

## Group Riding Revisited

By Mark Caldwell, Chapter Educator

This month we are having, or by the time you get this will have had, another Road Captain course. There are many great things covered in the course for the benefit of those who are interested in leading a group ride. But there are also many important things covered for those who don't want to lead, but just want to participate. I thought I'd take some time to review just a few of the basics of group riding. Some in the chapter have been doing this so long that maybe they do things out of habit and forgot the basics. So just like it's a good idea to take a riding skills course to stay fresh, let's review some of the skills specific to riding in a group.

First, and most important, is to remember that just because you are riding in a group does not mean that you abandon responsibility to the group leaders. **You are responsible for your own safety.** Ride your own ride, and if that means you need to leave the group in order to stay within your own riding comfort zone, then do so and don't let anyone peer-pressure you into riding in a manner you feel is not safe for you.

Goldwingers have an advantage in group riding because so many of them have CB radios for communicating with other riders. But remember that some may not have radios, so everyone should know a few basic hand signals such as: One finger raised means ride single-file in-line behind the lead; Two fingers raised (often the index finger and pinkie to make it clear) means ride in staggered formation; Pointing down to either side indicates a hazard in the road on that side. There are many other hand signals, but these are the most commonly used. One other important hand signal is to raise your arm in the air, make a fist and then pull down as if you were pulling a trucker's air horn, or an old pull-chain toilet, for those that remember that far back. As you might guess, this indicates that you need a rest stop.

Speaking of the staggered formation, the way that works is that the lead bike should be in the left track. Bike number two is about one second behind, but offset by being in the right track. Bike three is one second behind bike two and offset back into the left track. This puts bike three two seconds behind the bike which is in his same track. And so on throughout the group. For the group's safety, you should maintain that lane position consistently; however, absolutely break out of position if there is a question of safety. For example, break position to avoid road hazards. You also break out of staggered position in order to pick the best line through a corner. Then once through the corner, retake your staggered position.

If riding in inclement weather, double the gap between bikes. However, also try to keep the gap down to the recommended space so that other drivers are not tempted to pull into the middle of your group. If other vehicles get into the group, whether from expanded gaps or from the group being broken up by a traffic signal, continue to ride as if you are now two or more small groups until the vehicles leave the group. Automobile drivers tend to recognize that they are the intruder in a group and will want to get out when they have a good opportunity. Stay calm and relaxed and continue riding safely. If the group

gets separated by a large margin, the lead bike may find a safe place to pull over and wait for the group to reassemble before moving on.

There are several other important skills that I just can't fit in this article, such as how to change lanes as a group, and how the technique is different when riding in heavy traffic than it is riding on the open road. If you haven't had a chance to practice this, be sure to contact me or one of our experienced Road Captains and we will be happy to explain the process.

Riding in groups has several advantages. For example, there is some safety in numbers. Specifically, a group of bikes is easier for other drivers to see than just a single bike. And of course, just about anywhere we go we have more fun when we have our GWRRA Friends along. Whether in a group, or on your own, Ride Safe and come back again.