

Combat Veterans of America Motorcycle Club (CVAMC) Group Riding Procedures

Purpose

The following are CVAMC procedures for group riding. They are provided to establish a safe riding environment during club sponsored group rides. They should also be used to provide discipline during unscheduled club rides. These procedures have been tested for many miles, by CVAMC members and others riding all brands and models of motorcycles, and they have sound safety rationales to support them. All CVAMC members are urged to become familiar with these procedures. Road Captains, who frequently ride lead or trail, are required to know these procedures in order to explain them to other riders who may show up for a club ride.

CVAMC Prime Directives:

#1 Don't hit the bike in front of you.

#2 Ride your own ride.

Group Riding

There are several advantages for motorcyclists who ride in a group:

- a group is usually more visible to other drivers than a single motorcycle;
- other vehicles can predict what a rider in a group will do because all members generally maintain fixed positions and fixed intervals between riders;
- in case of a mechanical problem or an accident, help is available immediately to the rider. A member of the group may carry a cell-phone. Usually some riders in a group are trained in First Aid and CPR. They are often aware of safety information and accident management procedures that non-riders may not know -- for example, not to remove the helmet of a downed rider unless breathing is inhibited, where to find particular medical information for a downed rider; how to manage an accident scene to prevent complications, etc.; and;
- riding with a group can be a lot more *FUN* than riding alone!

In addition, motorcyclists tend to learn a great deal from each other about their sport. Planned stops along the way offer a fine opportunity to socialize and to share valuable tips and techniques.

However, group riding is not for everyone. It requires a certain level of skill and discipline. It restricts an individual rider's options as to speed, changes in route, and lane positioning. To attempt to ride in a group without having good basic riding skills and a good sense of what others in the group are likely to do -- and what they expect you to do -- is an invitation to an accident; one that may involve damage and injuries to more than one bike and one rider. It is also a matter of personality, in that group riding requires

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good communications, courtesy among riders, and a willingness to look out for the safety of others while riding your own ride.

Those who don't wish to ride in a group but who wish to arrive at the same destination as their friends may serve as a scout for the group or they may just prefer to travel solo on the same route and meet up with the group at the destination.

Some Common Group Riding Terms

Group: a small number of motorcyclists who ride together maintaining a generally fixed distance between bikes and maintaining fixed positions within the formation (usually not more than 8-10 per group). On rides in which participation by a large number of motorcyclists occurs, it is common to have riders divided into several groups.

Pack: a number of motorcyclists who ride together, generally without maintaining fixed positions or distances between bikes. Packs are occasionally seen with 20-50 motorcyclists in a single formation.

Road Captain: a person who generally plans and lays out group rides, communicates group riding rules or guidelines to the club, and ensures safe practices are observed during group rides. The Road Captain may or may not ride lead for a particular ride.

Lead Bike: a person who rides in the most forward position in a group and who relays information to all other riders in the group via hand signals and/or other communications devices. The Lead Bike determines the group's direction, speed, choice of lane, and formation. He or she often must make quick navigation decisions in the face of road hazards, changes in road surface conditions, poor signage, construction and other obstacles while maintaining control of his or her bike and communicating to those following. If there are three groups on a ride, there will be three Lead Bikes.

Trail [or Drag] Bike: a person who rides in the last position in a group who monitors and protects the formation, and who relays information to the Lead Bike regarding the other riders in the group, equipment problems, etc. The Trail Bike must secure a lane for the rest of the group during lane changes into faster traffic (move first to block oncoming traffic) and close the door (move to block passing traffic) when a lane is lost in a merging lane situation. Usually the Trail Bike is the most experienced rider in a group or a selected Road Captain. The Trail Bike is the rider who stops to assist a rider who has mechanical trouble, loses control, or drops out of a ride for some other reason. The Trail Bike should be prepared to render aid to a downed or disabled rider in a group. It's helpful if the Trail Bike has a co-rider who can assist with communications or traffic control if a serious problem arises. If there are three groups on a ride, there will be three Trail Bikes.

Position keeping: maintaining a fixed position and interval within a group of riders but not riding as Lead Bike or Trail Bike. Position keeping implies that the rider knows which bike is ahead of and/or behind him/her in the formation. Position within a group may initially be assigned by the Lead Bike based on the experience level of the rider, particularly his or her group riding experience.

Slot: any position within a group of riders in the right track of a lane, farthest from oncoming traffic.

Track: the zone of a lane in which a rider maintains his position in a group. A lane of traffic is divided into five zones: the left track is the second zone from the left, the middle

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of the lane (generally not used) is the third zone, and the right track is the fourth zone from the left. Two zones on the sides of a lane serve as margins. A rider may vary his path of travel from his normal track as is required by a road hazard or by an incursion into the group's lane by other vehicles.

Staggered formation: a formation of motorcyclists in a group in which the Lead Bike normally rides in the left track of a lane, the next bike in the right track or slot, and the next bike in the left track, and so on. Bikes in a group generally maintain a minimum interval of two seconds travel time between bikes in the same track, and one second travel time between each bike in the group. **In a staggered formation, a rider still commands and may ride in the entire width of his lane as needed.** The Trail Bike may ride in the left or right track depending on the number of bikes in the group. It is often preferable for the Trail Bike to ride in the left track, so as to have the same visibility line as the Lead Bike.

Two abreast: a formation in which the members of a group ride adjacent to each other in pairs, used after stopping at signs and traffic signals so that riders can get through an intersection quickly and together if possible. When departing from a stop, the rider in the left track normally pulls out before the rider on the right, returning to a staggered formation. Two abreast is also used when riding in parade formation.

Single file: a formation in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride in one track of a lane.

Parade formation: a formation in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride two abreast.

Group Parking: a formation in which all bikes in a group follow the Lead Bike in single file into a parking area, making a turn such that they can all line up next to each other in the space available.

Rider's Job: Don't Hit the Bike in Front of You and Ride Your Own Ride.

Riders are expected to arrive on time at the departure point with a full tank of gas, in proper attire for the conditions, and physically ready to ride (potty stop made, medications packed if needed, sober and alert). Motorcycle endorsements and insurance should be up to date, and the bike should be in street-legal condition. The Road Captain may ask a rider not to join a group ride if these basic conditions are not met (for example, if a rider is drunk or a bike is mechanically unfit to ride). If a rider brings a co-rider (a passenger) for a group ride, the rider is expected to manage and attend to that passenger's needs personally, before the riders' meeting.

A riders' meeting is held prior to all group rides in order to clarify what is expected of riders who participate. If you find yourself uncomfortable with the riding style of the group at any time, **DROP OUT**. Your safe arrival at the destination is far more important than conforming to rules you don't like or don't understand. In a group ride, the primary job for every rider is to not hit the motorcycle in front of him. If the rider (with or without a co-rider) wishes to slow down or stop during the ride, for any reason whatsoever, he or she may drop out of the ride. If at any time a co-rider becomes uncomfortable during the ride and wants the rider to slow down or stop, for any reason whatsoever, the rider should be prepared to do so as quickly and as safely as possible. It

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is courteous to notify or signal to the other riders in the group before doing this unless it is not convenient or possible to do so. Unless the Trail Bike clearly understands the reason for a rider's decision to drop out, normally the Trail Bike will stop with the rider who is stopping, to render aid if needed, or to determine his intentions about rejoining the group ride.

Road Captain's Job:

When a number of motorcyclists are invited for a group ride, the riders and their co-riders gather at the appointed time and place, often without knowing their specific destination or route from that point on. The Road Captain for that ride will have a route in mind and will usually have pre-ridden the route within the past week in order to look for construction and road surface problems and other situations which might affect the safety of those who are to participate. The Road Captain may appoint or volunteer experienced riders to serve as Lead Bike and/or Trail Bike, depending on the total number of bikes and the number of groups required. The other riders will determine which group they are going to ride in, and if there is an inexperienced rider along, will usually ask the Road Captain or Lead Bike to make suggestions on group positioning. The Lead Bike should determine roughly the experience level of each rider in his or her group before departing, putting the rider with the least group riding experience in the last slot position in front of the Trail Bike. The Road Captain will usually provide route directions or will have copies of maps to give the members of the group (this should be supplied to the Lead Bikes if not to all riders), and will have a rough idea of times and distances to be traveled, suggestions for rest stops, food and gas, etc. The Road Captain will hand out release of liability forms for sponsored rides, to be filled in and signed. He or she will then conduct a short riders' meeting to establish that each group has a designated Lead and Trail Bike, to review group riding procedures briefly, to alert the riders of potential hazards, to review hand signals or other communications, and to answer any questions about the ride. The Road Captain may or may not lead a group himself, and in fact may not accompany the riders at all once the ride is underway. If there are several groups of riders, the Road Captain expects all Lead Bikes to follow the route which has been laid out and not to initiate changes in the route except in an emergency. In case of problems that require emergency personnel or re-tracing a route to find a disabled rider or part of a group which has gotten lost, it is much easier to locate the person(s) sought if all groups follow the same path to their common destination. It is not unusual for groups of riders to be separated by several miles. It is also not unusual for groups to break up briefly in traffic, requiring a position-keeping rider to serve as Lead Bike or Trail Bike for a fragment of a group, for a short time.

Normal Group Riding Maneuvers

Regardless of the Lead Bike's signals, a rider is responsible for his or her own safety at all times. Ride Your Own Ride.

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Entering Traffic

When the Lead Bike for each group sees that all riders are helmeted, sitting on their bikes, motors running, and ready to depart, he or she will check for traffic and enter the roadway. Usually the Lead Bike will not attempt to exit a parking lot unless there is room for all or most of the group to follow immediately. If the group is split, the Lead Bike will normally take the slow lane and keep the speed relatively low until the group can form up in the positions the riders will keep for the duration of the ride. This may mean traveling slower than surrounding traffic to encourage cars or trucks to pass and allow the group to form up. Once all members of the group are together, the group will take up a staggered formation and will stay in it most of the time during the ride, unless the Lead Bike signals for a change or the need for a change is obvious. Reasons for changing out of a staggered formation could be a passing situation or poor road surface (single file), dog or other animal charging the group (split the group), or coming up to a traffic signal (two abreast while waiting for a light).

Changing Lanes

The recommended procedure for a group lane change maneuver depends on how the surrounding traffic is moving at the time. The goal for the bike which moves first is to create a gap into which the other bikes can fit.

Regardless of what other riders in the group are doing, each rider must personally check to see that the new lane is clear of traffic before entering it.

Changing Lanes as a Group

There is virtually no time (absent an emergency) when a group of riders should all move at the same time into a different lane, in regular traffic conditions. The wide gap required for a whole group to move is difficult to find in heavy traffic, and if it exists, it will be an invitation for other drivers to jump into it, perhaps while the group might be moving.

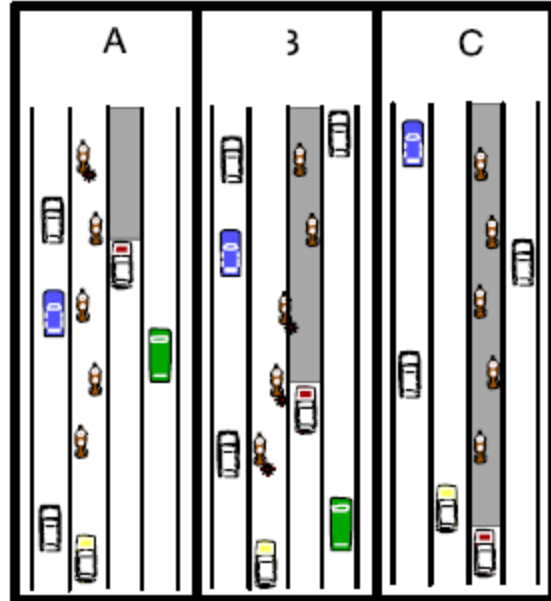
Changing Lanes into Slower-Moving Traffic

In most jurisdictions traffic laws prescribe that, on a road in which there are two lanes of traffic moving in the same direction, the lane on the right will be the slower lane. If a group of motorcyclists is going to move into the slower lane from the faster one, the first bike in a group which moves is responsible for creating a gap into which all the following bikes can fit. This is accomplished by maintaining a constant speed in order to enlarge the gap after the first bike moves. Each bike moving in succession should also be aware of this dynamic. Thus, the group moves from first to last. (An exception is the Trail Bike, which may move on its own for reasons explained later.) The first bike to move under these conditions will be the Lead Bike. The maneuver is accomplished in this way: The Lead Bike signals for the lane change using his turn signal and/or hand signal. After checking *by actually turning the head* to see that the new lane is clear of traffic, sufficient for one bike to safely enter it, the Lead Bike moves across the tracks of the current lane, taking up a position in the left track of the new lane where the Lead Bike usually rides. By maintaining the maximum speed which the traffic in that lane will allow, the Lead Bike creates a gap into which the next bike in the group can insert, moving into the right track there. Each succeeding bike follows this pattern: signal right, move right in your

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own lane, head-check, enter new lane, maintain speed to create gap, and take up regular position (left or right track) in the new lane.

The Trail Bike in this pattern is normally the last to enter the new lane, unless “closing the door” was possible. Because the bikes move quickly and re-form the group, it is rare that a car will move up into the gap in the new lane. If a car moves into the gap, the next bike to move must tuck in behind it and wait for the group ahead to slow up, encouraging the car to pass. When the car passes the slower forward group, the whole group can re-form into a normal riding configuration.



Occasionally a lane change may result in a break up and change in the formation order. During a breakup, each bike should keep its position in the resulting sub-group.

(Wherein, the bike which was unable to move into the new lane slows down and becomes for a time the Lead Bike for the left lane, while the rest of group moves ahead in the slower lane -- or, the bike which was unable to move right is forced to PASS the slower group.) This will normally be only a temporary break in formation. Temporary Lead Bikes from sub-groups should work to re-form the main group as usual behind the designated Lead Bike, in the positions they had originally. Stay alert! If forced to change positions in the formation, avoid changing tracks (crossing from one side of the lane to the other). During any period in which the bikes are changing tracks, the spacing between them is cut in half, drastically reducing the reaction time and space available to the rider in case the bike directly ahead of him becomes a problem. If the “new Lead Bike” shifts position and all the bikes following attempt to adapt to the new configuration by changing to a different track, they will then have to change back when the original group re-forms. There is no real reason to put the riders in additional jeopardy this way in order to have the “correct” formation, just for short periods. This pattern may occur not only during a lane change, but also during a passing maneuver or when a group gets separated in traffic because of signal lights and traffic flow.

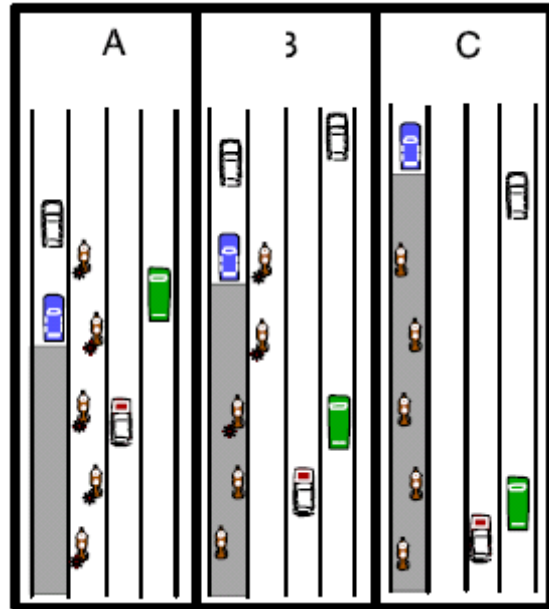
Changing Lanes into Faster-Moving Traffic

The same basic lane-changing principle for entering slow moving lanes also applies when a group is entering faster-moving traffic where at least two lanes of traffic are moving in the same direction; that is, moving from the right lane to the left. The first bike to move creates a gap for the remaining bikes. Since traffic is pulling away from the group as each member enters the lane, this maneuver is normally done back to front. The maneuver is accomplished in this manner: The Lead Bike signals for a lane change. All intermediate position-keeping bikes maintain their position, putting their own turn signals on to indicate the move to be made. The Trail Bike moves first when a space in the lane to the left opens up. Each rider must make certain the lane is clear by *actually turning his*

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head to insure that there is no other vehicle still approaching the group in the left lane.

The second bike to move will be the one in front of the Trail Bike. That rider moves across the tracks of the current lane, does a head-check, changes lane and then takes up a position in the track of the new lane where he was originally riding. By dropping to a speed slightly slower than the rate at which traffic in that lane has been traveling, each bike creates a gap into which the next bike forward can insert. Each rider follows this pattern: signal left, move left in your own lane, head-check, enter new lane, maintain (slower) speed to create gap, and take up regular position (left or right track) in the new lane. The Lead Bike in this pattern is normally the last to enter the new lane. Because the bikes move quickly and re-form their group, it is rare that a four-wheeler will move up into the gap in the new lane. If a car moves into the gap, the next bike to move must wait for the car to pass, so that a gap appears again. Then the maneuver can be completed and the group can re-form into a normal configuration.



Passing

On a busy two-lane road, oncoming traffic typically prevents a group from passing a slow-moving vehicle while in formation. Each member of the group must accomplish two lane changes in order to pass, and this usually is done on an individual basis.

Regardless of what a rider is told by others in the group about oncoming vehicles, each rider must personally check to see that the oncoming lane is clear of traffic before entering it.

If oncoming traffic requires the group to pass individually, the Lead Bike will signal the group to move into a single-file formation signaling that the group members are to pass the vehicle one at a time. The forward members of the group will gradually position themselves in single file in the left track to prepare to pull into the oncoming lane. The Lead Bike will usually wait for a gap in oncoming traffic that is big enough for more than one bike to pass, but this is not always possible. When a safe interval is observed, the Lead Bike will put its left turn signal on and pull into the oncoming lane. After passing he looks in the rear view mirror for clearance and *actually turns his head* to be sure the lane is clear, then signals that he's moving into the right lane and does so, taking his normal position in front of the slower vehicle(s). The Lead Bike must then maintain or even slightly increase its speed. As with a lane change to the right, each bike should be aware of the need to create a gap into which the next bike in succession can fit after overtaking. For this reason, each bike should maintain speed after passing, until the Trail

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Bike has passed and the group has re-formed. Special care should be taken when passing not to focus on distant oncoming traffic to the point of establishing “target fixation.” The rider should continue to scan the environment for hazards and should plan escape routes in case of the unexpected; for example, the slow vehicle may accelerate when he sees motorcycles passing him, while the rider is still in the passing lane.

Checking Out the Curves

On any stretch of curvy road and in any corner, a group may ride in single-file momentarily, to enable each rider to corner at his own speed and to have as much room as possible for maneuvering. This is especially important to riders with little experience in a group, as they may “wobble” or be nervous about making turns with another bike to their side or riding close behind them. This is an accepted variance to staggered formation; usually the Lead Bike will not signal for single-file at each turn but will expect the riders to choose their own path of travel.

Spacing Out

Especially on less-congested rural back-roads, the riders in a group may spread out to create larger intervals between motorcycles. This allows a rider to relax a bit, to enjoy the scenery and the ride. If no cars or trucks are trying to pass the group, this is fine. However, the riders should remain close enough to each other to be able to see hand signals being passed back from the Lead Bike.

If due to fatigue, inexperience, mechanical problems, etc. a rider has difficulty maintaining position and if the rider is endangering others in the group, the Lead Bike will usually discuss the problem privately with that rider at the next stop. If a problem cannot be solved reasonably in this way, the Lead Bike has absolute discretion to request that a rider leave the group and is entitled to expect the group to support this decision. In the case of a mechanical or minor medical problem, it is not unusual for another rider to accompany the distressed rider to get help. Sometimes if the Lead Bike just re-assigns the riders to new positions within the group, this is enough to bring a spaced-out motorcyclist back to a state of alert awareness.

Odd Formations and Maneuvers

Trikes, Hacks, and Trailers

Odd formations may be necessary in group riding when there is a member of the group which is not a standard two-wheel motorcycle -- an “odd duck.” This includes three-wheeled motorcycles (“trikes”), bikes with a sidecar (“hacks”), bikes towing a trailer, or four-wheelers. In each case, it’s a good idea to place the odd duck at the rear of the formation, in the last available slot. The group should also allow extra clearance and reaction time for a bike towing a trailer. Instead of a one-second interval between that bike and the next, and a two-second interval between it and the bike directly behind it in the same track, these minimum times should be doubled. For trikes and hacks, it is not so important to position these riders in a slot, but it is still a good idea, because these vehicles do not handle turns in the same way a motorcycle does. If a rider has difficulty handling an “odd duck” vehicle, the bike following it may need extra time to react, and

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the “odd duck” should not worry about being hit from the rear by a group member while he solves his problem. If there are several bikes towing trailers in a group, they should generally be riding at the back of the group, even if they are not all in slot positions. When a four-wheeler is a part of a group, it should trail the group behind the Trail Bike. Additionally, that vehicle should drive with its headlights on at all times, to enable the Trail Bike to distinguish it from other cars if possible.

Advancing Position

When a bike drops out of the group a position may be left vacant. It is customary to fill vacant positions by advancing position within the formation. CVAMC does not normally cross tracks when advancing position. The normal procedure is to advance straight ahead to an open position within the same track of the lane. The rider advancing position will wait for a signal [wave forward] from the rider in the opposite track and ahead before passing to fill the open position. Both riders must maintain their track while one rider advances. **Do not advance on curves or on narrow sections of roads.** If the rider ahead does not signal, the rider wishing to advance will wait until the next stop before filling the open position. If a rider is not comfortable advancing position, even after receiving a signal to advance, he/she may maintain position until the next stop.

IMPORTANT: Remember the Prime Directives!

Hand Signals

Certain hand signals are optional in group riding: turn signals on the bikes ahead will usually advise a rider that a turn is coming up, for example, and hand signals in a turning situation may actually add to the danger for some. However, other hand signals are extremely helpful to the rider who has no other means to communicate. The most important two hand signals are these: pointing to an obstacle in the road with a foot, warning riders to avoid it; and pointing to the tank. The rider should be advised that, no matter what his reason, if he points to the tank on his bike, he will be telling those following him (especially the Trail Bike) that he needs to stop as soon as possible. This may be because he needs fuel; because he wants to make a “potty stop”; because he is having a mechanical or equipment problem; because his co-rider is uncomfortable; because he has a medical problem; because he is having a crisis of confidence; or for any other reason at all. If a convenient place is available, the Lead Bike may orchestrate a stop by the whole group. If not, the affected bike can count on the Trail Bike to stop with him to try to help him. Other hand signals may be useful during a group ride. These include:

Back off -- Palm of left hand shown to group, pushing motion toward rear of bike

Ready to ride -- “Thumbs up” high enough in air to be visible to Lead Bike

Single-file formation -- One finger points to the sky above the helmet

Slow down -- Left arm is held out straight with palm down, and then goes up and down

Smoky alert (police or emergency vehicles) -- Hand taps top of helmet several times

Speed up or close ranks in formation -- Left arm makes “windmill” sign

Staggered formation -- First finger and little finger point to the sky above the helmet

U-turn -- Left hand makes circle in air over head

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Rubber-Band Effect

The rubber-band effect can be reduced by following these guidelines:

- Lead Bike changes speed more gradually
- Lead Bike signals speed changes
- All riders watch farther ahead than just the bike immediately in front of them in order to notice and to react quicker to changes in speed
- All riders restrain the impulse to “crank it up” in order to quickly re-establish normal spacing
- Lead Bike does not increase speed within 15 seconds of entering a curve which may require braking or some slowing down to maneuver it safely
- All riders abandon the one-second spacing rule when riding twisties
- Groups should not be larger than six bikes per group if any one rider is not experienced at group riding. Groups should never be larger than eight bikes: break the groups down into smaller ones.

Those who ride as Lead Bike for their group should be aware of the importance of avoiding sudden changes in speed if at all possible, so as to reduce the risks to those following.

Exceptions to Normal Guidelines

The often-heard rule, “***Ride Your Own Ride***,” means that any guideline for group riding can and should be ignored when it doesn’t make sense. Determining whether this is the case and acting prudently is each rider’s individual responsibility at all times. Under normal circumstances, the Lead Bike will choose a lane, will determine the speed at which the riders are to travel, will suggest the formation which makes maneuvers most safe, and will navigate. Common exceptions to these guidelines occur with a rider who is not yet experienced with group riding. If a maneuver looks too dangerous or awkward for the new rider to complete safely, he or she should do what he needs to do to protect himself and avoid an accident. This may mean passing up a turn or taking it very slowly, or parking somewhere not with the group, or going more slowly through a curve than the riders ahead of him.

Another exception: the Trail Bike may not travel in the same path or lane as the rest of the group. If, for example, a two-lane road is narrowing so that a lane is about to be lost, the Trail Bike will frequently “close the door” by moving out of the group’s staggered formation into the lane which is soon to disappear. This is to prevent a four-wheeler from trying at the last minute to pass part of the group and then have to cut into it when the pavement runs out. Even if the riders near the back of the group observe that the Trail Bike is no longer in the position where he has been riding most of the time, they should maintain their own place in the group.

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Appendix 1, Ride Briefing

Welcome, introductions and acknowledgements

Identify non-member riders; sign waiver form, determine experience

Describe:

The route

Potential hazards

The formation; including spacing

Determine and brief group composition

Number of bikes in single group or multiple groups

Establish that each group has a designated Lead and Trail Bike

Rider experience, odd ducks, and other special considerations for positioning

Review group riding procedures briefly

Hand signals or other communications

Advancing position or passing

Safety considerations

Traffic laws; group separations

Road guards; if used

Answer any questions about the ride