

GROUP RIDING

With the MSTR Michigan Sport Touring Riders

For many riders, “The Pace” embodies many of the principles that we try to adhere to, but the “group riding” technique described falls far short of being practical.

The Pace – The Pace 2.0

If you have never heard of or read “The Pace” article – do so. It is an excellent resource which goes into great detail of the riding techniques and styles that are appropriate for street riding – whether riding alone or in a group. The subject matter regarding appropriate street riding techniques could be a seminar unto itself.

“The Pace 2.0” is another great article that goes into even further detail regarding the proper riding techniques and bike control for safely riding on the street.

Neither of these articles reflects a group riding technique or method that is practical for the typical riding groups that we experience at our rides/events. The technique they describe requires a group that is almost perfectly matched with regard to skill set, ability and familiarity with each others riding style.

Group Riding – PROS and CONS

Two of the big upsides to group riding

1. Camaraderie – Friends to socialize with during gas stops and lunch
2. Safety in numbers – Should anything go wrong – there are friends nearby to help out

The downsides

1. Your actions and decisions can be influenced by the preceding rider
(Some people see this as an upside – it’s not really)
2. Self induced pressure to “keep up” with the rider in front of you
3. Ego / competitive urges are more difficult to control
4. Lower level of awareness / attention to conditions / whereabouts
5. Separation anxiety
6. When something does go wrong – it affects everyone in the group

The Objective

Create a procedure and a set of rules for group riding that will maintain the upsides of the activity and eliminate as many of the downsides as possible.

Three very important phrases / rules to keep uppermost in your mind at all times:

Ride YOUR own ride – Ride YOUR own pace
Stay in YOUR own comfort zone at all times

The RIDE

Preparation

Preparation for a ride begins one or more days before the actual date of departure. Every participant is responsible for making sure that their bike is in the proper condition to complete the planned ride, be it 100 miles long or 1200 miles long. Check over all systems and make any repairs necessary, prior to packing up and leaving home. Pay extra attention to the amount of tread on your tires. If you have any doubt that there is not enough tread to complete the trip – put new tires on the bike before packing up.

Make sure you have all of your riding gear packed – helmet, boots, gloves, and riding jacket at the minimum. Our organization believes strongly in wearing the proper riding gear. If there is a possibility of inclement weather – pack accordingly. Rain gear and heated gear can be invaluable to your comfort and ability to complete the trip when the weather goes bad.

Documentation for the Michigan Squadron organized trips is typically distributed to all of the expected attendees at least a week prior to the date of departure by one of the ride organizers. Typically this material will be emailed to you and will consist of a GPS file of the intended routes, an overview map of each route and hard copy directions for each route. On most rides there is also a Riders Information sheet with details regarding the routes, possible lunch stops etc. This information is usually NOT available on site. Make absolutely certain you have this information with you when you leave home. You should also have road maps for the areas you will be riding in. Without this information you are a **LIABILITY** to whatever group you happen to ride with.

Riders Meeting

1. On multi-day rides (MoArk, MR2 etc.), there will be a rider's meeting held the evening before the first day of riding, following the dinner hour. This meeting is mandatory for every rider in attendance. Riding with a group is voluntary. If you are planning on riding solo – you still must attend this meeting.
2. *On single day rides this meeting typically takes place the morning of the ride before it begins.*
3. All riders must sign a Waiver / Release of Liability form and provide emergency contact information at the start of the meeting.
4. Identify riders who volunteer to be POINT rider for a riding group. There needs to be one POINT rider for every 4 to 6 riders in attendance. Group size should never exceed six riders – less than 6 is preferable. The ideal group size is four riders.
5. The riders choose or are assigned to groups with the objective of achieving groups that are composed of riders that have similar riding styles or pace. The POINT riders will assist in this by indicating what they believe their own style or pace will be.

NOTE – Due to the mix of riders present, riders who are new to our club and other variables – Most groups are not perfect matches.

6. On multi-day rides there will be an additional Riders Meeting every evening following dinner in order to address group mismatches and make changes to the groups if possible.
7. Once formed, each group will meet to decide which route they will be riding in the morning and what their departure time and location will be. They may also discuss the riding order of the group at this time. Each group will get together every evening of the ride for this purpose.

Group Rider Requisites

1. Arrive at your group departure point **10 - 15 minutes prior to departure time**, with a **full tank of gas**.
2. If you are a GPS user – have the correct route loaded into your GPS unit. Also have the route directions in a location on your bike where you can easily refer to them. (A tank bag with a clear map pocket is ideal for this.)
3. Have an understanding of the route that you will be riding. It will help if you review and keep state maps of your riding area on your bike.
4. Leave your ego and any desire to impress anyone with your “riding skills” in your hotel room.
5. Be prepared to have a great day riding the twisties!

Group Ride Concepts

1. Every rider in the group must be committed to the following three objectives:

Ride his/her own ride, ride his/her own pace, stay in his/her own comfort zone at all times.

2. Every rider in the group (except for the rear most rider) is responsible for establishing visual contact occasionally with the following rider, between stops.
3. Every rider needs to know the route they will be riding and be capable of navigating the route should that become necessary.
4. The POINT rider is no different than anyone else in the group. They are there to have a good time and enjoy themselves like everyone else. The POINT rider is NOT a tour guide, but they do have a couple of additional responsibilities:
 - a. Stopping for fuel and rest approximately every 100 miles, being certain that rider #2 is aware of where he has stopped.
 - b. Stopping at appropriate places along the route in order to provide the opportunity for the entire group to reform and stay on route.
5. When a stop is initiated by the POINT rider, every subsequent rider in the group is responsible for being visible to the next rider in line, until he is certain that the next rider sees them.
6. If a rider decides that he wants to leave the group, he needs to do so at a stop point when all of the riders are together. Only then can he advise them that he is continuing on his own, or joining up with another group. His former group and new group (should there be one) can then make adjustments to the riding order to be sure that everyone knows who is riding behind them.

Group Riding Rules / Suggestions

Formation

In urban areas, the group rides in a staggered formation. POINT rider in the left side of the lane, #2 rider in the right, #3 left etc. A safe following distance between riders at urban speeds is typically 1 second between riders in opposite sides of the lane – 2 seconds between riders in the same side of the lane. Stops are made two abreast as a rule.

In rural areas, in the twisties, the group rides single file. Following distance should be a **minimum** of **3 seconds** between riders. – *See the Following Distance Chart at the end of this article.*

A TIP – If you find yourself having to react immediately to every move of the preceding rider – you are too close. Back off and ride your own ride – NOT his or hers. Riding further back will allow you the time to make your own decisions based on how you perceive the conditions.

Conversely, if you feel that the rider behind you is following too closely and pressuring you, pull to the right and wave them by or make an adjustment at the next gas break.

Passing

Passing another member of your group is discouraged and passing another member in your group without his approval or awareness is extremely dangerous and should never be done, however if the preceding rider signals the rider behind him to pass by moving to the right and waving him by, do so when you have deemed it to be safe to pass.

There is always a possibility that the pace of the riders in a group is not matched as well as hoped and that the riding order should be adjusted (a faster paced rider is following a slower paced rider). Rather than trying to rectify this while moving down the road, make any adjustments to the riding order during one of the fuel stops or breaks. All riders need to recognize that this can occur.

If another rider indicates that he would like to move up a spot in the riding order, do not perceive the request as a challenge. Remember – you left your ego back at the hotel room! Conversely, a rider may elect to move back in the group. Changes in the riding order need to be communicated with all riders in the group when they occur.

Passing other traffic that is moving at a slower pace than you are is quite common. Make your passes fast, safe and efficient. Make sure you accelerate far enough ahead of the passed vehicle to allow room for another rider to pass and get in behind you if possible. Do NOT assume that you can make a pass simply because the rider in front of you did so (an automatic pass). Take the time to observe the conditions and make your own decision regarding a pass.

Other riders in the group are encouraged to call out anyone in the group who makes unsafe or automatic passes. When you make an unsafe pass it not only endangers you – it endangers the entire group. No one wants to deal with another rider becoming a hood ornament.

Although illegal, solid line (double yellow) passes are not out of the ordinary when riding in rural areas. In many cases, due to the small size and rapid acceleration rate of a motorcycle, you can make a safe pass in an area marked as a “no passing” zone for cars. As with any other pass – the rider needs to determine that there is enough time and room to make the pass without any undue drama for them, the vehicle being passed or oncoming traffic.

A TIP – Use extra care when doing this. Car drivers are known to call the authorities on their cell phones to report this activity. Also, avoid these passes if there is a law enforcement presence nearby.

Keeping the Group On-Route

Every riding group whether well matched or not, is going to get spread out at times during the ride. Other traffic and the pace of the different riders are the main causes of this happening. It's a normal thing and should not be regarded as a problem. In fact, it is a positive thing.

1. A single bike making a pass on another vehicle is far less conspicuous than four or five bikes making the same pass one right after the other.
2. In the case of misbehavior, it's a whole lot better for law enforcement to catch one bike rather than a whole group of bikes at once.
3. If there is no pressure from a rider close behind AND you resist the urge to “keep up” with the rider in front, you will find it easier to ride your own pace and stay in your own comfort zone.

Every rider in the group (except the rear most rider) plays a part in keeping the entire group on route. Every rider must make an effort to establish visual contact with the rider behind them, occasionally.

Straight sections of the road are good places to slow down and allow the rider behind you to come into view. Once you have seen them, continue on, at your own pace.

*NOTE: Straight sections of road are **NOT** a place to speed up to try catching the rider in front of you. Most “**performance awards**” are earned on straight sections of road. It doesn't take any skill to twist the throttle wide open on a straight road – anyone can do it, and most bikes are capable of triple digit speeds. Excessive speed on the straight sections is just plain stupid! Keep it below 70 and slower if necessary to allow the rider behind you to come into view.*

The POINT rider is responsible for making stops along the route that will allow the entire group to reform. The “General Rule” for stops is as follows:

“The POINT rider will stop and allow the group to reform whenever the highway/road number on the route changes”

For example – The route has been following Hwy. #16 and there is a turn onto Hwy. #5. The POINT rider stops somewhere close to this turn (where he can be seen by the #2 rider) and waits for the entire group to arrive before proceeding on the route.

This sounds simple and it works out most of the time, but if another rider does not understand the route or know what Hwy. # they are supposed to be on, a mistake can occur.

For example – The route has been following Hwy. #16 and makes a left merging with Hwy. #5 (but it is also still Hwy. #16). A few miles further on the route continues to follow Hwy. #16 as it diverges from #5 and goes to the right. Technically, the Hwy. # for the route did not change and no stop was called for, however this type of sequence can lead to confusion. Particularly if a rider is not paying attention to where they are or what Hwy. # is specified for the route. If another rider is not waiting at an intersection or turn – you continue on the Hwy. # that you have been traveling on.

The POINT rider needs to recognize when this could be a problem and make stops to reform the group whenever he feels that it is necessary to avoid confusion. The other riders in the group need to be aware of what Hwy. # they are traveling on at all times and pay attention to the route directions.

In addition, if the group is spread out, the POINT rider should always stop prior to or very soon after entering an urban area, where it could be difficult to navigate without the riders in visual contact with each other.

The Role of GPS

The number of riders who have equipped their bike with a GPS unit has grown exponentially in the last few years. It has become standard practice to distribute a GPS data file for all of the proposed routes that are going to be offered on a multi-day ride. A GPS unit is invaluable when trying to find the next turn on a route if it is anything less than a well marked highway. Unfortunately, for various technical reasons, no matter how much care and checking is done when the route is being authored, the results when loaded into various different GPS models are often not the same. This can happen even with identical models if certain option switches are different from one to the other, or they do not have the same version map installed. The bottom line is that your GPS unit is NOT infallible and you cannot put your full trust in it to be correct.

That is the reason you also have “hard copy” directions of each route to refer to. The most reliable way to navigate a route is to use both your GPS and the hard copy route directions together. Nine times out of ten, if the two disagree – the hard copy directions are the way to go. If you have any doubt, stop and figure it out before proceeding. Do not blindly follow your GPS.

When Things Go Wrong

Usually, the first sign that something has gone wrong on a group ride is the failure of one or more riders in the group to arrive at a stop/regrouping point within a few minutes time. There are many reasons for this to happen. The most common, in order of incidence are:

1. A rider has been delayed by traffic that has been difficult to pass.
2. A rider has pulled over for a “bladder break”. *This is becoming more common as our members are getting older.* ☺
3. A rider has missed a turn or made a wrong turn and gone off the route.
4. A rider’s bike has had a mechanical break down.
5. A rider has been detained by local law enforcement.
6. A rider has made an error which resulted in an off-road excursion. (A crash in layman’s terms)

In each of these cases, a certain reaction or chain of reactions by the rider(s) that are at the stop point should occur.

The first reaction is to wait, about 5 minutes. In that time problems 1 and 2 may resolve themselves or another rider with knowledge of what has occurred will arrive at the stop point with more information about whatever the situation is that is holding things up.

If an arriving rider indicates that the problem is #1 or #2 and that accounts for everyone who is missing – then you wait some more.

If an arriving rider indicates that the problem is #4 or #6. The entire group rides back to the point of the problem and renders assistance.

If an arriving rider indicates that the problem is #5, the group waits* - provided the law officer has no interest in the other members of the group and did not witness any wrongful behavior on the part of the other riders in the group. If this is not the case – then the remaining riders in the group may elect to continue on the route without the rider who has been detained. *Let's hope that the detained rider prepared for the ride properly, has directions, knows where he is and can continue along the route solo.*

If you have waited 5 minutes or more and no further information has become available, the riders at the stop point are going to have to back track to try and locate the missing rider(s). It is very helpful at this point to know when the missing rider(s) was last seen. Wherever that point is determines how far you need to go in search of the missing rider(s). Establishing visual contact with the rider behind you occasionally between stops can greatly reduce this distance. Ride back slowly, carefully checking the roadsides for evidence of an off-road excursion. If you do not locate the rider(s) when you reach the point where they were last seen, most likely you are dealing with #3 or in a worst case #6 and you missed him with your initial search.

Stop at this point for a few minutes and check your cell phones to see if the missing rider(s) has tried to contact anyone. If not, then proceed back along the route – checking the roadsides with extra care – especially in areas where there are turns and drop-offs.

If you reach the original stop point and still have not located the missing rider(s) – stop and check your cell phones for messages, again. With no further information, the decision is whether to keep searching back and forth along the route or continuing on without the missing rider(s). If you are confident that you could not have missed a rider who went off the road and that you are dealing with #3 – then you move on.

If you are the “missing” rider in case #3, your chance of being found or rejoining your group is going to depend on how quickly you realize your mistake and get back to the designated route. There is a window of time when your riding group will be looking for you – on the route! If you don't realize your mistake and you don't know where you are or what the route is, you will most likely end up finishing your day alone. In this case, if you have a GPS you can simply call up the waypoint for the hotel and tell the unit to guide you there, or you can get out your map and decide what your best course of action is. By all means try to call and leave a message with someone from your group or the designated hotel for that night indicating that you are okay and will be there in due time.

More on Law Enforcement

For most motorcyclists, law enforcement along with performance awards and so called road taxes are a matter of course, but there are a things you can do to minimize your exposure (other than simply obeying the law at all times ☺).

You are at greatest risk on straight sections of roads, main highways, in towns as well as entering and leaving towns. You need to remember to be on your best behavior in these areas.

If your group is riding in a tight formation, the chance of everyone being pulled over at once is a lot greater than if you are spaced out a little.

A group of out of state motorcycles can be a great revenue generator for the locals.

In most cases, the riders in the group who have not been detained will continue along the route until they find a spot where they can wait for the other riders. Do NOT stop by the side of the road. Continue to a gas station or convenience store, pull off the road and leave one bike visible to traffic from the direction you came, scatter the rest throughout the parking lot. Keep an eye out for the scofflaw and wave him down when you see him (as long as the law isn't glued to his tail.)

In rare cases, the group may break up and everyone goes their own way to the end point of the route.

Conclusion

If you want to be a responsible, safe group rider then you need to do the following:

1. Prepare properly for the ride.
2. Ride YOUR own ride
3. Ride YOUR own pace
4. Always stay in YOUR comfort zone

You need to be in control of your emotions and your motorcycle at all times.

If you want to improve your riding ability, measure yourself against other riders, and see how fast you can ride ----- **Don't do it on the street.**

Go to track a day and get some instruction – or better yet go to a rider training class at a track!

FOLLOWING DISTANCE ON MOTORCYCLES				
		Feet		
Average Length of a Sportbike		6		
Length of a Football Field		300		
Recommended Following Distance		Seconds		
		3		
Speed	MPHour	Ft / Minute	Ft / Second	Following Distance
				Feet
	50	4400	73.33	220
				Bike Lengths
				37
	60	5280	88.00	Feet
				264
				Bike Lengths
				44
	70	6160	102.67	Feet
				308
				Bike Lengths
				52
	80	7040	117.33	Feet
				352
				Bike Lengths
				59