



Sherwood Chapter Safe Riding - Riding in a Group

This hand-out is designed for new and experienced riders and for those who want to make sure that what they do when riding in a group, i.e., ride-out is safe for the group as well as the individual.

Many experienced motorcyclists have ridden solo or with small groups on sport-bikes (usually in single file); when riding a Harley it becomes a different style of riding, particularly when riding in group formation.

Hopefully, after reading this hand-out you will feel more comfortable and safer with your riding in group formation as well as understanding what is expected from you when riding on a group ride-out.

Safe Bike, Safe Gear

You should check you Harley before you take it out of its cotton-wool wrapping in the garage. Make sure your tyre pressures and treads are healthy, your oil level is where it should be and you are fully legal – road tax, insurance, MOT, etc.

And for personal safety, riding with the correct gear- leathers, helmet, gloves, etc, is essential. It is down to individual's preference on what biking gear is worn, but there is a minimum requirement to satisfy the law – namely, your helmet.

What else you wear is up to you, but remember, you have only one pair of hands, legs, etc and once they are damaged through lack of personal protective gear, then it could mean the end of your biking.

Rules of the Road... It's the Law

When riding on the UK's roads we are all subject to the laws of the Highway as described in the Highway Code. We are all responsible for our riding habits and riding within the law. Should we decide to break the rules, e.g., speeding or riding irresponsibly, then we are liable for prosecution by the police.

Sherwood Chapter ride-outs are planned by Road Captains & Marshals and these chaps are responsible for ensuring that the route is suitable and safe for group rides. Road Captains & Marshals are not responsible for individual's riding skills and compliance with the law – it is the individual's responsibility to ride safely and within the law.

Mirrors

Mirror, signal, manoeuvre.

When riding your Harley you must be aware of those around you, especially more-so when riding in a group. You may not be responsible for those around you and how they ride, but if you are in an awkward position that puts you at risk, then you must be prepared to take appropriate action, and to do this you need space. We will talk later about keeping safe distances in group rides; however for now, remember to use your mirrors regularly.

Sometimes, group ride-outs use Road Captains & Marshals as out-riders. When riding in a group check your mirrors regularly and let out-riders and other traffic pass by safely.

There are also other reasons for using your mirrors regularly and this will be discussed later when we speak about the Buddy System.

Remember... mirror, signal, manoeuvre.

What If You Break-down?

Organized ride-outs have a Lead Rider and Tail End Charlie; with larger groups of riders, a Road Captain or Marshal will take the role of Sweeper. The Sweeper's duty is to assist with any breakdowns within the group.

Should you find yourself in the unfortunate position of having to stop due to a malfunction, the Sweeper will pull up with you and check that you are safe and assist where possible.

It is advisable that you carry breakdown insurance cover as well as a mobile phone. The Sweeper is not responsible for getting you and your Harley home.

First Aid

Most Sherwood Chapter's Road Captains & Marshals are trained for first aid. If you become ill or are injured during a ride-out, a Road Captain/Marshal will assist with First Aid where necessary.

Lead, Tail, Sweeper & Out-Riders

All ride-outs are pre-planned to ensure the ride is safe and suitable for group riding. Usually the Lead Rider is the one who has organized the route. The Lead Rider (wearing a high-vis yellow vest) will lead the ride-out and signal to the ride-out various instructions during the ride to ensure safe riding and continuity of the ride.

The Tail Rider – more commonly known as Tail-end Charlie (and wearing a high-vis orange vest) – resides at the back of the ride-out group. His role is to mark the end of the group and ensure that the group remains en route and reaches the ride-out destination.

Most ride-outs will also have a Sweeper (usually wears a high-vis yellow vest). The Sweeper's role is simply to stay at the back of the ride, just in front of the Tail-end Charlie and to assist with any breakdowns en route. He will also assist with any other issues that may arise due to heavy traffic, lost riders, etc.

On large organized ride-outs (particularly on the Continent) there may be Out-riders used to assist with the ride-out. Thankfully, the use of Out-riders is now becoming rare in the UK - it can be a dangerous activity, particularly in heavy traffic and through built-up areas, and it is recognized that the second man drop-off system is the preferred method of controlling a ride-out. Should you find yourself in a ride-out using Out-riders, then please ensure your mirrors are viewed almost as much as you look forward.

Staggered Formation & Keeping Your Distance

For new riders, the thought of riding in a group of Harleys can be intimidating. Most new riders will admit to this but once they have attended one or two ride-outs then they will come away from the ride thoroughly satisfied with the experience.

The general formation of a ride-out consists of the Lead Rider, the ride-out members and Tail-end Charlie (occasionally, there will also be a Sweeper at the back with the Tail-end Charlie).

The Lead Rider will position himself between the centre of the lane and to the left of the white lines marking the road lane; behind and to the Lead Rider's left, the '2nd Man' positions himself/herself; behind the 2nd Man is the 3rd, staggered and behind and to the right of the 2nd Man. This staggered formation continues back through the ride-out until the Tail-end Charlie. In theory, on a long straight road, the Lead Rider and Tail-end Charlie should be able to see each other between the two lines made up from the ride-out members.

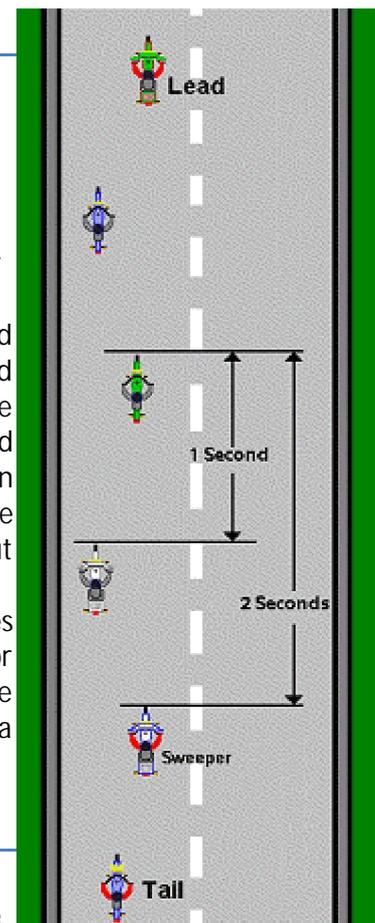
Whilst riding, always remember to use the Two Second Rule. This applies to the rider immediately in front of you, so the staggered rider to your left (or right) would be just one second in front. Only when the road narrows and the ride has to form a single file does the staggered formation rule change to a conventional single file ride with suitable spacing between the rider in front.

Watch Your Speed – Using the Buddy System

Never ride beyond your own riding capability and never ride in excess of the speed limits. The Lead Rider will ride within the speed limit and at a pace suitable for the road conditions. On urban roads and motorways/dual-carriageways, the Lead Rider will keep his speed to approximately 5mph below the limit to allow the ride-out to catch up should there be a lag in the ride-out. If you find yourself left behind due to traffic conditions, traffic lights, etc, do not panic and use excessive speed to catch up – the Lead Rider makes allowances for this and provided you ride to your speed limit, you will catch up and regroup.

There is also a system in use that also helps prevent the ride-out group from fragmenting. This is known as the Buddy System. Each rider uses their mirrors on a regular interval and part of their observation is to make sure they can see the rider behind them. Should a rider see the person behind fall back substantially, then he/she should slow down. This has the effect of slowing down the whole ride-out until the Lead Rider notices that the ride-out has fallen back. The Lead Rider will then pull over and wait for the rest of the ride-out to re-group.

It is important that you stay within the speed limits, but in doing so it is also important that riders also keep up with the ride-out in front. Riding with excessive gaps in the group (ie, allowing the two second rule



to extend to three or more seconds) encourages other traffic to break into the group causing a break-up of the group. This can cause frustration for all and as a result could see some bad driving/riding and ultimately cause an accident. So, keep up.

Should other road users decide to overtake ride-out members, then allow this to occur, do not put yourself at risk by obstructing other road users. Use your mirrors regularly and if necessary, pull to the left to allow the traffic to pass by – this is more often sports bikers trying to filter through a ride-out.

The Best Bit 'till Last – The Second Man Drop-off

Once the Lead Rider is satisfied that the ride-out group are ready he will lead off with the ride-out behind him forming up into the staggered formation with the 2nd Man to the left of the Lead Rider. The use of the indicators on the Harley will indicate to other traffic, including the ride-out, where he intends to turn or change lanes (on dual carriageways for example). Other signals directed to the ride-out will take the form of simple hand signals. Each individual Road Captain or Marshal might have a different style for hand-signals, but generally these will consist of a forefinger pointing toward a curb when he expects a 2nd Man drop-off. During a ride-out the 2nd Man can expect to be dropped off at one of the following places:

Left Turn Junction

The simplest drop-off is the left turn junction. The Lead Rider, when he wants the ride-out to take a left turn, will, as he approaches a left junction, to the curb. The 2nd Man will indicate left and pull over, placing himself in a position that is clearly visible to the ride-out members and other traffic. He must not stop where he places himself/herself at risk.

Right Turn Junction

As the Lead Rider approaches a right turn junction, he will indicate a turn right and then, using his left hand, will point once again to the curb. The 2nd Man will pull over to the curb if safe to do so, and then point to the right so that the ride-out can clearly see that the ride-out has taken the right turn junction.

Alternately, if the right turn junction is open and has no visible obstructions, then the 2nd Man will take the right turn and then immediately pull over allowing the rest of the ride-out to see that he has taken the right turn junction.

Traffic Lights

Traffic lights are treated in the same way as regular road junctions. Should the route for the ride-out be straight through a traffic lights, cross-roads, etc, then there is no requirement for a 2nd Man to drop off; however it is good practice, and reassurance for the ride-out to have a man drop off if practicable.

Roundabouts

The Lead Rider, as he takes an exit off a roundabout, will once again point to a curb. The 2nd Man will pull over where it is safe to do so and in sight of oncoming ride-out and traffic to indicate which exit was taken off the roundabout by the ride-out.

Ghost islands

At traffic lights, roundabouts and some large road junctions, ghost islands are used to control traffic. It is rare but on occasions, where safe to do so, a Lead Rider may utilize the ghost island as an early indication marker for the ride-out as they approach the junction/roundabout. Note that the ghost island can only be used provided there are broken white lines surrounding the ghost island. Be aware that ghost islands may have loose debris accumulated on them and can be slippery hence the use of ghost islands is not encouraged.

Forks in the Road

The rule of thumb on ride-outs is if you are at a junction such as a crossroads, and the ride-out is travelling straight through the junction, then there is no requirement for a drop-off. It is good practice to give assurance to the ride-out to drop off someone; however, sometimes this is not practicable. Should you arrive at a road junction crossroads with no 2nd Man drop-off, continue through the junction on the same road that you approached on.

Confusion can arise where there is a fork in the road however. Lead Riders will indicate a 2nd Man drop-off to indicate which forked road is the desire route for the ride-out.

Multiple Drop-offs

Where there is a complex road configuration or busy road traffic, the Lead Rider may choose to drop off more than one person. An example may be a large roundabout where the Lead Rider will indicate a 2nd Man drop off on the approach to a roundabout (perhaps utilizing a ghost island) and then another drop-off at the roundabout exit road.

It's Your Choice

Remember, your safety is your responsibility. The Lead Rider will always consider road safety and drop-off options, however road conditions are continually changing and a planned drop-off might not be as originally thought. Always make sure that you stop in a safe position and well visible to all traffic and ride-out. If necessary, park up the Harley and stand on a pavement and point to oncoming ride-out to show direction of drop-off route.

Patience

In heavy traffic or built-up areas, the ride-out may become heavily fragmented and split up. Be patient and wait for the Tail-end Charlie before leaving your designated drop-off point. If you leave too early the ride-out will get split up and the latter part of the ride-out will miss the turn and get lost.

If the ride-out does get split up, stay at your drop-off point. Using the Buddy System, the Lead Rider will eventually stop and wait for the ride-out to regroup. If the ride-out has split, the Lead Rider will organize a Road Captain/Marshal or experienced rider from the group to back-track along the route and pick up the stragglers en route.

It is not a rare event to lose part of a ride-out, and 99% of the time, the ride-out is lost simply because ride-out members do not follow these simple rules of dropping off when requested and waiting for the Tail-end Charlie.

Rejoining the Ride-out

As the Tail-end Charlie (and Sweeper) approach the drop-off point, he/they will slow down to allow the drop-off rider to rejoin the group in front of the Tail-end Charlie (and Sweeper). The rider will then stay at the end of the ride-out taking his place in the staggered formation at the tail end until he is superseded by the next drop-off rider who rejoins the group at the next junction. If, however, traffic conditions do not allow this, then you must rejoin the carriageway when safe to do so and rejoin the Ride-out – the Tail-end Charlie will slow down to allow you to catch up. Once safe to do so, overtake the Tail-end Charlie (and Sweeper) and rejoin the Ride-out.

Eventually, if the ride-out duration is long enough and there are ample junctions then the tail end riders will make their way back to the front of the ride-out to become the 2nd Man once again.

Crossing Over

Probably one of the most hazardous manoeuvres carried out en masse by the ride-out group is the cross-over. This occurs when the 2nd Man is dropped off and the 3rd Man then becomes promoted into the 2nd Man position behind the Lead Rider. The new 2nd Man crosses the lane from behind (or to the right) of the Lead Rider, to the left of the Lead Rider. The new 3rd Man then has to manoeuvre from the left side of the ride-out to the right and so on all the way through the ride-out until the Tail-end Charlie is reached. Use your mirrors, signal and then manoeuvre.

Ride & Have Fun

Finally, riding in a group of Harleys is one of the most exciting experiences you will have when riding on a motorcycle. Many Harley riders may not admit it, but they enjoy a long ride to a rally than the rally itself. It's all about riding your chrome & steel and having fun.

Keep safe, ride well and enjoy.