will then tell you to find your own spot. Do so carefully, especially on dirt. Watch out for cars backing up. Remember, most of our bikes are quiet. Try to keep the group together in an orderly fashion. It really looks good when a neat formation of motorcycles comes down the highway, exits in an orderly fashion, and parks all in a row. Spectators stop and watch an orderly group enter a parking lot, close up, and park; you can see the admiration on their faces. It makes you proud to be a part of that group of motorcyclists.
- If you lose control of your motorcycle while halted and it begins to fall over, don't attempt to hold it up when it goes past center. It's better to hurt your bike than yourself. If you have a co-rider, he/she should keep their feet in while the bike is falling and not try to step off, which would take away any chance for the rider to save it.

## Ride Organizers (for each specific ride)

Ideas and locations for rides come from you. Everyone has a favorite ride. Share it! Remember, the Ride Organizers do not have to be a Ride Leader on their ride.

- The Ride Organizers route the rides.
- When necessary, they will make maps and alternate routes.  
Note: Alternate Route: This takes a little more work for you, but gives several rewards. You can have a quick, straight route for those that just want to get from point to point. You can have a scenic and a challenging route for those who enjoy the challenge offered and for those who like to take their time and enjoy the scenery. Were the routes checked shortly before the event so that construction, washouts, or other unplanned obstacles could be avoided?
- When reservations to restaurants and lodging are necessary, the Ride Organizers make sure these are completed.
- The Ride Leaders are only an extension of the Ride Organizers.

## Comments

- Exceptions to Normal Guidelines The often-heard rule, "Ride Your Own Ride," means that any guideline for group riding can and should be ignored when it doesn't make sense. Determining whether this is the case and acting prudently is each rider's individual responsibility at all times. Under normal circumstances, the Lead Bike will choose a lane, will determine the speed at which the riders are to travel, will suggest the formation which makes maneuvers most safe, and will navigate.
- Common exceptions to these guidelines occur with a rider who is not yet experienced with group riding. If a maneuver looks too dangerous or awkward for the new rider to complete safely, he or she should do what he needs to do to protect himself and avoid an accident. This may mean passing up a turn or taking it very slowly, or parking somewhere not with the group, or going more slowly through a curve than the riders ahead of him.
- Each rider commands his entire area within a lane and may move to left or right in it as required.
- Another exception: the Sweep Bike may not travel in the same path as the rest of the group. If, for example, a two-lane road is narrowing so that a lane is about to be lost, the Drag Bike will frequently "close the door" by moving out of the group's staggered formation into the lane which is soon to disappear. This is to prevent a four-wheeler from trying at the last minute to pass part of the group and then have to cut into it when the pavement runs out. Even if the riders near the back of the group observe that the Drag Bike is no longer in the position where he has been riding most of the time, they should maintain their own place in the group.

## Rubber-Band ("Yo-yo") Effect

Reaction time for a motorcyclist 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 announced), then riders can usually react within about half a second after the bike ahead begins to react. When a group of riders change 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 a 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. Then he will take another one second to decelerate back to 70 mph to create a gap of the proper size. If there were only two bikes in the group, this example is easy to follow. But when the group is larger, and the bikes involved are riding further back in the pack, the "rubber band" effect can be especially dangerous to all bikes from the middle of the group to the Drag bike.

For example, the third bike in the group has this problem: About two seconds after the second bike has begun to accelerate, the third bike responds. Now, however, the second bike is moving at 75 mph rather than at 70 mph like the Lead Bike. The third bike must use even more effort to catch up to the second bike than the second bike did to match his speed to the Lead Bike's new speed, if the gap is to stay relatively constant. He will have to move at 75 mph for four seconds, not two, to catch up. The fourth bike will have to accelerate to 80 mph!

In a group of only six motorcycles, the last one 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.

Now, imagine what happens in the group if, while this is taking place, the Lead Bike must apply his brakes! This rubber-band effect becomes extremely important if the Lead Bike happens to make an abrupt and major change of speed at certain critical moments, such as when approaching a sharp turn or a tricky curve. Those who ride as Lead Bike, or near the lead bike for their group should be aware of the importance of avoiding sudden changes in speed if at all possible, so as to reduce the risks to those following.

The rubber-band effect can be reduced by following these guidelines:

- Lead Bike changes speed more gradually
- All riders watch farther ahead than just the bike immediately in front of them in order to notice and to react quicker to changes in speed
- All riders restrain the impulse to "crank it up" in order to quickly re-establish normal spacing.
- Lead Bike does not increase speed within 15 seconds of entering a curve which may require braking or some slowing down to maneuver it safely.
- All riders abandon the two-second spacing rule when riding twisties (curvy roads) and allow as much distance as is necessary to assure a safe ride.

## CB Chatter

- Don't interfere with information being passed on between the Ride Leader and Back Door.
- If you wish to converse with a fellow rider, call them by name, "Hey Harry, this is Jack" or whatever the handle might be.
- Limiting the use of the CB for idle chatter is particularly critical during departures and arrivals. There is a tendency for riders to be tense during the takeoffs and somewhat lax during arrivals. Experience has shown that these are the times that unfortunate incidents tend to occur. Be Alert!

**To Transmit:** First key the mike. But wait just a second or two for the radio to come up to power. It's not like a telephone with a two way conversation. They call the CB a two way radio, but it only works one way at a time. So, key the mike, pause, now in a normal tone, or better yet, lower (deepen) your voice just a hair, and talk plainly. Enunciation is the key to good clear radio speech - just like the man on the five o'clock news. Speak slowly and plainly, use simple terms that are easily understood. Remember there's wind noise to contend with, especially with open face helmets. Your passenger, just may be talking at the same time, and you know your priority. Hold the key for just a second when you are finished, then release it. Don't try to "quick key", or key just as soon as someone else lets off

their key. Allow a little time in between transmissions. When two people are conversing, don't try to jump in with some smart comment, most of the time you will "double" with them and nobody understands anybody.

Try listening to other people, using the helmet speakers and then with the fairing mounted speakers. After all, these speakers are about 5 times larger than those little bitty ones in your helmet.

The microphone in a full face helmet is usually the best, after all, you don't have the wind noise quite as much as with an open face helmet.

Try talking to the bike right ahead of you, and then the farthest bike away. You may be surprised to find out that the guy who is the farthest away hears you the best.

Don't try to talk over a real powerful station that is talking at the same time. It just does not work. Physics and all that stuff. One problem is called skip, or DX in radio lingo, these are really powerful stations transmitting hundreds of miles. To cut them out, just turn up your squelch, that's the other knob on your radio. Some times you hear DX, some times you don't. It has to do with sun spots and weather conditions. The squelch control cuts out all of the low powered noise.

Normally, in a group ride there are times like first starting out and coming to rest at a gas or food break, we give up the CB to the Ride Leader and his Back Door. It's just a matter of safety. After all, we are coming to a stop and we can take the helmet off and talk like real people.



## QUICK TIPS: MSF's Guide to Group Riding

Motorcycling is primarily a solo activity, but for many, riding as a group -- whether with friends on a Sunday morning ride or with an organized motorcycle rally -- is the epitome of the motorcycling experience. Here are some tips to help ensure a fun and safe group ride:

**Arrive prepared.** Arrive on time with a full gas tank.

**Hold a riders' meeting.** Discuss things like the route, rest and fuel stops, and hand signals (see diagrams on next page). Assign a lead and sweep (tail) rider. Both should be experienced riders who are well-versed in group riding procedures. The leader should assess everyone's riding skills and the group's riding style.

**Keep the group to a manageable size,** ideally five to seven riders. If necessary, break the group into smaller sub-groups, each with a lead and sweep rider.

**Ride prepared.** At least one rider in each group should pack a cell phone, first-aid kit, and full tool kit, so the group is prepared for any problem that they might encounter.

**Ride in formation.** The staggered riding formation (see diagram below) allows a proper space cushion between motorcycles so that each rider has enough time and space to maneuver and to react to hazards. 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; the rest of the group follows the same pattern. A single-file formation is preferred on a curvy road, under conditions of poor visibility or poor road surfaces, entering/leaving highways, or other situations where an increased space cushion or maneuvering room is needed.

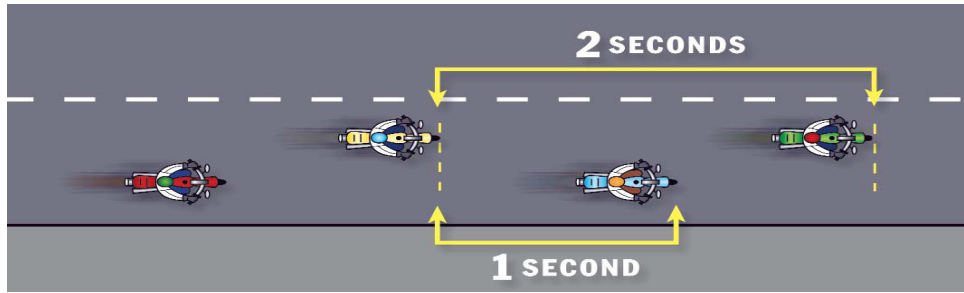
**Avoid side-by-side formations,** as they reduce the space cushion. If you suddenly needed to swerve to avoid a hazard, you would not have room to do so. You don't want handlebars to get entangled.

**Periodically check the riders following in your rear view mirror.** If you see a rider falling behind, slow down so they may catch up. If all the riders in the group use this technique, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up.

**If you're separated from the group,** don't panic. Your group should have a pre-planned procedure in place to regroup. Don't break the law or ride beyond your skills to catch up.

**For mechanical or medical problems,** use a cell phone to call for assistance as the situation warrants.

**MSF's Guide to Group Riding: Hand Signals**



## MSF's Guide to Group Riding: Hand Signals

**Stop** - arm extended straight down, palm facing back



**Single File** - arm and index finger extended straight up



**Turn Signal On** - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



**Slow Down** - arm extended straight out, palm facing down



**Double File** - arm with index and middle finger extended straight up



**Fuel** - arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended



**Speed Up** - arm extended straight out, palm facing up



**Hazard in Roadway** - on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand



**Refreshment Stop** - fingers closed, thumb to mouth



**You Lead/Come** - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front



**Highbeam** - tap on top of helmet with open palm down



**Comfort Stop** - forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion



**Follow Me** - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward



**Pull Off** - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder

