

# Group riding



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# Introduction

One of the best parts of riding is getting together with friends and riding out as a group, whether it's an afternoon, a weekend or an even longer run. Planning the route, sorting out the kit, prepping the bike and so on is all part of the experience.

Unfortunately, the down side is that a high proportion of motorcycle collisions, including fatal accidents, involve riders in groups. The victim doesn't necessarily have to be a newcomer to biking or someone who has only recently joined the group - even experienced riders can be involved. Whatever the cause, with a few simple precautions and some common sense rules, the run can be made safer and much more enjoyable for all concerned.



*This Guide has been supported by the Royal Signals White Helmets – because even the ultimate group riders know that preparing for road events needs a new set of skills!*

The advice is broken down into two main areas depending on the type of ride that you are planning. This may be a large event ride with a high number of riders, or simply a Sunday run with a few friends. The following advice has been put together to help riders who are planning group rides, of either kind, to get the most out of their trip.



# Planning your route

Getting the route right is crucial for a successful run. Think about:

- whether you are looking for the quickest, motorway-based route or a more challenging ride through the countryside?
- making sure that you include plenty of variety. Although challenging “B” roads may appear to be a good idea, make sure you include less testing sections to allow time to relax
- the ability range of all the bikers on the trip as well as the ability of the group to ride for long distances
- whether your choice of route may change depending on the time of the year
- the unexpected – always have a plan B!

To avoid problems, it's a good idea to give everyone a copy of:

- the route to be taken (list of roads and / or a route map)
- stopping places / rendezvous points
- mobile phone numbers of others in the group

If someone does go astray during the run, they are less likely to get worried or ride beyond their abilities to catch up if they know where they are supposed to be heading and how to make contact with the rest of the group.



## Plan your rest breaks

Where are you going to make stops on the journey? It is recommended that on-road sections should not exceed an absolute maximum of 90 minutes without a break (you may make this less depending on the conditions).

Regular breaks also allow the group to stay together rather than get too strung out. Breaks on the route can also act as rendezvous points in case you get split up.

Check the fuel range of the machines and make sure you have an opportunity to fill up.

If you're planning a large run, are your rest areas big enough to accommodate the whole group?

Remember, if a rider has caught up whilst the others are having a rest break, they will still need time to rest as well.



## The home run

Planning the home run is just as important as the outward ride, but often gets overlooked.

Take into consideration:

- that some riders will want to make their own way back
- that if riders do want to leave the group they should ensure that others are aware of this
- the point where the run will officially finish to avoid confusion later
- giving one rider the responsibility of a head-count at the end to ensure all riders have made it back. This rider should also be made aware of those leaving early, making their own way back etc

## Pre-run briefing

If you are on a smaller run with friends, this can just be an informal chat. On a larger run, the briefing will be on a larger scale. Either way, ensure that:

- the general route is explained (this doesn't have to be too detailed as long as the Lead and Tail (these are explained later) are aware of the route. You may wish to distribute a map.
- if you're going to use the motorway, agree at which junction you'll be getting off
- mobile phone numbers have been swapped
- all machines have enough fuel until the next opportunity to re-fill
- the rules of the run and the system you'll be using have been explained (depending on which of the later systems you adopt)



- you have asked if there are any problems e.g. does anyone not feel confident to travel this distance or this route?
- the rest stops have been explained
- everyone has taken the opportunity to do a maintenance check on the machines
- everyone is wearing the right gear, and, if the weather changes, will it still be the right gear?

## Smaller runs

### The running order

It is critical to get this right if you want a safe and successful run – so it's worth spending some time on.

Don't be tempted to put a slower bike in front so they can stay with the group. This rider is frequently one of the less experienced riders so should they really be given the responsibility of leading the way? There is also the perceived pressure from those behind to 'get a move on!' Consider whether the others really want to be stuck behind that rider for the whole trip.

Instead, there should be a **Leader / navigator** at the front. They should:

- be familiar with the selected route
- have the riding skills and the bike to make reasonable progress
- have a mobile phone

At the back you need a '**sweeper**'.  
They should:

- be an experienced rider on a reliable bike  
- one with a turn of speed if required
- be familiar with the route to be taken
- have a mobile phone

The job of the Sweeper is to look out for slower riders or breakdowns and to make sure no one gets left behind or has an incident without being noticed.

Between the Leader and the Sweeper you can afford to spread out a bit. It is best to keep the less experienced riders towards the front where they can be better protected by more experienced companions.



## Rules of the road

When out on the road there are two golden rules for a successful group run and they need to be agreed by everyone.

**No overtaking each other without prior planning**

**Ride to the bike behind you, not the one in front**

Not following these points can lead to the group breaking up. If some riders feel they want to travel ahead on the next stage, make sure they know to wait for the next stop. Then, let the "Leader" and "Sweeper" know they are going to do this. The rest of the riders can then be told.

*'Riding to the bike behind' is more serious and is the key to the whole concept of good group riding.*

One of the main causes of collisions is when the riders in the group play 'follow my leader' and constantly try to keep up with the bike in front. You've probably seen riders towards the back of a group overtaking on white lines, taking bends too quickly, or travelling too fast for the conditions in an effort to catch up.

This can be avoided without the ride turning into a crawl by taking account of the following:

- ensure each member rides so they can keep the bike following them in their mirrors for most of the time - good progress can be made and a rider will only need to slow down or stop if they lose contact with that bike for any extended period
- never turn left or right or deviate from the 'ahead' course without being sure that the follower has seen you

By using this simple technique, you will be amazed how you can enjoy group runs along more challenging roads without having to sacrifice the group concept



*Riding out with friends is what makes biking enjoyable but a big part of group riding is knowing when to think as an individual.*

## Larger runs

From time to time, riders will organise or participate in a larger group ride; this could be a social event or even a run for charity etc. Runs of this size will need a different approach. Again, there are good tips and pointers that can be employed to reduce risks to the riders involved.

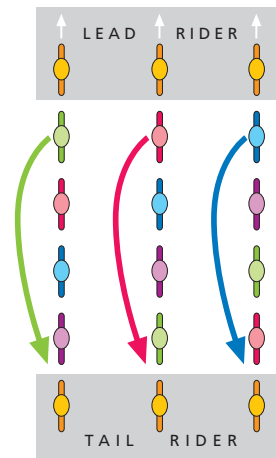


## The Marker System

The Marker System relies on three key roles. The first two of these are the 'Lead' and the 'Tail' riders. As the names suggest, one leads the group, the other stays at the rear. These two positions never change. The third rider is the 'Marker'. This position – and the rider responsible for it – will rotate throughout the group as the ride goes on.

### The Lead is responsible for:

- planning the route, taking on board all of the issues listed above in the "route planning" section
- briefing all riders
- setting an appropriate pace
- signalling to the Marker rider where to stop



The Marker System in action

**The Tail is responsible for:**

- allowing the rider who is giving directions the chance to pull out and proceed when it is safe to do so. If this is not possible they may have to slow to allow the Marker to catch up and overtake
- leaving a reasonable distance behind the penultimate rider, ensuring that slower riders at the rear are under no pressure
- watching out for any rider who has stopped and pulled over

**The Marker is responsible for:**

- following instructions from the Lead as to when to stop
- finding a safe place to stop when signalled to do so
- remaining at this point until the Tail rider has caught up
- rejoining the group safely

It should always be assumed that the group will take a "straight ahead" route unless advised differently. When the group are going to alter from the main route, the rider travelling directly behind the Lead is signalled by the Lead to pull off the road in a safe position. This stationary rider now acts as the Marker to the remaining riders,

showing which direction the group must take next. This rider will then rejoin the group in front of the Tail rider (if it is possible and safe to do so), knowing that the Tail will have already made sure they are the last rider in the group.

Therefore, as the ride continues, each rider in the group behind the Lead will take their turn to act as the Marker rider for the group. This system allows each member to ride in a style and a manner that suits them, always knowing that they are going to stay with the group and confident that they will always know which route the group is following.

To ensure that this is as effective as possible, make sure that:

- each rider is aware of the Lead & Tail system
- each rider knows who the Lead and the Tail are
- the group understand the Lead's signal for the following rider to dismount and direct - in other words every rider should know the signal that makes THEM the next Marker
- a headcount is taken so that all members know how many riders are in the group
- each rider knows that if they want to leave the group ride, this is done at a rest stop so all members are aware that there is one less rider





## Motorways

Staying together, or at least in sight of one another is quite important on motorways. This is especially true if you are in unfamiliar territory.

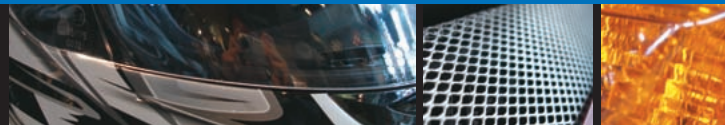
**Remember, stopping on the hard shoulder or near a turn off just to let the rest of your group catch up is illegal.**

**Plan ahead to decide at which junction you will be leaving the motorway and ensure that the group knows this.**

Within reason, the slower your group rides on the motorway the more likely they are to stay together. However, holding up or obstructing other traffic could cause other problems, so there is a different tactic:

give the lead rider a strict speed limit which is well within the reach of everyone else in the group. It could be, say, 60 mph on a busy urban motorway in the U.K. or faster on an Autobahn in Germany (of course, this is all dependant on the conditions). It doesn't matter as long as the others can go a little faster so that they have the ability to catch up.

By combining this with both the no overtaking rule and riding-to-the-bike-behind rule, no-one should have too much difficulty staying in touch with the group.





## Town & City Centres

Riding in large European cities like London, Paris or Amsterdam - or even smaller towns where there are intricate traffic management systems - can be difficult. It is easy to get into the wrong lane or get caught out at the lights, even when you're riding alone. Staying together in a large group in such places is extremely difficult. Sooner or later the group is bound to get broken up and any strangers to the area will have major problems finding their friends.

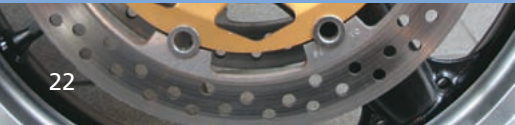
Get organised into smaller groups of around three or four bikes before going into the town.

Ideally, one of the smaller groups should be able to act as a navigator, although this is not always possible.

Ride in a staggered formation. It is easier for this size of group to stay fairly close to one another at low speeds and even to move almost as one vehicle through junctions etc. minimising the risk of split ups.

*This technique needs practising to get right and less experienced riders may be uncomfortable with it until their confidence improves. A bit of practise in local towns before the trip could well pay dividends if you know a major city is going to be on the route.*

It is useful to have a substantial landmark as a rendezvous point in case the group gets split . Even in a country where you don't speak the language you can usually get directions to major places of interest and, of course, morale (which is linked to safety) will stay high for lost riders if they have the company of a couple of other bikes with them.



## Riding Abroad

Try to familiarise yourself with the rules of the road in the country that you are visiting. Simple web searches such as “road signs Spain”, or “highway code France” can provide good information.

It also pays – if only for peace of mind – to make sure that you have the correct insurance cover before leaving the UK. Often, if you book through the large motoring organisations you get sent lots of information on legal requirements etc. for the countries you are visiting.

The websites of British Embassies and Consulates can also be useful sources of travel advice – start your search at [www.britishembassy.gov.uk](http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk)



# Checklist

- ✓ Plan the route – prepare copies for others
- ✓ Identify the rest breaks and ensure these are sufficient
- ✓ Full briefing – explain the rules, the breaks, swap mobile numbers etc.
- ✓ Explain the riding system you're using and identify the Lead and Tail riders
- ✓ If you're using a Marker system, make sure everyone knows how it works and the signal from the Lead that would make them the next Marker
- ✓ Maintenance & fuel check before the start – you could avoid a breakdown
- ✓ Make sure the group wear the right gear. Be prepared for changes in weather
- ✓ Tell the group to ride within their own ability and don't try to "keep up" – the way you have organised the ride will take care of the slower riders
- ✓ Identify hazards like tractors in the country or caravans in the summer
- ✓ If someone leaves the group make sure they know who to tell
- ✓ Make sure everyone is accounted for at the end

# Tips for any rider

- ✓ Always ensure that you ride within your own capabilities and exercise your own judgement
- ✓ Carrying pillion will affect the way your bike handles, including acceleration (keeping up needs to be well planned for) and braking (close following especially needs to be avoided)
- ✓ Make sure that pillion (especially the novices) are fully briefed on the type of roads you'll be using and what they can do to help you ride well
- ✓ Make sure that mobile phone numbers are exchanged at the start of a ride to improve your chances of communication if you get lost. Although "hands free" technology is available, the Road Safety Team does not recommend two-way communication when riding
- ✓ One way intercom technology, such as the ones used by bike trainers, could be considered for the Lead and Tail riders
- ✓ Wearing the right gear can make all the difference in a crash
- ✓ Keep good distances between riders - in normal conditions allow at least 2 seconds of gap between you and vehicle in front - at least double that in the rain

*The White Helmets - the ultimate in group riding...*

## Finally

All at Devon County Council's Road Safety Team and the Peninsula Motorcycle Forum wish you another great year of safe motorcycle riding. Hopefully, this information will help you achieve this.

For further information go to:

[www.devon.gov.uk/road\\_safety.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/road_safety.htm)

or

[www.peninsulamcforum.co.uk](http://www.peninsulamcforum.co.uk)


or contact the Devon Road Safety and Travel Awareness team direct at

email: [bikers@devon.gov.uk](mailto:bikers@devon.gov.uk)

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