



Group Riding Safety

Riding with a group is a very enjoyable way to spend a day or more on a motorcycle. Our Chapter rides offer many different lengths of group rides (half day, full day, overnight) where everyone makes or renews acquaintances with a great group of people (figures 1 - 3). Be sure to check out the Photo Gallery on our website. powderkeghog.net.



Figure 1

Augusta Ferry
2016 (1)



Figure 2

Race for the Cure
2017 (1)



Figure 3

Tale of the Dragon in the
Rain! 2019 (1)

Group riding also has its own set of challenges for each rider which ensure everyone enjoys a fun, safe ride. One of the most obvious challenges of group riding is the proximity of other riders when riding in a staggered formation.



Figure 4

Riding staggered (two up)
Windy 9 Ride 2017 (1)

Because safety is foremost for the Powder Keg HOG Chapter, we have established certain guidelines for group riding which align with those established by: the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF), Motorcycle Ohio, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Our first consideration is to limit the number of motorcycles within a group to approximately ten. This allows the group to be large enough to be more visible to cars and trucks while also being small enough to maintain group structure when encountering stop signs or traffic lights. Some other advantages of a smaller group include:

- Smaller groups can overtake slower traffic more easily and without being split up
- Motorists can overtake a smaller group without splitting up the group
- The larger a group is, the more exaggerated the “rubber band” effect becomes. A smaller group limits this effect

Each group will include a minimum of two Road Captains to handle the responsibilities of “lead” and “sweep” riders.

As a solo rider, or when riding single file, our basic training and experience have taught us that within a lane of traffic, cars and trucks have left two tire tracks. This gives a two-wheeled motorcycle rider the choice of three possible tracks to ride in: left, center, or right (see figure 5). When riding solo, a two-wheeled rider has the option of choosing any of these three tracks.

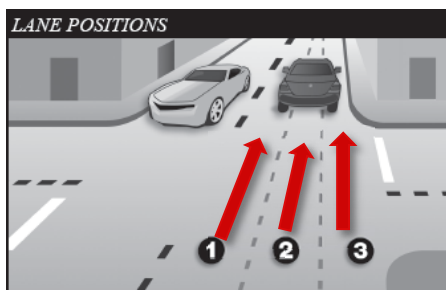


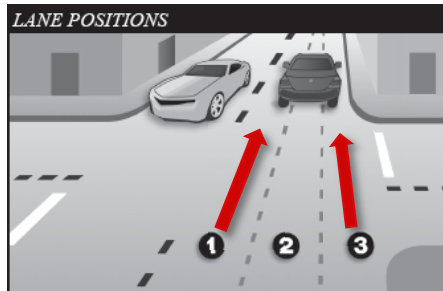
Figure 5

Three possible riding tracks when riding solo (2)

Staggered formation group riding limits these options to either the left or right track depending upon your position within the group (see figure 6 numbers 1 & 3).

Figure 6

Only two possible riding tracks when riding staggered (2)



For safety, two riding formations are employed by our Chapter during group rides: “one-up” or single file and “two-up” or staggered. Choice of formation is made by the lead Road Captain based upon upcoming road elements.

Single file or “one-up” will be signaled by the lead road captain raising his/her left hand above their helmet, with only the index finger extended (see figure 7). Single file may be chosen by the lead Road Captain when:

- Curves in the road dictate (twisties)
- Road conditions are poor enough that each rider would benefit by choosing their own line
- The width of the riding lane becomes too narrow



Figure 7

Hand signal using left hand indicating “one-up” or single file formation (3)

Single file allows each rider to ride in any of the tracks of a lane of traffic. It also allows you the freedom to change tracks as needed to avoid road hazards or more safely enter a series of turns.

A staggered or “two-up” formation is our default riding formation. Staggered formation will be signaled by the lead Road Captain raising his/her left hand above their helmet, with the pinky and index fingers extended (see figure 8). We

have chosen not to use the pointer and middle fingers, a normal symbol for two, because this configuration better separates the fingers lessening the possibility that the signal is misconstrued as “one up”. A “two-up” formation may be signaled when:

- The road transitions from one lane to two lanes
- To signal the end of the twisty portion of the road

Figure 8

Hand signal using left hand indicating “two-up” or staggered formation (3)



We ride staggered rather than side by side for safety reasons. A staggered formation allows each rider a margin of drift without immediately contacting a fellow rider. Staggering also allows for a better field of vision for all riders in the group. This formation also allows the group to remain “two-up” through wider turns without creating a significant hazard.



Figure 9

Side by side into a tight turn or without formation becomes unsafe (4)

Regardless of your position within a group, these (and all) hand signals are to be passed back by each rider as soon as it is safe to do so.

Although Trikes ride continuously in a single file formation due to their track width, their riders should always send hand signals back so that following riders,

whether three or two-wheeled, are aware of the possible road conditions approaching.

A “two-up” formation begins with the lead bike in the left tire track. The second bike will occupy the right tire track. The third bike in the left, fourth in the right, and so on. Safety is maintained by each rider maintaining their lane position and spacing. Our Chapter follows the spacing recommendations of the NHTSA, Motorcycle Ohio, and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. Riders in a group should maintain a two second gap from the bike immediately in front of them and a one second gap from the bike in the other track (see figure 10).

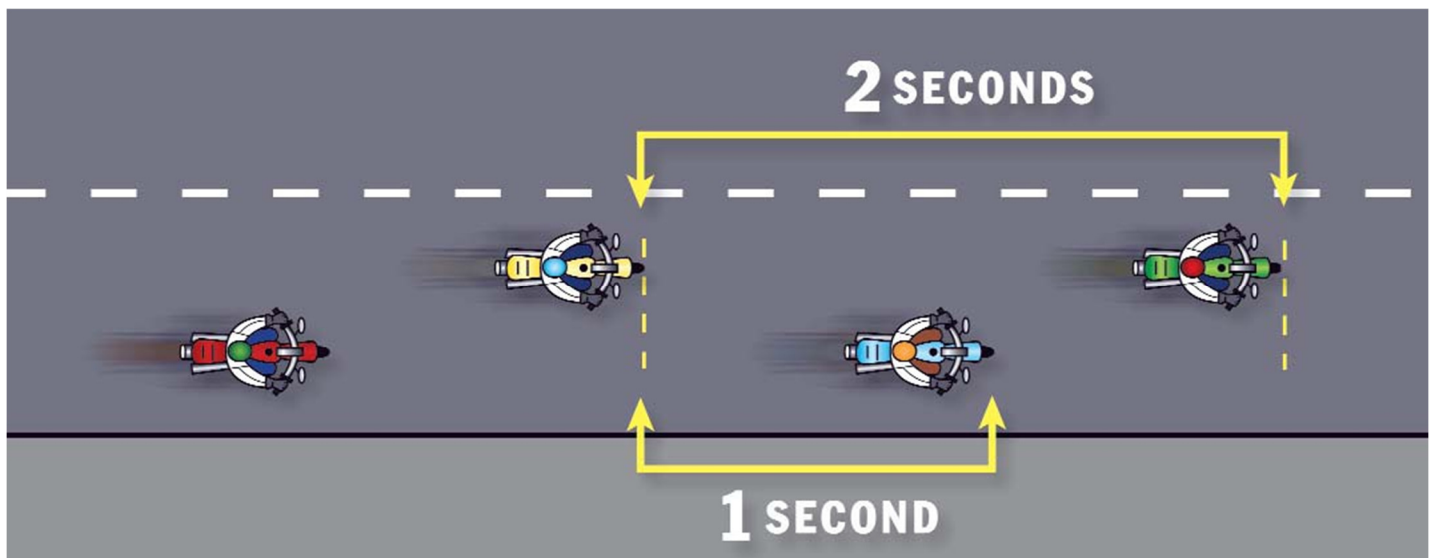


Figure 10 – Group spacing (8)

Timing the gap in this way allows for safe distances which will change according to the speed of the group. Maintaining this gap keeps the group together and eliminates the “rubber band” effect caused by varying speed. The rubber band effect occurs when speeds forward in the group vary, causing the rear of the group to race and/or brake to maintain their positions. This can become a safety issue as riders may feel forced to exceed their comfort zone to stay with the group. With all riders maintaining both lane position and spacing, a safe and enjoyable ride occurs for the entire group.

Note that regardless of riding formation at the time (one-up or two-up), when coming to a stop sign or red light, all two-wheeled riders are to position

themselves side by side and snug to the motorcycle in front of them (see Figure 11) with trikes pulling up tight as well. This will help facilitate the possibility of everyone making it through the intersection when departing. When the lead Road Captain pulls out from his/her front left position, each bike will proceed in a staggered departure of right, left, right, left, maintaining their respective lane positions, until the group has exited the intersection or until it becomes unsafe or illegal (light changes) to do so.

Figure 11

Side by side at stop sign (9)



When riding on the highway, our Chapter will try to ride one lane to the left of the slow lane of traffic when possible (see figure 12). We do this to avoid the lack of merging ability of most drivers entering the highway and to keep the group together and most visible.



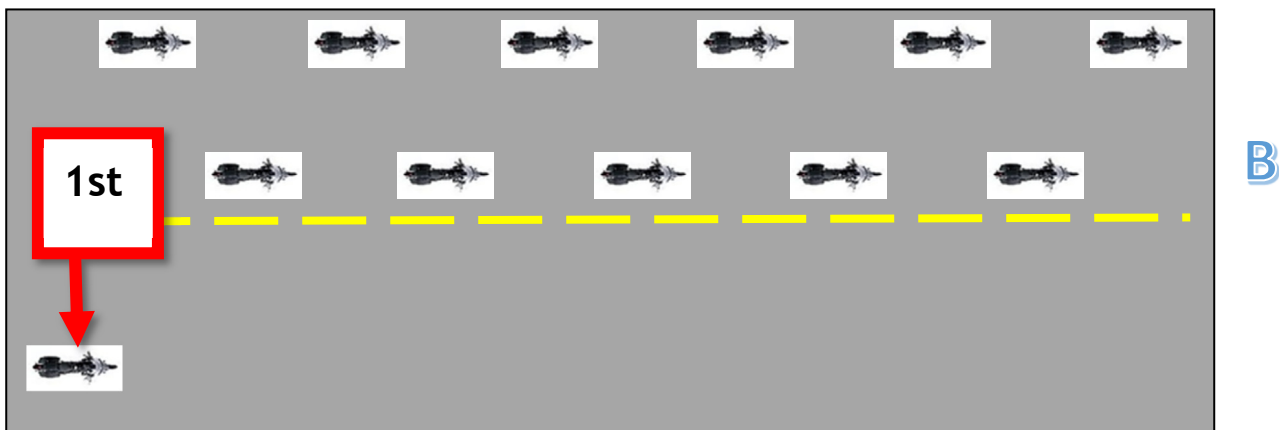
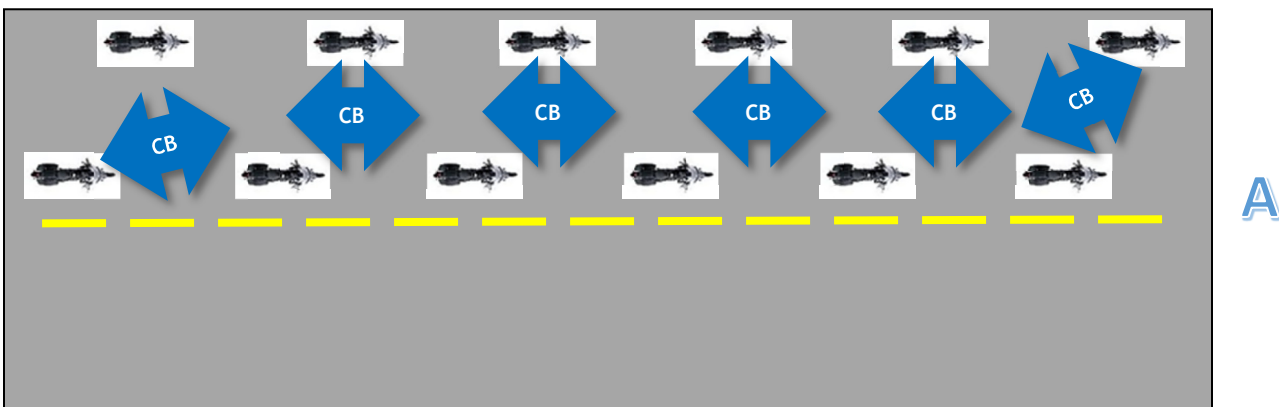
Figure 12

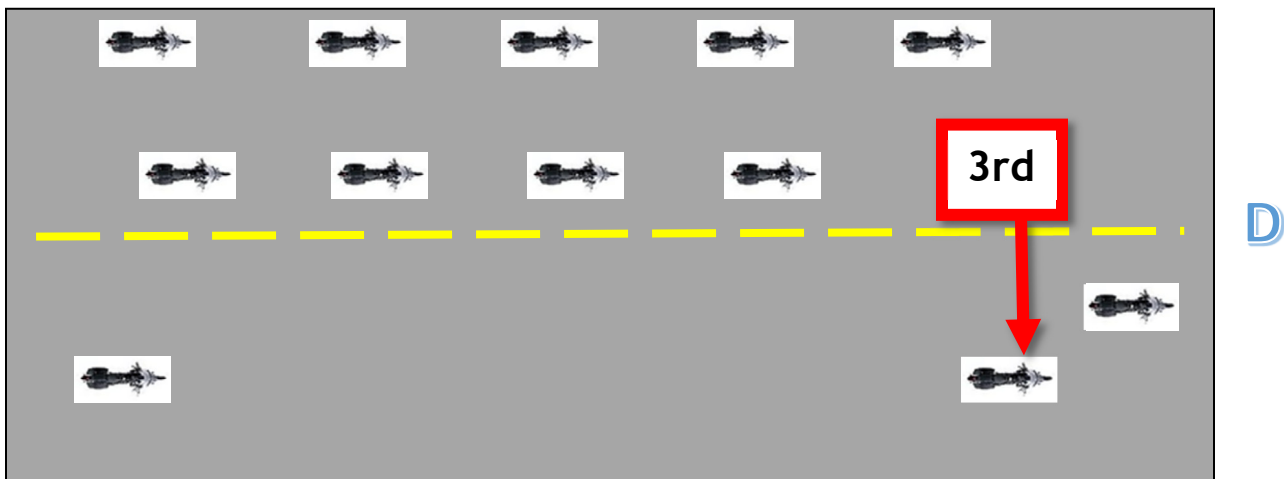
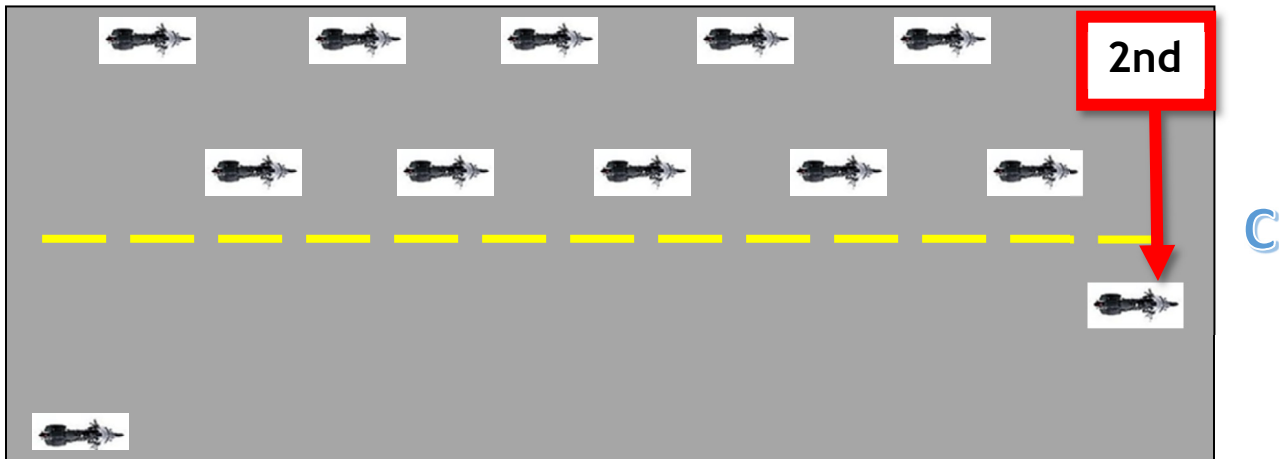
Group riding on highway (10)

Our visibility is our safety and it is created by the size of a properly spaced group of motorcycles. A group of ten motorcycles is larger than a semi-truck, creating the greatest safety for every rider in the group. Additionally, when proper spacing is maintained by every rider, the chance of a car or truck entering into the group is lessened.

Changing lanes on the highway with a group of bikes can be challenging. Lane changes on the highway only occur after radio communication between the lead and sweep Road Captains **A**. Lead will request the sweep Captain to “secure” a lane either to the left or to the right. When it is safe, the sweep will signal his/her turn and change to the requested lane, but stay behind the group **B**. The group is to remain in formation in their current lane at this time. The sweep will communicate to the lead when it is visibly safe for the group to make a lane change. Lead will then signal, look back, and make the lane change **C** followed by the next rider back **D**, then the next, and so forth until the group is into the requested lane.

For safety, each rider waits until the bike diagonally in front of them has made the change, then signals, looks back, and makes their change. By following this simple progression, group and individual safety is maintained as each rider is responsible to look for traffic before they change lanes while knowing that none of their fellow riders behind them, or any cages have filled the spot prematurely.





During our rides, safety communication is passed back from the Lead Road Captain to each rider in succession via specific hand signals as not all riders use CB. When we all use the same hand signals, communication will be clearly passed through the group. Altering signals can confuse and even stop communication. As with many of our group riding guidelines, hand signals will follow those suggested by NHTSA, MSF, and Motorcycle Ohio with the one exception being the fingers used to indicate a “two-up” formation as discussed earlier. Please refer to the following pages for examples of often used hand signals. If you are not sure of the signal, do not try to guess. The signal will be sent again as the sweep will not have received the initial attempt.

Group Riding Hand Signals (11)



Left Turn

Left arm extended straight out with palm facing down



Right Turn

Left elbow bent 90° with clenched fist pointing straight up



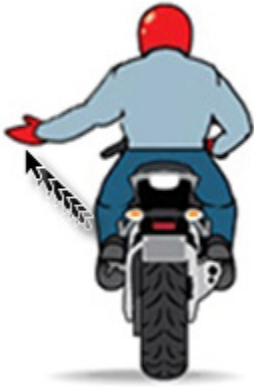
Road Hazards

If hazard is on the left, point with left arm (or foot). If hazard is on the right, point with right foot.



Slow Down

Extend left arm with hand facing down then swing palm down toward your side. Repeat motion.



Speed Up

Begin with left arm at your side, palm facing up. Swing palm upwards and repeat motion.



One-up (single file)

With left arm raised (preferably over helmet to avoid confusing with right turn signal) extend left index finger.



Two-up (staggered formation)

With left arm raised (preferably over helmet to avoid confusing with right turn signal) extend left index finger and pinky.



Hazard ahead

Tap on helmet then point to side of road that upcoming hazard is located. Use to warn of pedestrians, bicycles, carriages, etc.



Pull Over

Extend left arm then swing over helmet with index finger extended.

Image References

- 1 – Powder Keg Chapter photo archives
- 2 – Motorcycle Operator Manual – Motorcycle Ohio
- 3 – Google images
- 4 – Right Driver article www.mockthetest.com
- 7 – Google images
- 8 – MSF's Guide to Group Riding
- 9 – Newsweek article Jan 23, 2018 "The Plight of the Forbidden Ones, The Notorious Brooklyn Motorcycle Club"
- 10 – Time Out Dubai article Oct 21, 2014 "Motorcycle clubs in Dubai"
- 11 – www.motorcyclelegalfoundation.com

Ride Safe!

"Grumpy"

Safety Officer HOG 4035

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