

These rules are based on those created and copyrighted by Marc Mauss in 1998 for the purpose of increasing safety of motorcyclists riding in groups. The original rules may be found at <http://www.shadowriders.org/faq/ridingrules.html>. Marc is a brother Blue Knight and we thank him for his assistance and support.

The purpose of riding in an organized group instead of an undisciplined pack is to provide the additional safety that a well-organized group inherently generates. This comes from within the group and from the outside. When a group rides in an orderly fashion, people don't get in each others way, and the organization of the formation itself discourages cars from attempting to cut in. I have even seen trucks move to the far side of their lane to minimize wind blast when they see a well-ordered formation "single up" and move as far away from the truck as their lane allows.

The following rules are compiled from a number of sources. Most clubs that ride in orderly formations follow similar rules. Details may vary from one club to another, sometimes because of the style of riding they do, or sometimes because there are a number of reasonable options, so they chose the one they prefer.

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1. Formation

Riding will be in a standard staggered formation unless the leader calls for single file. In staggered formation, the bikes form two columns, with the leader at the head of either the right or left column, as he chooses.

The second bike will head the opposite column, and will ride approximately 1 second behind the leader (and in the opposite side of the lane). The other riders will position their bikes 2 seconds behind the bike directly in front of them, which puts them 1 second behind the diagonal bike.

This formation allows each rider sufficient safety space, and discourages other vehicles from cutting into the line. The last rider, or Tail Gunner, may ride on whichever side of the lane he prefers. He will have to change sides during the ride, based on the situation at the moment.

2. Ride Leader

The Ride Leader is responsible for the safety of the entire formation. He must be aware of the length of the columns, and must gauge the passing of merges, highway entrances and exits, etc., to allow for maximum safety and keeping the group together. He must make sure that he leaves enough time/space for the formation to get into the appropriate lanes before exits, etc.

All directions come from the Ride Leader. The Ride Leader makes all decisions regarding lane changes, stopping for breaks and fuel, closing of gaps, turning off at exits, any concerns of what lies ahead, accepting/rejecting radioed messages from other individuals, and so on. No individual will assert himself independently without direction from the Ride Leader to do so.

3. Tail Gunner

The Tail Gunner serves as the eyes of the Ride Leader. He watches the formation, and informs the Ride Leader of any potential problems within the group. He watches other vehicles, and informs the Ride Leader (and anyone else with radios) of hazardous conditions approaching from the rear, such as vehicles trying to cut into the formation and trucks passing with potentially dangerous wind blasts. He will watch for merging lanes, and will move into a merging lane (or stay in a merging lane just vacated by the group) in order to "close the door" on other vehicles that may otherwise find themselves trying to merge into the formation. At the Ride Leader's request, the Tail Gunner changes lanes before the formation, to secure the lane so the formation can move into it.

4. New Riders

The position of new (inexperienced with GROUP riding) riders within the group is significant. New riders should be positioned as close to the front as possible

5. Lane Changes

All lane changing starts with a radio request from the Ride Leader to the Tail Gunner. The Tail Gunner will (when it is safe to do so) move into the requested lane and will inform the Ride Leader when the lane is clear.

At this point, the Ride Leader has three options.

a. Simple Lane Change

This is an ordinary lane change, and can be used in most situations. After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then initiates the change. All other riders change lanes too. The important concept is that NO ONE moves until the bike in front of him has started moving.

b. Simultaneous Lane Change

This can be used interchangeably with the Simple Lane Change. It requires a little more work, but it is well worth the effort. It's quite impressive to watch, and gives the riders a tremendous feeling of "togetherness". This sounds a little complicated, but is actually very simple to do.

After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the Ride Leader will put on his directional signal as an indication that he is about to order a lane change. As each rider sees the directional signal, he also turns his on, so the riders following him get the signal. The leader then raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too. This allows the entire formation to move from one lane to another as a single block.

c. Rear Fill-in

This is sometimes necessary if a long enough gap cannot be maintained in the new lane, for example when trying to move from the right lane to the center and vehicles from the left lane keep cutting into the opening.

After the Tail Gunner has secured the new lane, the leader (usually at the suggestion of the Tail Gunner) will call for the group to fill in the space from the rear. He signals this by raising his hand to shoulder height and "pushing" it towards the new lane. All riders repeat the signal, and the last bikes move into the space in the new lane ahead of the Tail Gunner, then the next-to-last bikes move in ahead of those, and so on until the Ride Leader finally moves into the space ahead of the entire formation.

6. Emergencies

In the unlikely event of an emergency condition, the Ride Leader will make every attempt to move the formation to the shoulder in an orderly manner.

If a bike breaks down, let the rider move to the right. DO NOT STOP. The Tail Gunner will stop with the problem bike. The Ride Leader will lead the group to a safe stopping place.

7. Tolls

The Ride Leader should be aware of tolls and collect money from all riders in advance. When the formation arrives at the toll booth, the Ride Leader pays for all bikes, and all bikes proceed through the toll. Many toll booths have counters that count the number of vehicles coming through. To accommodate these, ride through the toll booth one at a time.

If some people in the group are using EZ Pass, they will split out from the group, and the formation will reform on the other side of the toll booth.

Make sure the Ride Leader knows in advance how many bikes he is paying the toll for.

8. Hand Signals

Each rider (and passenger) should duplicate all hand signals given by the rider in front of him, so that the signals get passed all the way to the back of the formation. The following signals are used in addition to the standard (right turn, left turn, slow/stop) hand signals.

- **Simultaneous Lane Change** - The leader (after having the Tail Gunner secure the lane) raises his left arm straight up. Each rider repeats this signal. Then, as the leader lowers his arm to point to the lane into which he's moving, he actually initiates the change. All other riders lower their arms at the same time and change lanes too.
- **Fill in From Rear** - After having the Tail Gunner secure the lane and putting on his directional signal (which is repeated by each rider), the Ride Leader raises his left hand to his shoulder and "pushes" his open hand toward the lane into which he wants to move. This signal is repeated by all riders, and each rider in turn, rearmost first, moves into the space ahead of the riders behind them.
- **Single up**- When conditions warrant single file (narrow road, anticipated wind-blast from trucks, obstruction, pedestrians, etc.) the Ride Leader will raise his left hand straight up, holding up just his index finger. All other riders will repeat this, and the two columns will merge into one.
- **Staggered Formation** - After singling up, when single file is no longer necessary, the Ride Leader will raise his left hand with thumb and pinky out, other fingers closed, rotating his wrist back and forth (indicating left, right, left, right).
All other riders will repeat this and resume staggered formation.
- **Tighten Formation** - When the Ride Leader feels that the formation should be tighter (bikes closer together) (usually after being informed by the Tail Gunner), he raises his left hand with fingers spread wide and repeatedly closes them into a fist. All other riders repeat this and close up all unnecessary space in the formation.
- **Road Hazard** - This is the one signal that can be initiated by ANYONE. Anyone seeing a hazardous condition on the road surface (roadkill, oil, gravel, significant pot hole, etc.) will point at it. All following riders will repeat this, and all riders will avoid the hazard.