

THE MICHIANA ELKHART H.O.G CHAPTER PRIMER ON GROUP RIDING

INTRODUCTION:

Ride and Have Fun is the motto of The Harley Owners Group. As HOG members, group rides are a large part of our activity calendar. Our safety is an important part of having fun but it is serious business. Please review these suggestions to help make your group riding more pleasurable and safe. We are ultimately responsible for our own safety.

HAND SIGNALS AND FORMATION RIDING

Hand signals should be kept simple, easy to learn and few in number. The basic hand signals are: Right Turn, Left Turn, Slow Down, Stop and Road Hazards. Ask your Road Captains for a review if you are unfamiliar with them.

Hand signals are typically done with the left hand so your right hand is always close to the throttle and brake. Either the rider or passenger can relay the signal. As soon as you see a signal given, you should give the same signal so those behind you can see it. Hand signals should always be used by the groups you ride with.

START YOUR ENGINES

When you have cranked your V-Twin and are ready to go, place a hand on top of your windshield or, if you don't have a windshield, raise your hand. This alerts the leader that everyone is ready to head 'em up and move 'em out.

STAGGERED RIDING.

Each lane of the highway is divided into Thirds, the left, middle and right. When the phrase "1/3 of a lane" is used, it is referring to riding in the right or left track of the lane. The lead motorcycle should be in the left 1/3 lane, the 2nd motorcycle should be in the right 1/3 of the lane, and so on in a staggered formation.

Each motorcycle should leave enough room for the motorcycle in front to make a maneuver (right or left) without having to worry about hitting the rear of the motorcycle. Typically, at highway speeds, you should maintain a minimum 2-second interval from the bike directly in front of you and a minimum 1-second interval from the bike to your left or right.

Always stay in line with the bike in front of you and do not switch between the left and right side of the lane. The lines will fill in at the next stop sign or traffic light.

SLOW DOWN

To signal a slow down or a stop, use your left arm at a downward 45 degree angle or straight down with your palm facing back. You should wave your arm slightly to differentiate between slowing down and stopping. If there is cause for a sudden, unexpected stop, wave your arm with more vigor to alert those behind you of the unexpected situation.

HAZARDS IN THE ROAD

Point with your left hand or either foot at an object on the road, whether it be road kill, a pot hole or other hazard. There is no need to point out objects that are not in the direct path of the group or pose no hazard to the lanes of traffic.

PASSING OTHER VEHICLES – TWO LANE ROADS

Get into a 'pre-pass' position and be far enough behind the vehicle you are about to overtake so you are able to see clearly down the road for an 'oncoming traffic check.'

Use your blinker AND hand signals. If you have a passenger, advise the passenger to perform the hand signal.

Do a mirror check, then a head check of your blind spot, to make sure you are clear and able to change lanes.

When passing, accelerate and change lanes. Remember, you cannot legally exceed the speed limit but passing 'aggressively', especially semi's, is recommended.

When returning to your lane, signal your intent, make another head and mirror check to be sure you are clear, then return to your lane. Don't forget to turn off your turn signal.

No more than two motorcycles should pass at a time on a two-lane road, maintaining a staggered position.

PASSING OTHER VEHICLES – FOUR LANE ROADS / INTERSTATES

No more than three motorcycles should pass at the same time. This allows for an 'out' if necessary. The entire group may be in the passing lane.

In large groups, when changing lanes, the group - maintaining staggered formation - should follow the lead bike as if it were the head of a snake and the group is the snake's body. Make an organized lane change – when safe to do so. This keeps the formation solid and tight as well. Although not recommended, the sweep – or Road Captain in last position – can move over to 'secure' the lane to allow the group to move over.

Sometimes it is advisable to leave a three or four car-length gap in the group for a couple reasons. (1) It allows vehicles to pass the group in segments rather than all at once. (2) It allows vehicles to enter and exit the freeway without trying to force its way into or through the group. Remember. Don't play chicken! The cage always wins!

A group of 8 or 10 motorcycles, when riding in staggered formation, takes up the same amount of highway as a semi. Be considerate when we share the road.

TURN SIGNALS

Most of us have turn signals on our motorcycles. *USE THEM!!* Hand signals should be used in conjunction with turn signals and gives everyone in the group, as well as vehicle traffic, a clear view of your intentions. You and your passenger should work as a team when giving hand signals. Let your passenger know when you are turning so they can give the appropriate signal. This is for the safety of you both!

OTHER TIPS FOR TOURING AND GROUP RIDING

1. If you need gas, point to your tank.
2. If you are hungry or need a break, point to your mouth or use the universally recognized 'can to the mouth' signal.
3. When in a tight curve, the rider on the outside of the curve should give room to the rider on the inside, in case the curve is too tight to negotiate at that speed and the rider cannot hold their line.
4. Use the 'buddy system' of riding. If the buddy you are riding with has trouble and must pull out of the group, pull off the road with them and offer what assistance you can. It is a good idea to have your cell phone pre-programmed with emergency numbers and even the numbers of Road Captains or other chapter members to advise them of any long term difficulties, if a tow is required, etc.
5. Keep a safe distance behind the bike in front of you. Know your stopping power. The minimum recommended distance is two seconds (one Harley Davidson, two Harley Davidson) behind the bike directly in front of you.
6. Try to maintain a constant speed and do not 'rubber band'. Keep the group tight without crowding each other. Stay close through intersections and traffic lights to keep the possibility of group separation at a minimum. When separated, if possible, the lead group should slow down or pull over when it is safe to do so and let the stragglers catch up. Otherwise, space people that are familiar with the ride and route throughout the group so somebody who knows where you are going and how to get there can take over and lead.
7. Periodically check your mirrors and be aware of openings as you ride so that you will have some place to maneuver or escape in case of an emergency. Also, be aware of the riders around you (especially the one to your side) and give each other as much room to maneuver as possible in any situation. Eye contact with other riders is a good thing.
8. As motorcyclists, we always have one eye on the weather because nobody really enjoys riding in the rain. Unlike riding inside a cage, you are not safe from lightning while riding your bike. In the event of a thunderstorm, find appropriate shelter and wait until it is safe to continue.