

Gold Wing Road Riders Association

GROUP RIDING GUIDELINES



TEXAS DISTRICT

CHAPTER "G"

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INTRODUCTION

As everyone is aware, the GWRRA motto is “Friends for Fun, Safety, and Knowledge.” This booklet was developed to help promote all three aspects of the GWRRA motto. The biggest problem motorcyclist face on the roadway is the lack of visibility. That is, being seen by other motorist. For as large as a Gold Wing is, other motorists anticipate seeing two headlights and the image of a car or truck. By riding in a group, we present a more eye-catching appearance to other motorist. They see several headlights and several objects (motorcycles) moving back and forth. This attracts a motorist eye. Therefore, riding in groups improves our safety on the road.

To enhance the safety of the members riding in the group, we have established group riding guidelines. It is very important that we know and follow the same guideline when riding in a group so that we do not become a hazard to ourselves.

Group riding is fun. It should be a pleasant experience. Please take a few moments to read these guidelines and remember it is everyone’s responsibility to abide by these guidelines and enhance the safety of the entire group. Good Riding...

PRE-RIDE ACTIVITIES

Meeting Location

When choosing a meeting location, attempt to meet somewhere where there will be enough room for the bikes to assemble and park where they will not interfere with traffic or block the access or exit to the location. Try to find an area where the surface area will not be a hazard to the riders trying to maneuver their bikes at slow speed to line up for the ride. If possible, attempt to choose a meeting location on the same side of the street or highway that the group will head out on. This will prevent the group from having to cross over lanes of traffic. You can begin on a bad note by having vehicles get between the riders right out of the starting gate.

Group Size

From our past experience, we have determined that a group should consist of **no more than seven bikes**. With the addition of the eighth bike to a group, the group should be divided into two groups (one of 5 bikes, the other of 3 bikes¹).

Understand that it is very difficult trying to maneuver a large group of bikes through city traffic and traffic lights. Problems are also encountered when attempting to pass vehicles on an Interstate with a large number of bikes. We also make it difficult for other vehicles attempting to enter or exit an Interstate with a long string of bikes. Groups will be held to a maximum of seven bikes for our own safety. It doesn’t matter if you are in the first or second group, everyone will get to the destination within minutes of each other.

Lead Bike

The person taking the “Lead Bike” position should be the Ride Coordinator or one of the designated Road Captains. This individual is responsible for moving the group from one location to another in the safest possible manner. Therefore, it is very important that all riders in the group be familiar with these guidelines and follows the instructions of the Lead Bike. The Lead Bike is responsible for conducting a pre-ride briefing to insure everyone in their group is familiar with group riding guidelines, the planned route, positioning of bikes in the group if there are inexperienced riders or bikes without CB’s, and the appointment of the “Drag Bike.” While riding, the Lead Bike will call for lane changes, passing maneuvers, oncoming 18-wheelers, road and traffic hazards.

NOTE: *It is advisable for the “Lead Bike” to acknowledge all communications from the “Drag Bike”. It lets the “Drag Bike” know that you heard and understood the communication.*

¹ It is best to have an odd number of bikes in a group so that the Lead and Drag bikes are both in the left tract

Drag Bike

The “Drag Bike” is the last bike in a group. The “Drag Bike” has several important responsibilities. The most important one is to observe the riding technique of the members in the group and immediately advise that person if their actions present a danger to the members of the group. The “Drag Bike” will announce when a lane is clear for the group to make a lane change. The “Drag Bike” will notify the “Lead Bike” when the group has cleared a stop sign, traffic light, or has pulled out onto a highway. The “Drag Bike” should keep the “Lead Bike” informed if the group gets separated or if a vehicle gets between members of the group. The “Drag Bike” will also inform the group of 18-wheelers and cars traveling at high rates of speed approaching the group from the rear. If the group is riding in the right lane of an interstate and a car entering on a on-ramp will intersect with the group, the “Drag Bike” should advise the group to either allow the car to merge into the group or to insure the left lane is clear and call for a lane change. In the event someone in the group has an emergency and must pull out of the group, the “Drag Bike” will pull off with the troubled bike. The remainder of the group will continue on until they find a location where the group can safely pull off the road and park.

NOTE: *It is advisable for the “Drag Bike” to acknowledge all communications from the “Lead Bike”. It lets the “Lead Bike” know that you heard and understood the communication.*

Group Members

Even group members have responsibilities in group riding. **Group members are responsible for insuring they ride within their own ability.** If, at any time, a group member does not feel comfortable or capable of riding with the group, they should signal their intention and safely leave the formation. No one is required to ride in the group and if you feel uncomfortable, it would be better for you and the group to ride separately. You may choose to ride ahead of the group, behind the group, or travel at your own speed and meet the group at the destination.

Group members are responsible for verifying the lane next to them is clear whenever a lane change is called for. This is especially important for riders without CB radios that will not hear about the one lone car still beside the group. Group members should maintain an appropriate and consistent distance behind the bike ahead and the one to the side. If you allow large gaps to develop in the middle of the group, other vehicles will attempt to pull into the group. Also, when you speed up to close the gap, it causes the bikers in back of you to have to run 5-10 mph faster to catch up and reestablish the proper interval for the group formation.

Pre-Ride Briefing

Prior to beginning the ride, the Lead Bike will brief all members of the group as to who will be riding in each group, assign numbers to each group if there is more than one group, who will be Lead Bike and Drag Bike for each group, decide on the CB channel to be used for communications, position bikes without CB radios in the groups, and discuss the route to be traveled. All Lead and Drag Bikes must be equipped with CB radios to insure maximum safety for the group.

Pre-Ride Preparation

All bikes should have a full tank of gas prior to the departure time. It disrupts the group if they have to stop 20 miles down the road because someone didn’t fill up before the ride.

Communications

The CB radio is the most valuable asset in group riding. Pay attention to what is being broadcast during the ride. It will advise you of lane changes, turns, and road hazards. Chapter "G" uses Channel 1 as the Primary Channel for CB communications while riding. In the event there is a lot of traffic on Channel 1, the Lead Bike will advise the group to go to the alternate channel. The Alternate Channel is Channel 16. If a channel change is called for during the ride, advise the Lead Bike after you have changed channels so that the Lead Bike can insure everyone is now on the new channel.

NOTE: Bikes without a CB radio should stagger themselves in the group. Do not have two bikes without CB's next to each other. Also, bikes with CB's must know if the next bike in the formation does not have a CB. This will become apparent in the section that discusses passing on a two-lane highway.

RIDING PROCEDURE

Group Formation

The general formation that will be used when riding in a group will be a staggered formation. The first bike will ride in the left portion of the lane. The second bike will ride in the right portion of the lane approximately one second behind the first bike. The third bike will ride in the left portion of the lane approximately two seconds behind the first bike. The fourth bike will ride in the right portion of the lane approximately two seconds behind the second bike, etc. The interval between each bike will also be influenced by the weather and road condition. Determining the proper interval between bikes can be very difficult. Its purpose is to give each rider sufficient time and distance to react in the event of an emergency.

Some think it "looks cool" to have the entire group in a "tight" formation. That may be fine if you are on a drill team, but not for safe group riding. When we ride in groups, we have individuals in the group with skills that vary from novice to expert. Some individual's have slower reflexes than others. Some have CB's and can hear everything that is going on and others that do not have CB's are unaware of trouble ahead or if someone in the group is having a problem. The best way to determine if you have the proper distance between you, the bike directly in front of you, and the bike in the stagger next to you is to ask yourself this question, "If the bike in front of me or in the stagger next to me has an emergency (flat tire or engine loses power) and suddenly decelerates, slams on their brakes, makes an emergency stop, or attempts to make a sudden turn for the shoulder of the road, do I have enough time and distance to evaluate what is happening, react to the situation, and take evasive action without hitting them or someone else hitting me?" It is important that group members feel comfortable while riding in the group. **Never force someone to ride beyond his or her skills.** Remember, the sole purpose of group riding is to move a group of motorcycles from one point to another in the safest possible manner.

On very narrow highways, hilly terrain, and roads with frequent curves, bikes will ride in a single file. The position of each bike in the lane will be dependent on each rider and the line the rider will take in the curve. Each bike will maintain a two second interval behind the bike in front of them. The interval between each bike will also be influenced by the weather and road condition.

Traffic Lights and Stop Signs

When stopping at a traffic light or a stop sign, bikes will pull up so they are two abreast while waiting for the light to change or to leave the stop sign. Dependent on the width of the lane, trikes or bikes with trailers may not have enough room to stop two abreast. As the bikes leave the light or stop sign, they will pull out one at a time and reestablish the original staggered formation.

As the group begins to pull out from a stop sign, the Lead Bike should announce to the group if traffic is approaching from the right or left. As others in the group pull out from the stop sign, they should inform others behind them if there is any traffic approaching. This should continue until the entire group has cleared the stop sign.

When the Drag Bike clears a traffic light or stop sign, the Drag Bike should notify the Lead bike so the Lead bike knows whether to pick up the speed of the group or slow down until the remainder of the group has caught up with the first part of the group.

Speed

The Lead Bike will establish and set the speed for the group. Maximum speed limits will be adhered to. Depending on traffic, weather, and road conditions, the Lead Bike may have to adjust speed to keep the group together. Consideration should be given to the experience and ability of the riders in the group when setting the speed.

During adverse conditions, any member of the group that feels the group speed is too fast for the road conditions should contact the Lead Bike and request the group speed be reduced.

If the group's speed is too slow for traffic or traffic is building up behind the group, the Drag Bike should advise the Lead Bike. The Lead Bike should make the decision to increase the group speed, move the group to the right lane if on a multi-lane highway, allow the vehicles to pass the group, or pull the group off the road until the traffic clears.

Passing On Multi-Lane Highways

When passing a vehicle on a multi-lane highway, the Lead Bike will ask the Drag Bike to secure a particular lane. When the Drag Bike determines that it is safe to move into the new lane, the Drag Bike will move into that lane first and announce over the CB that the "Lane is secure." After hearing this, the Lead Bike will turn on the appropriate turn signal. This is the signal for the remainder of the group to move to the new lane.

If traffic is heavy, sometimes the Drag Bike cannot wait until the entire lane is clear before securing the lane. If a vehicle is alongside the group when the Drag Bike secures the lane, the Drag Bike should announce "Lane is secure after the red car". The Drag bike should use the color of the car that needs to clear the group because most people cannot easily identify the make or model of cars. It is especially important if there is more than one car that needs to clear the group before group members can change lanes. Individual group members should change lanes as the vehicle clears them.

Circumstances may also arise when the Lead Bike may advise the group to change lanes when you get the chance. In this instance, each bike is responsible to insure they have cleared the vehicle before changing lanes.

Passing On Two Lane Highway

Passing vehicles on a two-lane road presents a greater hazard to a group. Many times, the riders cannot see the road ahead due to hills and curves. When the Lead Bike determines that the group will attempt to pass a vehicle on a two-lane road or highway, the Lead Bike will go around the vehicle first. All other bikes should stay behind the vehicle. The Lead Bike will attempt to get a quarter of a mile ahead of the vehicle. The Lead Bike will continue to radio back to the group if there is oncoming traffic or if it is safe

to pass. When there is no oncoming traffic, the next bike will pass the vehicle. All bikes should continue to listen to the Lead Bike and pass the vehicle when conditions permit. As each bike passes the vehicle, they should allow sufficient room behind them for the remainder of the bikes to pass the vehicle and pull back into the right lane. When all bikes have passed the vehicle, the Drag Bike will advise the Lead Bike.

NOTE: *If you are a member of the group with a CB radio and the next bike in the formation does not have a radio, you should use hand signals to signal the bike without the CB to follow you around the vehicle.*

NOTE: *Do not get impatient when having to pass a vehicle. The group will not pull away and leave you. When you pass the vehicle, take your time and gradually pull back into group formation.*

Passing an 18 Wheeler

If the group must pass an 18-wheeler on a multi-lane highway, members of the group will form a single file in the far side of the lane away from the 18-wheeler as they pass. 18 Wheelers throw off a lot of turbulent wind that has the potential of causing you to lose control or can blow your bike off the road. 18-wheelers are known for losing the tread off of recapped tires. This tread is very heavy and can seriously injure you or damage your bike. So, do not linger on the side of an 18-wheeler. Pass the 18-wheeler as quickly as possible and be sure to pull far enough ahead of the “Big Boy” so there is room for the remainder of the group to pass and clear the truck.

Vehicles Passing the Group

There will be times when the group is on a two-lane road and a vehicle wants to travel faster than the group. The Drag Bike will notify the Lead Bike when a vehicle seems to be “pushing” on the back of the group. The Lead Bike will check for oncoming traffic and let the Drag Bike know when the road is clear. The Lead Bike may instruct the group to form a single file along the right side of the lane to give the group better visibility and space management as the vehicle passes. The Drag Bike will hand signal the vehicle to pass the group. The group should maintain its speed when the vehicle passes so the bikes do not bunch up together. If oncoming traffic appears as the vehicle is passing the group, members of the group should begin to leave sufficient space between bikes so that the vehicle has room to pull back into our lane. Again, do not get upset about a vehicle being in the middle of the group. When the road is clear again, the Lead Bike will tell you to waive the vehicle around and finish passing the group.

When an 18 Wheeler passes the group either from the front or the rear, the Lead or Drag Bike will advise the group of the “Big Boy” passing. The group will form a single file to the right side of the lane to avoid as much of the windblast from the truck as possible.

Merging From Two Lanes To One

If the group is on a multi-lane highway and the lane the group is in must merge into another lane, the Lead Bike should attempt to move the group into the lane that does not end by using a lane change maneuver. If a lane next to the group merges into the lane the group is in, the Lead Bike should notify the group that the lane on the left (or right) merges into your lane. The Lead Bike should ask the Drag Bike if it is clear on the left (or right). The Drag Bike should check to see if anyone is in the lane next to the group or if someone is rapidly approaching from the rear in the lane that will have to merge into the group’s lane. The Drag Bike should notify the group if there is a possibility that a vehicle that will get trapped on the side of the group and try to force its way into the middle of the group. This allows individuals to identify the location of the vehicle in their rear view mirror and allow group members to make room for the vehicle to merge into the group. During this maneuver, group members should communicate with each other to let them know where the vehicle is and who is going to slow down and make room for the vehicle. Remember -- don’t be stubborn. The vehicle is coming into your lane one way or another, especially, when the lane ends.

Curves

When traveling on roads with curves, members of the group should give each other a bigger interval than normal. When entering a curve, each bike should seek the safest path in the curve. There are many factors that will affect the path taken in a curve: your speed, the sharpness of the curve, ability to see through the curve, weather conditions, and gravel or obstacles in the roadway. Do not attempt to out ride your abilities just to stay up with the bike ahead of you. When the group reaches a straight section of roadway, the group can resume a normal riding formation.

City Traffic

When entering areas of heavy traffic, safety is of the utmost importance. **During these times, all members of the group should refrain from idle chatter on the CB radio.** This is a time when communications and instructions between the Lead Bike, Drag Bike, and Group Members are very critical. There may be frequent calls for lane changes, identification of road hazards, turning instructions for the group, and if a section of the group is separated by cars or catches a traffic light. It is important that all members of the group maintain a minimum safe distance between each bike and listen attentively to instructions on the CB.

In the event traffic or a traffic light separates the group, do not attempt to get back into formation by taking risks. The lead section of bikes will not pull away and leave you. The person in the lead of the second section of bikes should maintain contact with the Lead Bike on the CB and notify the Lead bike of your location (using landmarks). The Lead bike will slow down the pace of the first section of bikes to allow the second section to catch up. The Lead Bike will also identify their location by landmarks so the second section of the group can approximate how far they are from the first section of bikes. Do not become alarmed --you will eventually catch up.

NOTE: *If the first bike of the second section of bikes does not have a CB radio, a bike with a CB should take the lead of the second section until the group is back in formation.*

Breakdowns

In the event a bike experiences a mechanical problem or becomes disabled, if possible they should signal their intention to pull out of the group. Other members of the group should give them enough room to safely move out of the formation and pull to the side of the road. At this point, the Drag Bike will drop out of the formation and stop with the troubled bike. The remainder of the group should continue on until they find an area when all the bikes in the group can safely pull off the road and not be a hazard to traffic. The Drag Bike will maintain radio communications with the remainder of the group to advise them of the extent of the problem. If more assistance is needed, the Drag Bike will call to the group for assistance.

U-Turns

U-turns can be very difficult and dangerous, especially on narrow roads. If the group has to make a U-turn it is preferable to continue on to an area where the entire group can pull off the road and make the turn in the opposite direction without being a hazard to traffic or jeopardizing the safety of the group.

Leaving the Group

Each rider must ride within the limits of their ability, experience, weather, and road conditions. In the event you choose to exit the group formation, use your CB radio to announce your intention. Other riders should allow enough clearance for that rider to safely pull out of the formation. This should be done in a manner that does not jeopardize the safety of the other bikes in the group.

At an event, if you will not be riding back with the group you came with, let someone in the group know. If not, the group may be waiting on someone who has already left.

Arriving At The Destination

When the group reaches its destination, the Lead Bike should make every effort to find a large enough area so all members of the group can pull off the highway or street as soon as possible.

Bikes can be parked much faster by pulling into parking spots “nose” first than by having to wait while each bike turns around and backs into a parking spot. More importantly, the slope of the parking lot should influence the direction that bikes park in. Always try to park with the front wheel facing uphill so bikes will not have a tendency to roll off their kickstand. Also, be aware of side slopes so the bikes will have enough lean angle for their side stands.

POST-RIDE ACTIVITIES

Post-Ride Meeting

After reaching the destination, the entire group should hold a brief post-ride meeting. Items that should be addressed are: speed of the group, communications, improvements in individual or group riding techniques, and any item that is a cause of concern. We encourage everyone to honestly discuss things of concern to him or her. The post-ride meeting is the best tool we have available to improve our group riding and individual techniques. We will only be able to make improvements if we receive feedback from all members of the group.

SUMMARY

These guidelines were developed for the safety, protection, and enjoyment of everyone riding in a group. As members of Chapter “G”, we ask for everyone’s cooperation in following these guidelines. It will make our group rides fun and a lot safer.

If anyone has any suggestions regarding the content of this booklet, please contact the Chapter Director, Chapter Rider Education Coordinator, or the Ride Coordinator. Your comments are welcomed.