

8 rules for group motorcycle riding

"Safety in numbers" is usually a good maxim, whether it's walking alone at night or playing capture the flag. But if you're not careful, large numbers can be risky during one activity: motorcycling. Here are some group-riding guidelines to help make sure more really is merrier.

dangers of motorcycle group riding

The fun and camaraderie of group riding is, for many, one of the top draws of having a motorcycle. However, it comes with a slew of risks all its own: Covering too much road, mixing riders of various skill levels, and general chaos were just a few of the group-riding concerns one biker mentioned in a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study.

Clearly, some rules are needed to help limit the unpredictability of what can be a fun and stress-relieving experience.

rules for your motorcycle group rides

1. Hold a meeting before you ride

It helps to get together with all your riders beforehand to talk strategy (where you'll stop, how long you'll ride, where to go if you get lost, etc.) and ask questions. Trust us, it'll be easier to sort out concerns in a quiet room than over the crackle of the throttle.

2. Decide a riding order

First choose a lead rider (the one in front) and a sweep rider (the one in back). The lead rider is in charge of telling the group what's coming, be it a traffic jam, rainstorm, or stampeding horse. And the sweep rider sets the pace for the group. Everyone else should have a place in the formation, too. The least experienced of your bunch should be behind the leader, letting the pros line up behind them and lend a watchful eye.

You might be wondering, "How many riders should be in my group?" It depends on the situation. In the NHTSA study, though, several riders said they felt best in groups of 10 or fewer.

3. Come prepared

This includes simple things that everyone should do, like arriving with a full tank of gas and bringing a cell phone. It also means deciding who will bring a first-aid kit, bike tools, and other necessities.

4. Don't go rogue

In group motorcycling, there's no room for showboats or renegades (despite all that leather). Avoid competitions with your group mates, tailgating, or passing other riders.

5. Stagger your riding formation

Perhaps the trickiest part of group riding is perfecting the formation. That's because while you want to keep your group relatively tight (so you're easy to spot), you also want to maintain a space cushion within the ranks.

How on earth do you do that? The best way is to stagger: the leader rides on the left side of the lane, the second rider stays one second back and on the right side. The third rider stays one second behind the second rider and on the left side, and so on. You don't want to ride side-by-side since this will limit your maneuvering space if you need to swerve quickly.

Keep in mind that you may want to go single-file on very curvy or deteriorated roads, when entering the highway, when turning at intersections, or in bad weather.

6. Pass in formation

When it comes to passing other vehicles on the highway, group members should do so one at a time and then return to their spot in formation. So the leader would pass and return to the left side of the lane, then the next rider would pass and return to the right side, and so on.

7. Take plenty of breaks

If all these group riding rules seem a bit exhausting, that's because they are. In order to keep your concentration and energy (and avoid sucking the fun out of the experience), take frequent rests and just savor the moment.

8. Keep your least experienced rider in mind

Not sure how far to ride? How fast? How often to take a break? The answer is always to figure out what your least-experienced rider is capable of and comfortable with and use that as your benchmark.