



# GROUP RIDING MANUAL

**Winchester Harley Owners Group,  
Chapter 5346  
Winchester, Virginia**

## FORWARD

The Group Riding Manual is a new document based on the Road Captains Handbook. This document is written as a reference for Road Captains and all chapter riders. As such, it is not written as a training text although it is intended as the basis for education of both Road Captains and of the chapter riders.

The Group Riding Manual is available to the membership on-line through the chapter website. This is a living document that will evolve as needed without notice.

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## DISCLAIMER

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**INTRODUCTION:** For group riding to be enjoyable, it should be safe and organized. To achieve this, there should be procedures and standards for rides so participants know how to conduct themselves and what to expect from their leaders and fellow riders. This provides consistency for executing maneuvers, handling ride situations, and minimizing surprises. All of this should be done with safety as the most important objective.

This manual documents the procedures and standards for conducting group rides. It is the result of considerable experience, knowledge, and research. Much of what is included is applicable to all riding whether as part of a group or by oneself. Other organizations may use different procedures for their own reasons. Our procedures fit us best.

**The procedures and standards in this manual are subordinate to the use of good judgment as the ultimate factor in decision-making and conduct.**

**SAFETY:** Safety is paramount for both the safety of the chapter riders and the general public. Safety should dictate the attitude and behavior of every rider in the chapter. The Road Captains will contribute all they can to the safe conduct of chapter rides, but the message that safety is the most important factor should be communicated to all. As motorcyclists, we are vulnerable to a greater degree than other motorists. The well being of our fellow riders should always be in our minds and control our actions.

**RIDE SAFE AND HAVE FUN:** A group ride is one of the great motorcycling and social experiences associated with H.O.G. Taking part in a group ride is a great way to enjoy the fun, camaraderie, and passion of motorcycling. Following the procedures and standards in this Group Riding Manual will help make group rides safer and more enjoyable, for yourself and everyone taking part.

**WAIVERS:** Current chapter members signed a waiver on joining, or renewing, that covers the year. Non-members must sign a waiver for each ride. This includes non-member spouses and children. The waiver for minors is different from the waiver for adults.

**OBEYING THE LAW:** It is Chapter policy to obey the law on all chapter rides. This includes the blocking of an intersection without specific authorization from a legal authority.

## **RIDE PREPARATION**

**Rider** - An integral part of a rider's responsibilities is preparing for a ride. Mental preparation is always crucial. Riding a motorcycle requires an alert mind that is free from distractions like worry and stress. This also includes riding free from the influence of drugs or alcohol. For some, even too much caffeine or personal prescription drugs can adversely affect their ability to concentrate. Illness or allergies may be cause to not participate. Riders should consider their stamina and not start a ride they cannot be sure they can complete safely.

**Clothing** - Clothing choices should be made intelligently and take into consideration: adequate crash protection including an approved helmet, eye protection, full fingered gloves, over ankle footwear, abrasion resistant clothing that doesn't melt and is appropriate for the weather. Riders should be prepared for the ranges of temperature and changes in weather that might occur. Consider rain gear. It can double as a windbreaker or insulation.

**Support Items** - Support items should include tools, water if required, maps, emergency phone numbers, and required medications. Additional items may include cell phones, sun screen, first aid kit, security lock, spare parts, and spare keys.

**RIDE GROUP SIZE:** The group size may vary depending on the participating riders, weather conditions, roads to be traveled, known traffic conditions and available Road Captains. The group needs to be one that is easy to monitor and control based on the above conditions. The Ride Leader, Road Captain or Road Captain in charge of the ride will have the final decision on how small or large a group will be.

If a ride is organized as multiple groups, groups will be spaced at appropriate intervals.

**RIDING YOUR OWN RIDE:** Although each rider is part of a group, each rider is also an individual and the sole operator of the motorcycle. “Ride your own ride” is the phrase used to emphasize that each rider should take responsibility for operation of the motorcycle. Riders cannot allow themselves to become complacent or be intimidated into doing something that is unsafe or they are not comfortable with.

**THE SIMPLE STUFF:** The following is a list of tasks each rider intending to participate in a group ride is expected to perform:

- Riders should show up on time, in advance of the pre-ride briefing, so they do not miss anything or keep people waiting or distract other riders who are trying to listen to the pre-ride briefing.
- Riders should have their gas tank full and their bladder empty.
- Riders should check their motorcycle including oil and tire pressures before leaving home.
- Riders should have what they will need for the ride (like water if it is hot).

## **CONDUCT OF A GROUP RIDE**

**Pre-Ride Briefing** - The pre-ride briefing is conducted 15 to 30 minutes before the start of a ride. The standard pre-ride briefing will:

- Confirm that all non-members and all minors have signed waivers.
- Emphasize safety.
- Review group riding procedures and hand signals.
- Identify the Road Captains participating in the ride.
- Identify riders with special needs.
- Review the route.
- Answer rider questions.

**Route Familiarization** - Riders should pay attention to the route description given during the pre-ride briefing so they also know the route.

**Riding Formations** - Two riding formations are used on group rides: stagger and single file. The group will never ride side-by-side. The Ride Leader will indicate a change in formation as necessary by hand signals.

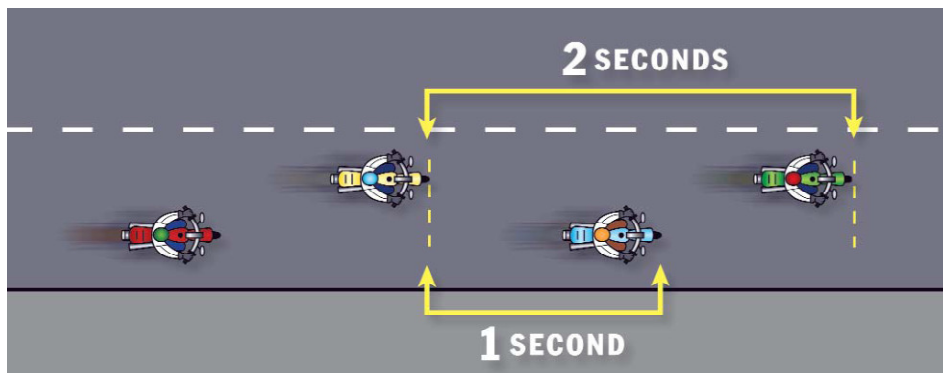
**Stagger** - The stagger is the primary formation for group rides. The Ride Leader rides in the center of the left third of the lane. This is the source of the phrase "Lead from the left". The second motorcycle rides in the center of the right third of the lane. The third rider rides directly behind the first, the fourth behind the second and so on. This formation allows for a compact group taking up the same amount of road as side by side riding plus one motorcycle and spacing. It gives each rider a safe distance from the rider in front and in back. It also gives each rider the ability to move to the opposite third of the lane, between the adjacent riders in front and behind in case of an emergency.

**Single File** - A single file formation may be used because a road is narrow, twisty, rough, or contaminated. Riders may assume any position in the lane they wish. Single file is reset to stagger after stopping for a traffic signal or stop sign. The exception is when a group is split from the front of a ride group. The split group retains the formation used before the stop.

There may be occasion when the group is riding in single file and the road condition changes to what appears to permit a stagger formation. Riders should not assume the stagger formation on their own. The Ride Leader may have a reason for not wanting the group to go to the stagger formation such as an approaching hazard or change in road condition dictating the continuation of the single file formation.

**Spacing** - Riders will maintain a two second spacing between their motorcycle and the motorcycle directly in front of them. In the stagger formation a one second spacing is maintained behind the motorcycle in the opposite third of the lane.

An aid to maintaining spacing is the use of mirrors. If a rider can see the face of the rider in front at a reasonable size in that rider's mirror and can see the face of the rider behind in their own mirror, the proper spacing is easier to maintain. Another method is to mentally count the time between when the rider in front passes a point and you pass the point.



*Figure 1. Spacing*

**Trikes and Motorcycles with Sidecar** - Trikes and motorcycles with a sidecar participate in group rides like all other motorcycles, using the same procedures and standards with one additional requirement. They ride at the rear of the group ahead of the Tail Gunner.

**Parked Car Hazard** - On roads with parked cars along the side where opening car doors, and people and animals coming from between parked cars may provide a hazard, a lane away from the parked cars should be chosen. If an alternate lane is not available, single file and a reduced speed may be in order.

### Large Trucks Hazard

**Passing Large Trucks** - Riders should not ride close to large trucks. They should pass large trucks quickly and with maximum clearance. It is advisable to change to the opposite third of the lane from a truck to increase clearance. A turn signal should be used to indicate the move and the rider should check to the rear for clearance before the move. The Ride Leader may speed up to allow clearance for those behind to pass quickly. Each rider in turn should do the same for those that follow. The Ride Leader may put the group in single file. If so everyone should move to the opposite side of the lane – away from the truck.

Trucks have large blind spots that make it impossible to see a motorcycle in some positions around the truck - including in front. Riders should assume they are not seen.

Tire explosions happen often. It is a violent event and can cause a rider great harm. Large trucks should be given a wide berth for this reason. Do not ride beside a large truck any longer than necessary.

**Lane Choice:** When there are more than two lanes in the direction of travel, the center lanes are usually the safest and best for a group of riders.

### RECOMMENDED RIDE POSITION:

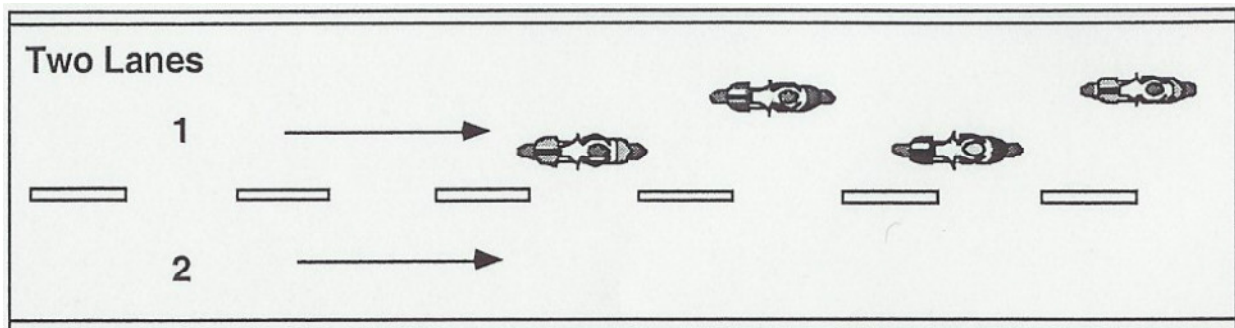


Figure 2. Ride Position when 2 Lanes; Ride in Lane #1

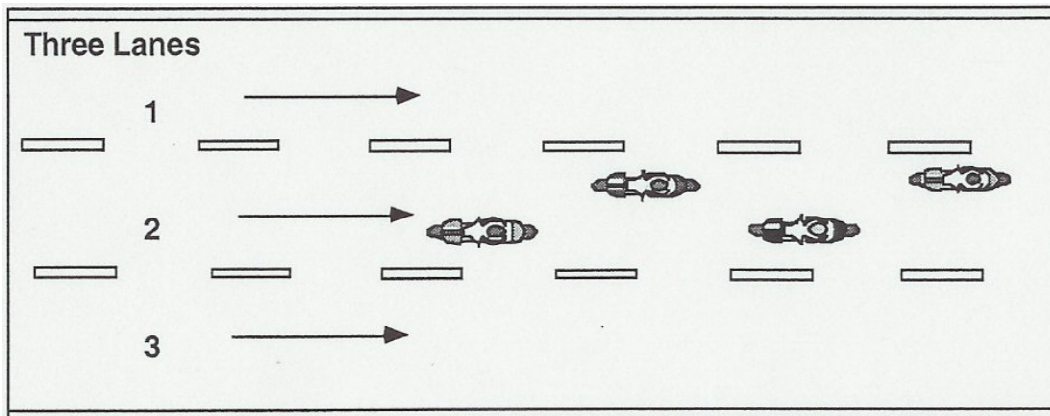
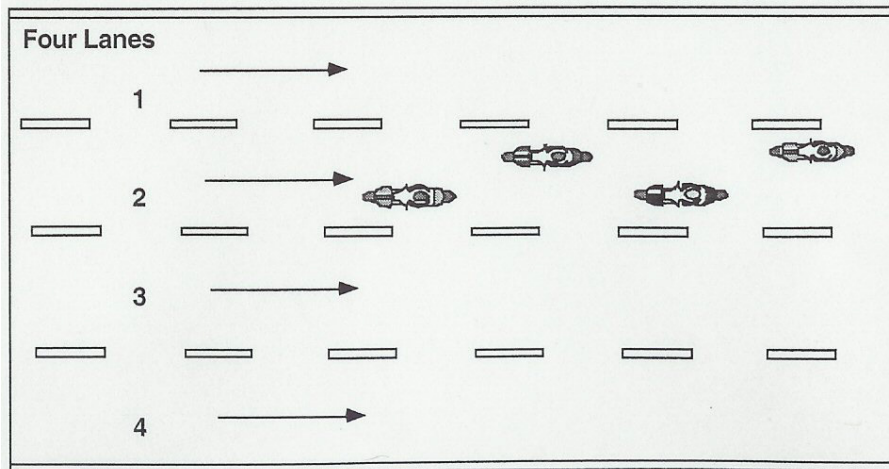


Figure 3. Ride Position when 3 Lanes; Ride in Lane #2

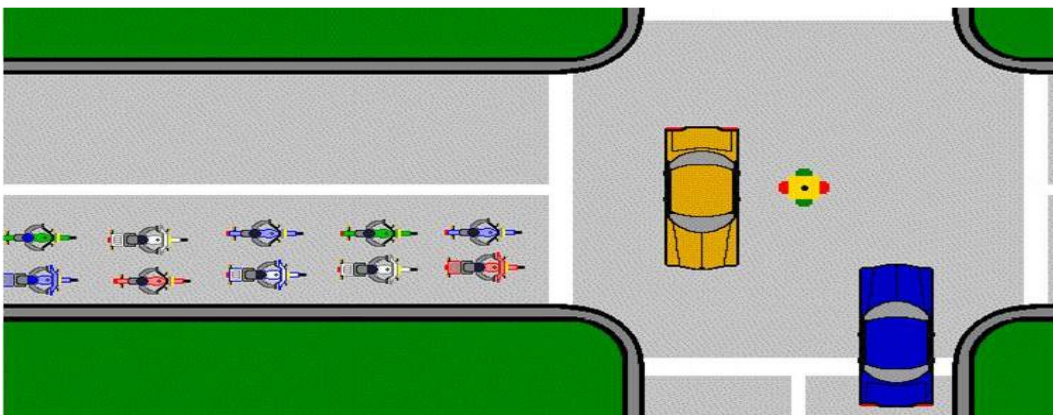




**Figure 4. Ride Position when 4 Lanes; Ride in Lane #2**

**No Right Turn On Red:** Although it is legal at most traffic lights in Virginia, Group Rides should not turn right on red lights. Experience has proven the group is not always safe when making such turns.

**Stops at Stop Lights or Stop Signs -** When riders stop at stop lights or stop signals, riders will pull up side-by-side. A stagger formation is established on leaving the stop by one rider leaving first or by an acceleration differential if the motorcycles leave together. This means that a single file formation will become a stagger formation after the stop. This does not apply to groups that are split from the lead group. Split groups will maintain the formation last indicated by the Ride Leader after the side-by-side stop.

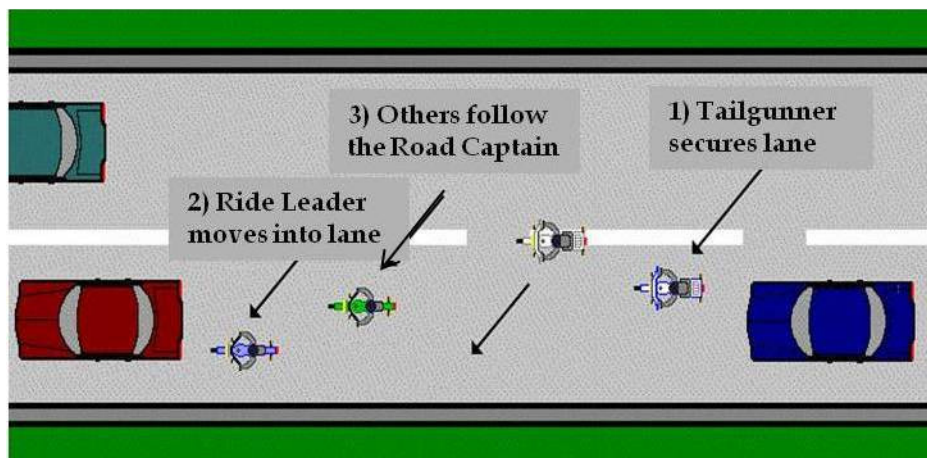


**Figure 5. Ride Position when stopped at Stop Light/Stop Sign**

**Controlling Surprises:** Riders are safest when they anticipate what is about to happen and have time to react. Ride Leaders should anticipate as much as possible the conditions ahead and prepare and guide the group so the riders are comfortable in all situations. This means avoiding abrupt stops and turns. There may be cases where the Ride Leader, in the interest of safety, will lead the group down an unintended road and make a U-turn or other maneuver to correct the route.

**Changing Lanes:** Lane changes are made from back to front. The procedure for changing lanes is:

- The Ride Leader signals for a lane change using the turn signals.
- Each rider passes observed turn signals to the riders behind.
- The Tail Gunner will move to the new lane when appropriate and protect the lane from traffic.
- When all vehicles between the Tail Gunner and the Lead Rider have cleared the area the Lead Rider will signal the lane change (sweeping signal to the left - or right), and will pull over into that lane..
- The Lead Rider will then be followed by the bike in the #2 position of the formation (3rd bike to change lanes), and then the bike in position #3 in the formation and so on... The lane change will appear like a "moving snake" when viewed from behind.



**Figure 6. Changing Lanes**

The Tail Gunner may be able to anticipate lane changes by having instruction from the Ride Leader that will allow protecting the lane before the signal is given by the Ride Leader. Riders should clear the area behind and to the side then before changing lanes. This procedure often does not go as planned for a number of reasons including traffic, late or slow signaling, and riders not exercising patience. In some cases, the group must merge around cars thus separating the group. Riders should give their best effort to make the procedure work properly.

**Passing on Two-Lane Roads:** Although not recommended there are exceptions, such as slow moving farm implements, to this rule. Safety of the group comes first ensure that the entire group can make the maneuver before committing them to it.

**Riders with Speed Limitations:** It is Chapter policy that rides will be conducted to the level of the rider with the greatest limitation, be that experience or mechanically imposed limitations like the 55 MPH break-in restriction. New riders fall into this category. In some cases a special group will be formed for these riders and routes may be modified.

Riders with limitations should ride immediately behind a Ride Leader. The reasons are:

- The closer to the front, the slower the speed.



- Riders at the front are less likely to be separated from the Ride Leader by traffic and stop lights.
- The Ride Leader can more easily observe the subject rider and adjust the pace of the group to their needs.

In some very rare cases such as long, difficult, or high speed rides it may not be possible to accommodate the needs of all riders. For example, a rider with a new bike might be asked to not participate in a freeway ride; or, if enough Road Captains are available, a Road Captain might be assigned to lead a group of two that departs early.

### **Keeping the Group Together**

The Ride Leader will set a pace that accommodates the skill level of all the riders in the group. The Ride Leader should plan ahead for changes and signal early so the signal gets to the Tail Gunner and to the rest of the group in time to prepare for the maneuver. If at all possible, the Ride Leader should make necessary lane changes at least one mile before a turn.

**Checking Mirrors** - All riders should check their mirrors. Frequent and appropriate use of mirrors is one of the most prevalent deficiencies among riders. If a rider can see their face in the mirror of the rider in front of them and can see the face of rider behind them in their own mirror, the group will maintain its positioning and each rider will have a safe amount of space.

Stop lights are a major cause of a split group. Riders should check their mirrors after a traffic signal to determine if the group has been split and the split group hand signal needs to be passed forward. There are a myriad of other reasons for checking the mirrors. Check mirrors as often as safety permits.

All riders should check the mirrors to know:

- The general state of the group.
- Where the riders are who are immediately behind.
- If there is a split group.
- The traffic conditions in other lanes.

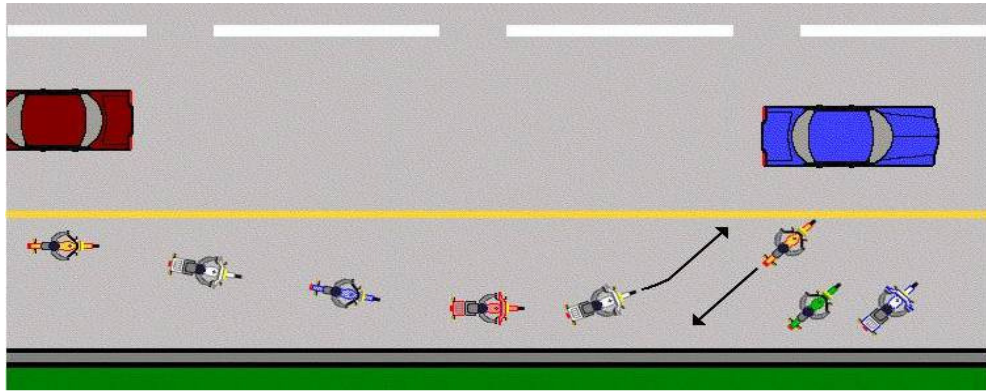
**Intersections** - Intersections are an area of high risk for a motorcyclist. This is still true for the group despite the increased visibility due to the number of motorcycles. All intersections should be approached with caution.

**Clearing Intersections** - Each individual should "clear the intersection" prior to moving through it. Clearing an intersection means to look left and right before proceeding through it to ensure it can be crossed safely.

**Turns at Intersections** - When making a turn at an intersection with turn arrows, tighten the formation to allow as many riders as possible to pass through the intersection quickly. The group should make the turn in a tight stagger formation. Do not ride side-by-side. At intersections that have no turn arrow, riders should proceed with caution. Riders should act as an individual, making the turn only when it is safe to do so.

While waiting to turn, mirrors should be checked because other motorists may be expecting the group to turn en masse. The group will re-form on the other side of the intersection.

**Parking** - Avoid parking in a manner that may require assistance to get out of the parking spot, such as downhill or head-in. Pull through parking is best for both arrival and departure. Riders should position their motorcycles so that the group can depart as a unit in single file.



**Figure 7. Group Parking**

**Merging Traffic** - Traffic will sometimes want to merge into the group. They will not like it there and will usually go away the first chance they get. Let them in, and let them out.

**Motorcycles Overtaking the Group** - Often other motorcycles will overtake the group from the rear. This is of concern on two-lane twisty roads. The group is likely already in single file. Move to the right and allow the faster rider to pass with as much safety as possible for both of you. A rider can signal by pointing with the left hand down at a 45-degree angle to indicate where you want the rider to pass and acknowledging the overtaking rider's presence. This is a good case for watching your mirrors.

**Interstates and Freeways** - A stagger formation is normally used on freeways and interstates. In heavy traffic, riders should resist the temptation to close up the formation to unsafe distances.

**Entering Interstates and Freeways** - The Ride Leader should maintain a merging speed that will allow enough space for following riders to safely merge. If possible, the Tail Gunner will clear enough space for the group to safely merge into the slow lane. If it is not possible for the Tail Gunner to clear a lane, riders will merge as individuals and position themselves in a staggered formation as quickly as possible.

**Lane Choice** - Riding in a group doesn't change the right-of-way; riders should be alert for cars entering or exiting the interstate or freeway that may cut through the formation when the group is traveling in the far right lane. For this reason, it may be better for the group to ride over one lane when everyone has safely entered the freeway.

The group will normally ride in lanes between the right most and left most for safety and courtesy. This also gives good options for maneuvering. High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes may be used at the Ride Leader's discretion.

**Exiting** - If the off-ramp is straight, a stagger formation is used to exit the freeway. If the exit off-ramp is known to be curved, turn, or change direction, the exit may be taken in single file.

**Split Group and Lost Rider** - The group may become split by a stop signal or other event. A rider may have a physical or mechanical problem and have to stop, or a rider may go down. If a part of a group is separated from the lead group by other traffic and can see the lead group, they are not considered split. Riders should not feel pressure to do anything unsafe, including disregarding traffic signals or speeding to keep from splitting the group. Split groups are expected, and there are procedures for handling them.

### ***Split Recognition and Hand Signal***

As soon as a rider in front of a split notices that the group is split, the rider should signal the riders in front by raising the left arm straight up with the hand in a fist. The riders in front should pass the signal forward as they see it in their mirrors until the Ride Leader acknowledges seeing the signal by giving the same signal.

**Rejoining a Split Group** - The Ride Leader will take action to rejoin the groups by slowing down or stopping so the split group can catch up. If the Ride Leader decides to stop the lead group, a safe location large enough for the group should be found. When the second group rejoins the first, the rejoined groups will continue.

**Entering a Group En Route** - A rider may enter a group that is en route. The rider should enter at the rear of the group just in front of the Tail Gunner(s). Riders re-entering the group should also follow this procedure and not try to re-enter in their previous position. Road Captains may need to re-enter the group other than at the rear.

**Split Group** - If the second group became separated because of a traffic light or other transitory event, the group should continue until it rejoins the first group. Road Captains in the split group may assume the position of Ride Leader for the split group if necessary. This can be for the comfort or safety of the group or to ensure the correct route is followed. If a Road Captain assumes the lead, the standard "lead from the left" formation will be assumed while in stagger formation. If the rider left in the lead after the split is allowed to continue leading the group and the group is in the stagger formation, the lead rider will lead from their position before the split, be that left or right. This will simplify rejoining the lead group if they have not stopped.

On rejoining the main group, the split group will assume the formation in use by the main group. If the second group stops because of a problem, the Road Captains will determine a plan of action to handle the problem. If a rider cannot continue, a Road Captain or other riders appropriate to the problem or emergency will be appointed by a Road Captain to stay with the rider with the problem. A Ride Leader and Tail Gunner for the second group will be established and the second group should continue and rejoin the first.

**Lost Rider** - The chapter has a policy that **no rider will be abandoned**. Any rider who drops out, for any reason, will be approached by the Tail Gunner and any help within the Tail Gunner's ability will be given. This situation will be treated as a split group as described above.

**Riders Needing to Drop Back** - A rider may need to drop out of their position in the group and take up a position in front of the Tail Gunner knowing that the Tail Gunner will adjust for their special needs such as needing more space, to slow down, or the rider may need to stop.

The procedure should be done safely. There are three methods for moving out of the group.

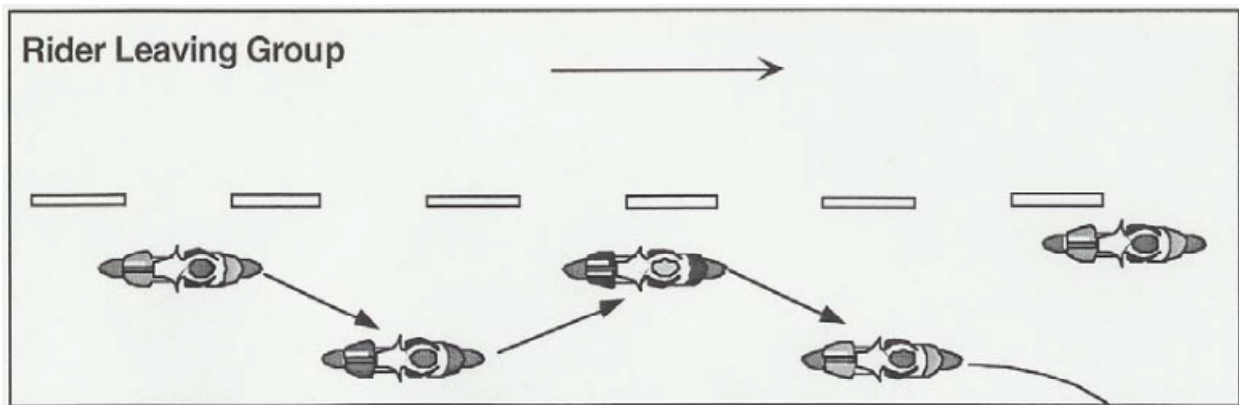
- If on a multi-lane highway, the rider signals to change lanes, changes lanes, and waves the other riders to pass.
- The rider keeps to their side of the lane and waves the others riders to pass. The other riders pass as safety permits. They then adjust back into the staggered formation filling the gap left by the rider dropping back
- If a rider has a serious need to drop back or stop, the rider signals the riders behind for more space and pulls off the road when it can be done safely and waves the other riders to pass.

The Tail Gunner will stay with the rider and will ride with them at their pace or stop with them and assist with any problem or emergency. If there is a Road Captain toward the rear of the formation near that person should drop out with the rider in lieu of the Tail Gunner who will remain with the main group. The Tail Gunner can motion the group to continue, eliminating or reducing any delay to the group.

**Leaving the Group / Filling a Gap** - If a rider plans in advance to drop out of the group, the rider should inform an assigned Road Captain of the approximate place or time of leaving the group. The Road Captain will inform the Ride Leaders who will inform the Mid-Group and Tail Gunners.

This will prevent a false lost rider situation. The departing rider should signal when they leave the group. Departures from the group should be made safely.

The procedure for filling a gap when a rider leaves or is added into a group is for each rider to cross over and fill the empty space created. Riders should check their mirrors before making this maneuver.



**Figure 8. Filling a Gap / Leaving a Group**

**Problem Riders** - Occasionally a rider will behave in a way that is disruptive or unsafe. Prudent action should be taken to rectify the situation, but the person should be handled with tact and discretion. The situations listed below are a few, but not all of the situations which will require intervention:

- Riding beyond one's ability.
- Unacceptable formation riding (allowing gaps that are too large or small).
- Not maintaining a constant gap to the riders in front (rubber-banding).

- Riding beside another rider.
- Operating a mechanically unsafe motorcycle.
- Riding while impaired by illness, fatigue, or medication.
- Riding while under the influence of alcohol.

If a safety breach has occurred during a ride, the person who sees the problem should approach a Road Captain at the next stop and tell them of the occurrence. The Road Captains will take action to resolve the problem. If the problem requires immediate action for the safety of the group, the person should drop back and inform Mid-Group or Sweep of the situation. In some cases it may be easier to tell the Ride Leader.

**Roadside Emergencies** - If the group encounters a roadside emergency, the Ride Leader will determine if the group may be of assistance. If so, the Ride Leader will find a safe place to stop the group that will not add any congestion. Those in the group that can render assistance will be assigned tasks. This may include rendering first aid, directing traffic, and calling for emergency services. The group will resume the ride as soon as possible and may leave riders at the scene if they are providing assistance.

**CHASE VEHICLES** - Chase vehicles may accompany a ride. These vehicles are not part of the ride. The chase vehicles should be behind the last group in a ride.

**MANAGING ALCOHOL RELATED RISK** - Alcohol increases the risk of injury, is illegal to drink and drive and H.O.G. insurance does not cover alcohol-related claims. National H.O.G. recommends and this Chapter and our Sponsoring Dealership has adopted; no alcohol before or during a riding event. The Chapter will not furnish alcohol at any event.

**H.O.G. CHAPTER ALCOHOL GUIDELINES** - Safe and responsible motorcycling activity is a major H.O.G. goal. In this regard:

- The consumption and use of alcohol is a serious personal responsibility involving the safety and welfare of family, riding friends, and the individual H.O.G. member.
- Alcohol consumption before or during motorcycling activity is not safe responsible behavior.
- National H.O.G. has no direct operational control over chapter operations. Consumption of alcohol after riding activity or at non-riding events is a matter to be decided by the sponsoring dealership and H.O.G. Chapter leadership. All such decisions are subject to final review and approval by the sponsoring dealership.
- If the sponsoring dealer and chapter decide that alcohol may be consumed at a chapter activity, then the recommended approach is either to "Bring Your Own" or to "Buy Your Own" from a vendor licensed and insured to sell alcohol.

**NOTICE: LIQUOR LIABILITY COVERAGE IS NOT PROVIDED BY THE CHAPTER GENERAL LIABILITY INSURANCE POLICY.**

**HAND SIGNALS:** Refer to the brochure with the same title on the main page of the Chapter Website under Group Riding.

**Right Turn** – arm extended straight out , elbow bent, fist clenched



**Left Turn** – arm extended straight out , fist clenched or palm facing down



**Hazard in Road** – on the right point with right Foot; on the left, point with left hand or foot



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



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



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

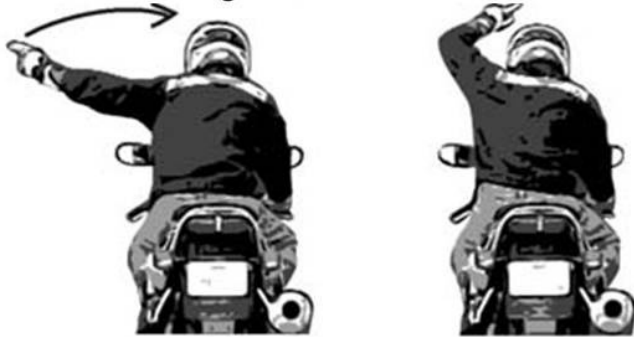




**Stop** – arm extended straight down , palm facing back



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



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



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



**Need Fuel** – arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended





**RIDE AND HAVE FUN!**