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SAFETY IN NUMBERS

GROUP RIDING

The heading doesn't always ring true. If you are thinking about organising or joining in on a group ride, there are some basic rules to keep it safe. Without some structure, group riding is just asking for trouble. Be smart, enjoy the ride – Karel Pavich from ProRide talks you through the dos and don'ts.

Every rider in a motorcycle group has an individual responsibility to ride safely, promote safe riding to the rest of the group, and ensure that the flow of other traffic on the road is not disrupted by the actions of the group.

SMALL vs LARGE GROUPS

Smaller groups of riders are easier for other road users to deal with because they don't interfere with traffic flow as much as bigger groups do.

Bigger groups of riders can be split into smaller ones with a good distance between them, to enable other motorists to safely overtake and continue on their way. In larger groups, another common problem is that some riders can get separated and left behind. You need to know everyone is still upright and in touch with the group, otherwise, ride on your own.

TAKING THE LEAD

Any group of riders needs to have a designated leader, who has the responsibility for signalling changes in general direction, up-coming lane changes, unmarked intersections and any unexpected road obstacles that mean lowering speed or changing direction. The signals should be explained to the group before it sets off. All of the other group members need to be alert to signals from the front, and should be prepared to brake earlier and more gently than normal to alert the riders behind them. The leader needs to maintain a speed that is enjoyable for those following, and to bear in mind that braking hard will have a more profound effect for riders at the rear, and so will fast acceleration – the bungee effect.

NOVICES

The least experienced riders should ideally be closer to the front of the group, so that the more experienced ones can keep an eye on them. Also, since the tail-end rider dictates the speed of the group, it's not in the interest of progress to have less confident riders at the back.

ROUTE AND PACE

All riders in the group need to keep one eye on their rear view mirror so that the person behind is always visible. If the tail-end rider falls behind, everyone needs to slow down until he or she is visible again and keeping up, so the group can remain together. The leader of the group should brief the group on the route so if anyone does get separated, they will know where they are going. When making turns onto side roads or driveways, it's a good idea to stop and wait if you can't see the rider behind you in your mirror, so they can see the turn point.

SPACING

Each rider should maintain a close but safe distance from each other, to enable enough space to react safely to changes, but close enough to each other that the group doesn't take up unnecessary space on the road. Try not to get fixated on the rider ahead of you – it's important everyone uses their perception skills to identify potential hazards.

FORMATION RIDING

Staggered formation is the best way to keep the motorcycle group in order. The leader rides in the right wheel track of the lane while the second rider goes in the left wheel track at about 1 second following distance. The third rider goes in the right wheel track of the lane about 2 seconds behind the leader, and so on. This provides all riders with clear vision ahead and enough time and space to react safely to changes or hazards without risking collision with another bike.

OVERTAKING

When passing other vehicles, do so in the same staggered configuration, one at a time. The leader overtakes when it is safe to do so and returns to the right wheel track of the lane afterwards, speeding up a little to make space for the rider behind. When safe, the second rider overtakes the vehicle, and drops into position in the left side of the lane. Each rider moves up and passes one at a time, then maintains speed to make room for the next member of the group.

CORNERING

Formation riding is not appropriate when heading into corners. The riders need to drop back into single file when cornering, allowing enough space between bikes to enable safe adjustments to be made if road conditions require.

GIVE WARNINGS

If you see a pothole, gravel or oil on the road or a car coming out of a driveway, let others behind know about it by pointing to the hazard with your hand or foot.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Riding in a group changes the dynamics a lot. You can't control your own speed to the same degree, because you have to maintain extra awareness of all those around you in the group.

STOP OFTEN

When everyone keeps adjusting to the general needs and pace of the group, particularly on longer trips, fatigue or boredom can set in which increases the risk of rider error on the road. Stop often for refreshments which will also allow slower riders to catch up.

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