

Riding in a Group? What are the things to know?

Some people love riding in groups, others hate it, beware those that have no rules. If ever there was a can of worms to open, then it is riding in groups of two or more. It can be the experience of your life, building rock solid friendships. But it can just as easily break your friendships, create festering feuds, ruin a day out or holiday, smash your bike, or worst still smash your body for life.

Don't imagine that riding in a group is the same as riding on your own with one or two strangers around. The moment you drop the clutch strange forces start to take affect. You enter a complex social system of behaviours. Riding alone you've only yourself to worry about. You position yourself on the road for maximum visibility, accelerate as you wish, brake as hard as you wish, overtake when you feel like it. When you are the only bike, you're in your own "high performance" traffic system, moving all over your lane to see and be seen, use brakes and throttle to nip past cars when you choose. You stay alert riding alone!

When riding in a group there is a whole lot more on your plate. Because each bike in the group is as flexible and manoeuvrable as you, you have to make allowances and ride conscious of what the others are doing. In addition to your own riding safety, you have to start thinking of others. As soon as you ride in a group, you lose much of the freedom and individuality that makes biking so precious. You are also highly likely to lose concentration when following the wheel in front, thereby increasing danger to yourself.

Much depends on how close you ride. Leaving a big gap to the rider in front of you and you do not need to make any allowances for them. But you do have to watch out for the rider behind. If they are right up your arse, then you have to take special care, even to avoid undue pressure on your mind.

Why the hell did you brake (and so fiercely)?

By far the most common cock up when in a group is the rear end shunt. Rider A brakes for petrol or at a roundabout, rider B is just behind with pace in mind, and runs in the back of A. Two damaged bikes and for sure rider B saying "Why the hell brake there....", rider A saying "Why were you so close..." Do not expect that people you know will not do the utterly unexpected.

Brake lights can cause as much friction as the brake pads themselves. If your riding in front then consider that every time you dab the brake the rider gets flashed and has to react to it. They might brake too, and so it ripples back through the group. If you constantly dab for comfort reasons, the rider behind may ignore it sometimes.

Since brakes are an issue. It is not a bad idea to try to ride without using them at all. It makes one look further ahead, forces appropriate gear selection, and makes for overall smooth riding. On the other hand, ultra competitive riders may put the brake light on to early, to fool the following rider into thinking the break-point has arrived. By far the safest is for the following rider to look at the road as if the rider in front is not there, or is a complete idiot.

Why the hell did you stop accelerating?

Rapid acceleration can cause nearly as many problems as braking. If rider A gives it a fistful, rider B will follow like a lemming. Racing thru the gears will naturally see bikes with similar performance dangerously close to each other. Sudden drop-off of acceleration is the same as sudden braking when B is still gunning. Rapid acceleration can cause nearly as many problems as braking.

What the hell is he doing in that position?

The subtleties of positioning when riding in a group are endless. Positioning is all about getting the best view of the road ahead, being seen by everyone else and reducing the chances of hitting someone or being hit. So riding in close line astern is about the worst thing you can do. The people behind take their eye off the road and mesmerise themselves on the rear wheel in front. It really drags down the riding standard of the group.

At slow speed the generally accepted pattern in close formation is a staggered formation in loose rows of two. The leading rider chooses where he wants to be, the next rider relocates so that he can see ahead and has little risk of shunting. Providing the riders position themselves on the right side or left side of a road lane, then the riders can bunch closely in town. Cars behind them will not get frustrated if the riders are tightly formed whilst riding at low speed.

Getting separated in towns

Traffic lights are the worst for separating and delaying progress of a group. When traffic lights are coming up then reduce gaps between riders as speeds fall. This way there is more chance of the group getting through the lights in one session. The front rider should never race the green light to get through. Followers may rush dangerously, and an accident becomes highly probable. Leaders must drive cautiously at junctions.

Make pace by filtering past stopped cars wherever possible, providing it is safe and does not cause annoyance. The front rider, if stopped, should always leave enough space at his side for the following rider to filter and enter the same gap. Likewise for the following pair of riders. If in a group of three, the lead rider may, when stopping, leave a whole bike-space in front, so the the following two riders may filter into the forward position. In this case, the front rider should hold up one or two fingers to signal available space for the group behind. Maintaining thoughtful relationships at road junctions will enable good pace of the group as a whole.

Overtaking - look at that arsehole

A rider has many things to concentrate on when passing moving cars. So much so that acceleration, braking, positioning may sometimes become aggressive. As a following rider, make it a rule never to pass the same vehicle together with the front rider. If you do there will come a time when there is insufficient space, time, distance for the following rider to get back-in. Sometimes a playful or offensive car driver may force this dilemma, and the following rider will get stuck in the wrong place at the wrong relative speed and with nowhere to go. Make it your rule to always wait for the rider in front of the car ahead to vacate his space before you make the overtake. And should you, in front, after overtaking see some idiotic rider trying to do the same overtake and with nowhere to go but into your space, then move tight to the inside so that the un thinking rider behind will have

somewhere to dive. When this occurs, you have no doubt upset the car driver, so be warned. Use the open road to make pace, not when the traffic is dense.

Mirror filling

You do not have to overtake to wind people up, especially to wind up the person in front. Sitting right behind someone can be just as annoying because you are being aggressive or patronising. You're saying to them "Look how slow or sloppy you are." The person in front may not be setting the same pace as you would like, or maybe conserving petrol to the next town, but that does not matter, it's what that person in front thinks. To a car driver, the rider's headlamp can appear equally menacing, so always be considerate. The open road will allow you to make pace when the time is right.

On the open road, especially when riding in pairs, you will enjoy your ride better if you have maximum separation between riders. Keep your headlight on so that the rider in front can monitor your progress. Providing your headlight shows every so often, the rider in front will be able to make his pace without undue worry that you have stopped for some reason or another. If only parking light is on, the rider in front cannot see you.

If there is an inconsiderate person filling your mirror then either he is admiring your riding, or try to push you. Do not be pushed into a dangerous situation. Better to courteously wave the rider to pass you, and to follow him. You may learn that he is just an arsehole!

Where the hell have you been?

Think carefully what should and should not be packed underseat and deep inside bags. Do not pack things that will be required "on demand" at check-ins, frontiers, gas stations, etc, deep within luggage or under seat. Keep in a pocket those items to facilitate quick presentation or regular use: Consider ferry tickets, Passport, Credit Card, and some money for petrol, lunch and road tolls. Appoint the leader to buy all road toll tickets for the whole group - it saves time and gives respect to waiting cars.

Be punctual. One late person is disrespectful to all the others in the group and will incite annoyance. Especially when starting the day, be on time and ready to roll, with a full tank of gas. Arriving late, unready and without petrol is never polite, and you may be accused of affecting ride objectives.