

ROAD CAPTAIN GUIDE



revision 8



Dear Road Captains,

This RC Guide will give you some guidelines as to what your role is in your Club or Chapter, how to ensure the safety of your fellow riders and how to interact with other traffic before, during and after a ride.

This guide, in no way, dictates what you should be doing as a RC but merely sets the foundation for you to build on and develop a system that works for you in your Club or Chapter.

You will also find some helpful illustrations indicating how Group Rides should be managed on the road and through intersections; a chart with universal Hand Signals is also included.

As for the content of this RC Guide, please don't copy or reproduce this in any way or format without my written consent. I've worked long hours to put this together for you and I know you will respect that.

This RC Guide is FREE and will stay that way.

In October 2009 the first Road Captain Course in South Africa was presented to 30 members of the KZN Motorcycle Federation, and in July 2010 to more than 50 members of the Vaal Presidents Counsel.

I am willing and available to do this in order to promote Motorcycle Safety and Skill in your Area. Bike Talk M.R.A. is the only academy in South Africa who presents a course at this level.

Here's to you, your Club or Chapter and a safer motorcycling experience!

Yours in Motorcycle Rider Skills Development,

Hein Jonker

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Preparing for a Group Ride

The Road Captain's Job

A Road Captain, while on the road, is the one to ensure and maintain order on the ride no matter how big or small the group; enforces certain safety rules regarding gear, bike and riding manner. During the ride the Road Captain is in charge of safety, compliance and discipline. The Road Captain is also the one who leads a group on a ride with appointed Marshal and Sweep Riders to help in fulfilling his function.

Regular talks on riding safety should be held to ensure consistency among riders.

Before the Ride

When a number of motorcyclists are invited for a group ride, the riders and their pillioners 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 will appoint or volunteer experienced riders to serve as Sweep Riders and Marshal, 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 to make suggestions on group positioning. The Road Captain should determine roughly the experience level of each rider in his or her group before departing, putting the rider with the least experience in front of the group behind the President/Leader, away from oncoming traffic.

The Road Captain will usually provide a Route Memo or will have copies of maps or directions to give the members of the group (this should be supplied to the Sweep Riders if not to all riders), and will have a rough idea of times and distances to be travelled, suggestions for rest stops, food and fuel.

Those not properly geared up for his/her own safety and that of others should in actual fact not be allowed on the ride. If riders want to ride in shorts, t-shirts and slops, they could do so in their own time and on their own ride. Mutual respect for one another's safety should be schooled into all members.

The Road Captain will then conduct a short riders' meeting to establish that each group has a designated Lead and Sweep Rider, to review group riding guidelines briefly, to alert the riders of potential hazards, to discuss communications within and between the groups, to review hand signals and to answer any questions about the ride.

The Road Captain may lead the group himself, and will be in charge while the ride is underway.

If there are several groups of riders, the Road Captain expects all Sweep Riders 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 kilometres during a long trip or in heavy traffic. It is also not unusual for groups to break up briefly in traffic.

The appointment of Marshal and Sweep Riders should be done according to the number of riders in the group; smaller groups (5 - 8 riders) may for instance only be able to have one Lead and one Sweep Rider.

Safety, in all its forms, is the pinnacle of your responsibility as Road Captain:

The Bike: Tyres, Lights, Frame, Brakes, Mirrors, Licensed, Legal Plates

The Gear: Boots, Pants, Jacket, Gloves, Helmet

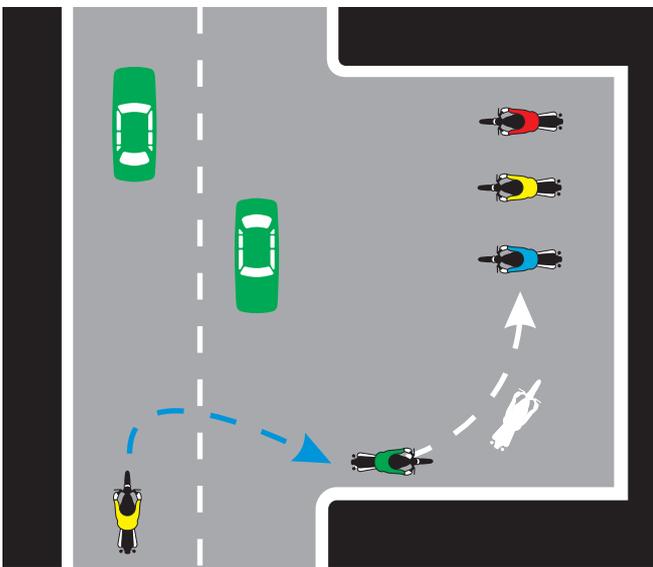
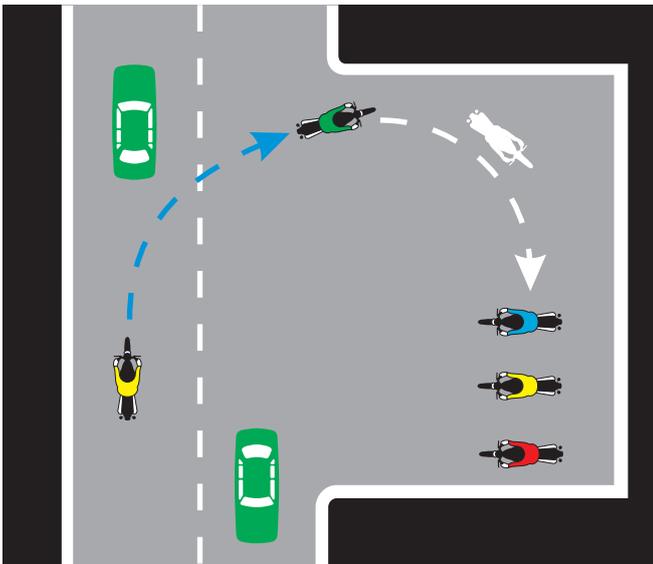
The Rider: Licensed, attitude on the road and towards other riders



Preparing for a Group Ride

After the Ride

Upon arrival bikes should be parked in the most convenient and safe way, making the departure quick, safe and efficient. (Motorcycles facing the exit or direction of departure and in the sequence they arrived)



PARKING

You should, at all stops, inform any rider of incorrect riding so he/she can take note before continuing the ride.

Certain checks must be done before riding again depending on the distance travelled, i.e. clean helmet visors, refuel, tyre pressures, visit the bathroom and freshen-up, take in liquid, take a breather, discuss the road back or ahead, etc.

Marshaling

This may only be done when and where the situation warrants, i.e. Emergency Traffic Control or Mass Ride Traffic Control and not on group rides with less than 15 to 20 riders.

With **Traffic Authorities not present**, you have the right to direct the flow of motorcycle traffic in a swift manner to not interfere with normal traffic conditions, with the safety of your fellow motorcyclists as your primary concern.

With **Traffic Authorities present** you will stand and assist only. Their concern is to direct normal traffic and you are to work with them, getting the motorcyclists on their way as soon as possible. Ensure the wearing of the "Road Captain's Vest" or "Bibs" at all times. All Road Captains to assist during Mass Rides and briefed in detail regarding the route and points of placement.

Two Road Captains or a Road Captain and his Marshal should be present at any point of traffic control.

Substance Abuse

If you are serious about safety and you care about your fellow riders the message is clear.

BOOZE AND BIKES DON'T MIX!

An intoxicated rider should not be allowed to ride and may be assisted by the support vehicle or sit it out with a fellow rider until sober enough to ride on.

You as the Road Captain should set an example especially with guests or prospects present.



Common Group Riding Terms

Mass Ride

A large number of motorcyclists who ride together, generally without maintaining fixed positions or distances between motorcycles. Mass Rides are occasionally seen with 50 and more motorcyclists in any given or suitable formation.

Group Ride

A small number of motorcyclists who ride together maintaining a generally fixed distance between motorcycles and maintaining fixed positions within the formation, usually no more than 10 to 15 motorcycles per group. On rides in which participation by a large number of motorcyclists occurs; it is common to have riders divided into several groups naming them Group 1, Group 2, etc.

Road Captain

A person who devises group riding rules or guidelines for a club or chapter of a motorcycling organization, who communicates these guidelines to the club, and who generally plans and lays out group rides. The Road Captain may or may not ride lead for a particular ride. The rear Road Captain may roam up and down next to the group to ensure that all riders are still following safe procedures and that any luggage are still secured.

Road Captain may appoint Marshals for Mass Ride Management.

Marshal

A person, positioned behind the Road Captain, who assists with traffic control at intersections or any point where tasked by the Road Captain.

Marshals, on a Mass Ride, should be at any given point of duty well before the Mass Ride starts.

Lead Rider / President

A person who rides in the position just behind the Road Captain (excluding the Marshal) in a group and who relays information to all other riders in the group via hand signals. The Lead Rider 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. It is the responsibility of the Lead Rider to select an appointed Sweep Rider with whom communications will be coordinated during a ride.

If there are three groups on a ride, there will be three Lead Riders.

Sweep Rider

A person who rides in the last position in a group and who relays information to the Road Captain regarding the other riders in the group, traffic patterns, equipment problems, etc. he or she observes. The Sweep Rider must secure a lane for the rest of the group during lane changes into faster traffic; move first to block oncoming traffic from the rear and move to block passed traffic when a lane is lost in a merging lane situation, usually this is one of the most experienced riders in a group.

Support Rider

A person who stops to assist a fellow rider who has mechanical trouble, loses control, or drops out of a ride for some other reason. The Support Rider should be prepared to render aid to a downed or disabled rider in a group while communicating the problem to the Lead Rider and others in the group. If at all possible, the Support Rider should be equipped with a Cell Phone and, preferably, will have a pillion 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 Sweep Riders and one Support Rider.

The rider in this position is sometimes called the 'tail-gunner' or 'rear guard'.

Single File Formation

A formation in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride in one track of a lane, two seconds travel between bikes in the same track of a single lane.

Staggered Formation

A formation of motorcyclists in a group in which the Road Captain rides in the middle track of a lane, the next bike in the left track or slot, and the next bike in the right track, and so on. Riders 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 this formation, a rider may ride in the entire width of his lane as needed.

It is preferable for the Sweep Rider to ride in the middle track, to have the same visibility line as the Road Captain and Lead Rider.

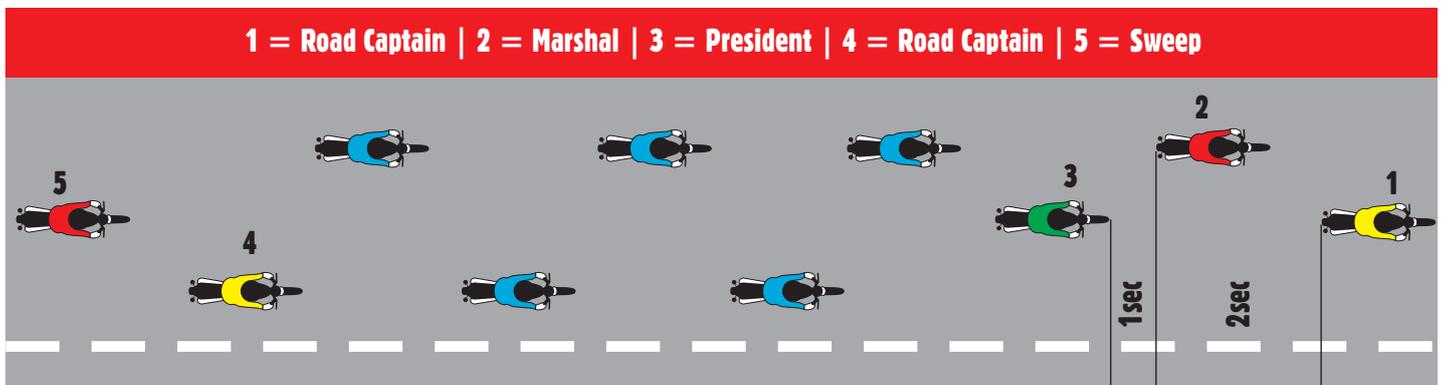
Formation Riding

There are two general formations one can ride in as a group; **staggered** or **single file**.

Staggered – This formation is the preferred riding style for general riding and for its overall safety of all participants in the group. Alternating rider positions on either side of the lane being travelled ensures that everyone is able to maintain visual contact of fellow riders. The President will ride in the middle of the lane; the first rider following will ride on the left hand side of the lane; the second rider rides on the right-hand 3rd of the lane and so on. Riders wait in pairs at stops but should never ride side-by-side in the same lane unless done on parades at speeds of up to 40km/h. Pulling off from stops, first in, first out ...

Riders should keep a 2 second gap between him / herself and the rider directly in front of him / her. Should a rider fall out of the formation, the rider directly behind where the gap was created, shall move up to fill the gap. NEVER CHANGE LANES within the formation in order to fill gaps.

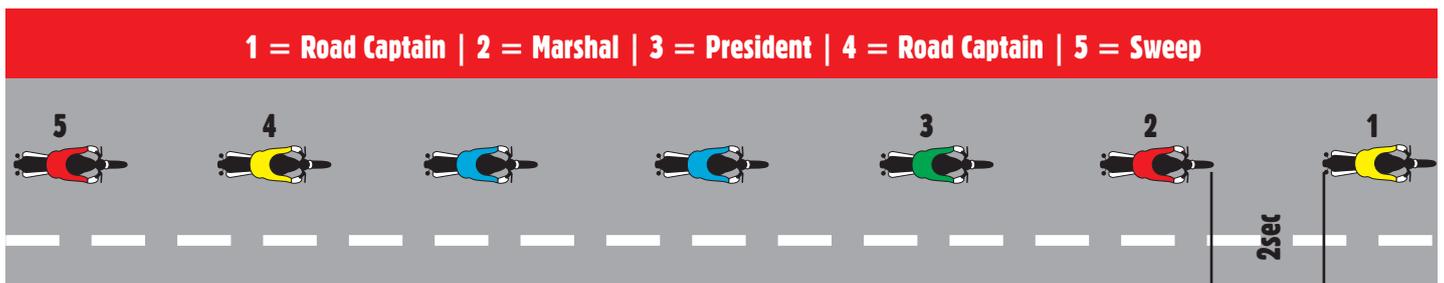
New riders should ride in the front of the group and more experienced riders in the back giving way to Marshals coming through. Regardless of the size of the group, this alternating positioning of motorcycles should be consistent.



Single File – In certain situations, it is safer for the group to ride in single file. The single file formation is best used when more room to manoeuvre might be needed such as on narrow and/or curvy roads, in poor visibility, at tollbooths, entering and leaving highways, on roads with bad surfaces, when entering a traffic circle, difficult traffic situations or in any other situation where more space cushion is needed.

All riders should maintain the 2 second gap between him / herself and the rider directly in front of him / her. Please note that as soon as the group moves from Staggered to Single File formation, there will only be a 1 second gap between each bike. The two second gap should be achieved as soon as safely possible after moving into the single file to ensure a big enough safety cushion. Single File Formation allows for easier manoeuvrability of the group but creates a much longer group.

This formation is good for night riding due to the fact that you won't be blinded by your mirrors from a motorcycle's headlights behind you.



Large groups, where possible, should be broken up into smaller manageable groups each with its own Road Captain and Sweep Rider. Groups can also be broken up into "Fast", "Easy" and "Slow" Riders to ensure an enjoyable ride for everyone. Marshals or additional Road Captains should be appointed for every 10 - 15 riders.

Marshaling

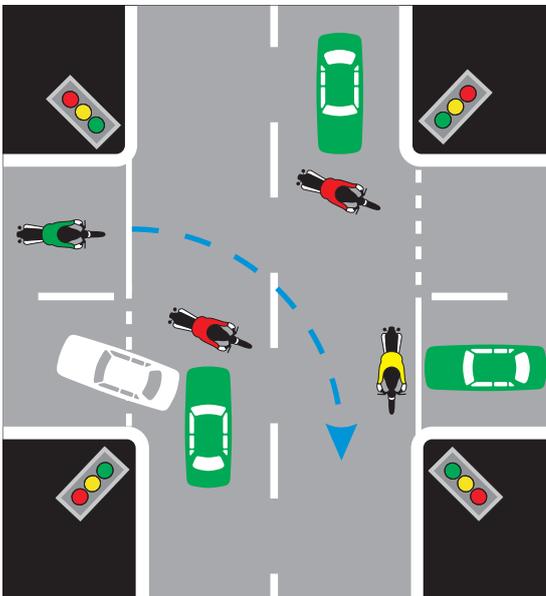
Intersections

Moving a group through town can be a daunting task and dealing with traffic intersecting with your route requires a hands-on attitude from the Road Captain and his Ride Officers (Marshal, Sweep Rider).

As the group moves on route and when safe, the Road Captain will initiate a block at an intersection with Marshals following on their required points. A Sweep Rider or rear Road Captain then relieves the Marshal to continue onto the next intersection. This method is repeated for as long as it is necessary.

The rear Road Captain, relieving the Marshal, is also the last to leave once the whole group has moved through the Intersection. The Marshal / Road Captain has to make his way past the group safely and on time for the next intersection.

On Mass Rides block traffic using your motorcycle, dismount and stand to marshal. On smaller Group Rides, a quick block and marshal while sitting on your motorcycle is allowed.

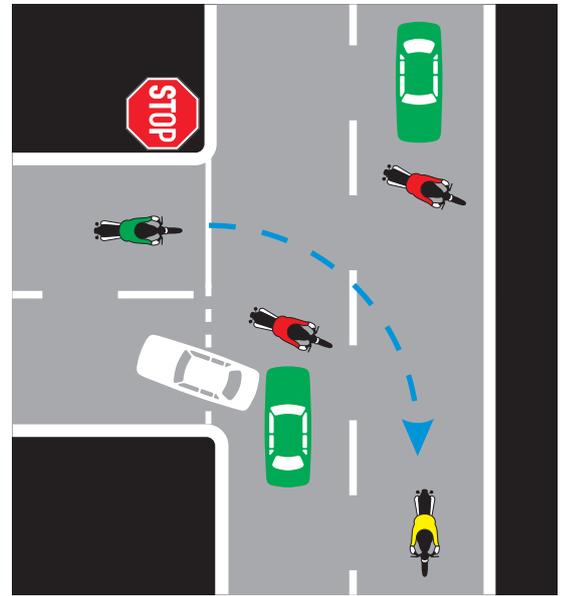


4 WAY MARSHAL

IMPORTANT

On Mass Rides, Road Captains and Marshals should be at their Points of Duty well before the Mass Ride starts.

The Route and Points must be confirmed well before the Mass Ride starts.



3 WAY MARSHAL

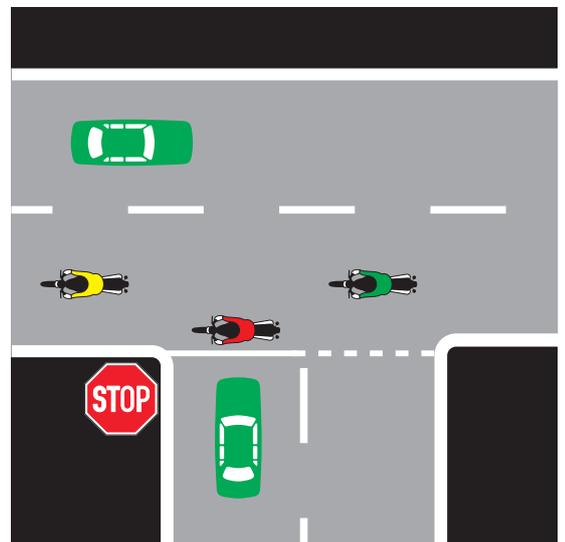
Side Streets or On-Ramps

In this case the Marshal immediately behind the lead Road Captain will initiate a block preventing other vehicles from entering the group formation.

A Sweep Rider or rear Road Captain then relieves the Marshal to continue onto the next intersection. This method is repeated for as long as it is necessary.

The rear Road Captain, relieving the Marshal, is also the last to leave once the whole group has moved past the side street or on-ramp. The Marshal / Road Captain has to make his way past the group safely and on time for the next intersection.

On Mass Rides block traffic using your motorcycle, dismount and stand to marshal. On smaller Group Rides, a quick block and marshal while sitting on your motorcycle is allowed.



SIDE STREET / ON-RAMPS

Group Riding in General

Ride the Plan

A pre-ride discussion of your plans, preferences, and requirements helps everyone avoid surprises. Talk about pace, signals, details like fuel or refreshment stops, the route and what to do in an emergency; make sure everyone gets to offer something.

Be Aware

A group of motorcycles is a dynamic unit. It constantly changes from second to second as speed, weather, traffic, and road conditions change, and as rider fatigue increases. When riding in a group you become a part of that unit, and your actions affect more than just yourself, they affect all those riding around you. Be aware of what's going on around you at all times. Stay alert and keep an eye on the Road Captain, his Ride Officers and President at all times. You can gawk at the scenery some other time. Be sure your bike is in good running condition BEFORE the ride; otherwise stay home or ride your own ride.

Formation

Riding side-by-side, in a column of two's, is NOT SAFE. Ride in a Staggered or Single-file Formation; stay two seconds behind the bike directly in front of you, and one second behind the bike to your left or right front.

Everyone must maintain a constant speed and distance from everyone else, without falling back and speeding up, to avoid the notorious "Slinky" effect.

Duties

The Road Captain rides in front, the President will ride just behind the Marshal in the middle of the lane. The Marshals will block cross-traffic at any intersections, when required or instructed to do so by the Road Captain. Once the entire group has passed through, the Marshals will make their way back up the group in a safe and swift manner.

Behind the President come the least experienced riders. Behind the Members and Prospects ride any guests.

Additional Road Captains or Sweep Riders last in the group, followed only by the support vehicle/s. The Senior Road Captain sets the pace. If the pace is not to your liking, talk it over with him at the next stop, but until then, try and KEEP UP!

One common problem I see with large groups is a failure to provide gaps for other traffic. On a two-lane road, it may be impossible for overtaking traffic to safely pass a line of a dozen or more motorcycles. Some members of the group may get run off the road if a driver tries to pass and has to pull back into the right lane when oncoming traffic appears. On a multi-lane road a long double column of motorcycles may trap a car on one side of it, blocking it from reaching an exit. Some riders act as if permitting a car to cross their column of bikes is a violation of their religious and constitutional rights, and can make a driver already in a panic about missing his exit quite dangerous.

Do address this problem. It's best to ride in sub-groups of eight to ten bikes and provide a gap of four or more car lengths between each sub-group. These groups can also be responsible for each other, taking care of other members of their group so that the entire fleet of bikes doesn't end up trying to squeeze onto the shoulder, which can create a real hazard.

If the group is stopping, make sure that everyone gets completely off the road. If you are arriving at a destination with a large group, bikes at the front should keep moving to allow room for the one behind to pull off the road.

Difficulties

Anyone dropping out of formation should let a Sweep or Support Rider know if they DO NOT need help. Unless you tell him/her otherwise, if you drop out of the column, the Support Rider will also drop out along with a support vehicle. If you signal the Support Rider not to stop, you are on your own until you rejoin the group. If your buddy drops out of formation, don't drop out with him unless you have a real need to do so. The Support Rider and/or support vehicle will take care of the situation. To help your group get together again, use these three systems:

1. Give everyone an emergency phone number in writing to call.
2. Be precise, "the first Shell Petrol Station on your left just past the R603/Kingsburgh off-ramp," for example.
3. Make sure everyone knows the destination and a possible route map on hand.
4. The golden rule applies: All out on the ride; all back in from the ride. No-one gets left behind to ride on his own.

Group Riding in General

Hand Signals (see page 10)

Hand signals should be used by all riders, and passed along to those behind you. EVERYONE in the group must know what your signals mean before you leave your start point.

Changing Lanes (see page 9)

When the column is moving on the highway and needs to change lanes, the column will do so starting with the REAR (Sweep Rider) of the group. While this seems strange at first, once you experience it you'll understand how it increases the safety of such a move. The mechanics of such a lane change are as follows:

- The lead Road Captain will indicate a lane change by signalling either to the left or right before changing lanes.
- The Sweep Rider will change lanes next, in order to block any traffic from passing.
- The remainder of the group will change lanes from the front to the rear.

Use your mirrors and check your blind spot BEFORE changing lanes! Change lanes smoothly and give other riders plenty of space. This is not a race to see who can go sideways the fastest.

Motorcyclists riding in large groups consistently do a bad job of passing slower traffic on two-lane roads, which can create a dangerous situation.

Typically they cut back in too close to the car they just passed and immediately slow down. This not only annoys the driver, it leaves little room for the next rider coming up from behind. He or she has to wedge in even closer to the front of the car being passed. I have seen riders get locked out of the lane because those ahead left no space for them to pass.

When passing a car on a road with only one lane going each direction, keep your speed up after you have completed the pass, and don't slow back down until there is a gap large enough for all the riders behind you to pull back in and safely decelerate. Be aware of what the riders behind you are doing. If you are further back in the group, don't begin your pass until there is a gap ahead of the car big enough for you and the riders in your sub-group.

Intersections (see page 6)

Moving a group through town can be a daunting task and dealing with traffic intersecting with your route requires a hands-on attitude from the Road Captain and his Ride Officers.

As the group moves on route, the Marshal/s will initiate a block at an intersection (when necessary), a Sweep Rider or rear Road Captain then relieves the Marshal to continue on to the next intersection. This method is repeated for as long as it is necessary.

Food / Fuel Stops

Fuel up before the ride starts, and be sure that you have enough fuel to reach the next stop. Everyone must stay together and stop at every scheduled fuel stop. Typical stops are 150-200 km's apart, so that bikes with small tanks will not have to leave the formation. If you have 25 litre tanks, you should only have to fuel up at every other stop. If this is the case, try to pair up with another bike with a big tank and alternate fuelling up. This will keep re-fuelling time to a minimum at any one stop. At each stop along the way, follow the Road Captain into the facility. He will go by the re-fuelling area to the staging area where he has chosen to form up the group for departure after re-fuelling.

If you need to re-fuel, stop at the pumps, otherwise, fall in behind him and park. If he needs fuel, he will go back after showing you where to form up.

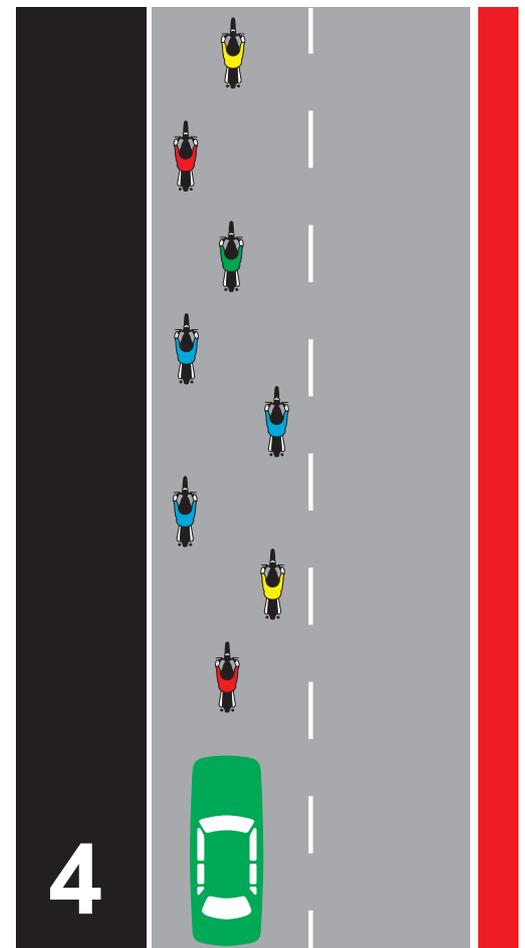
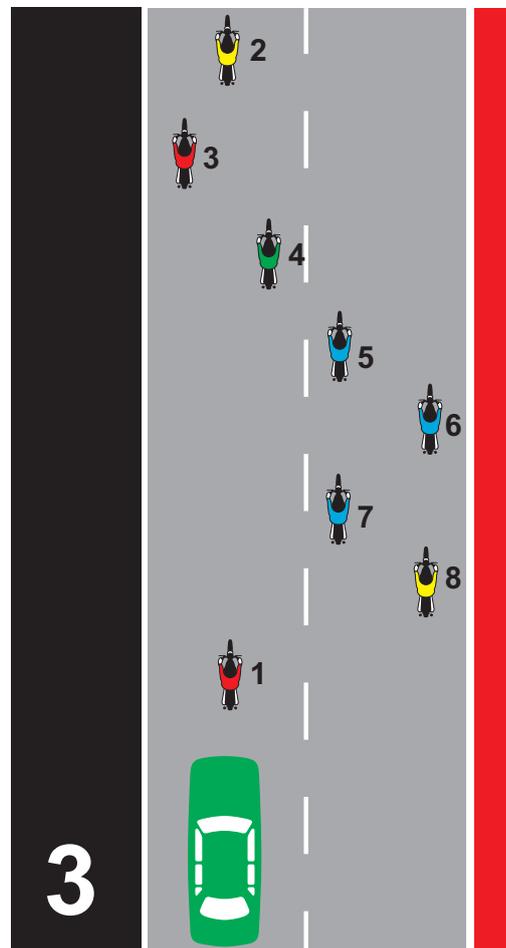
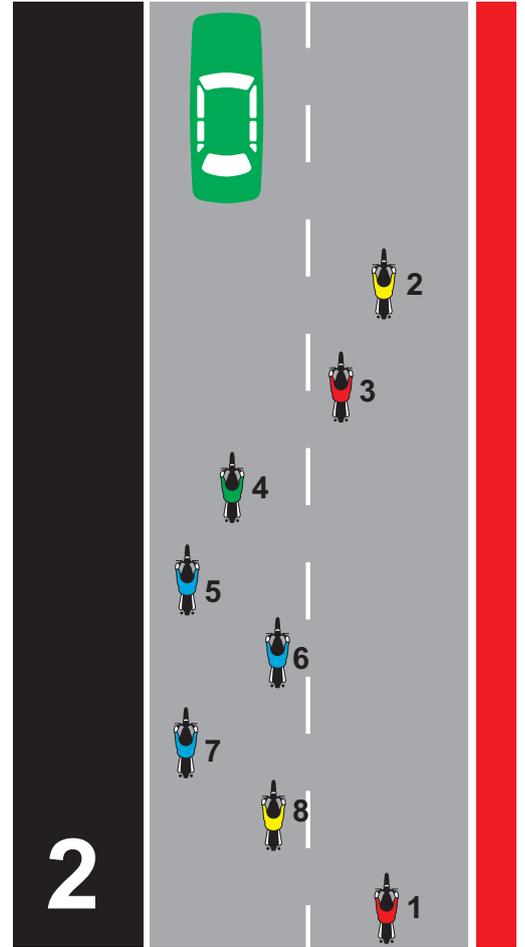
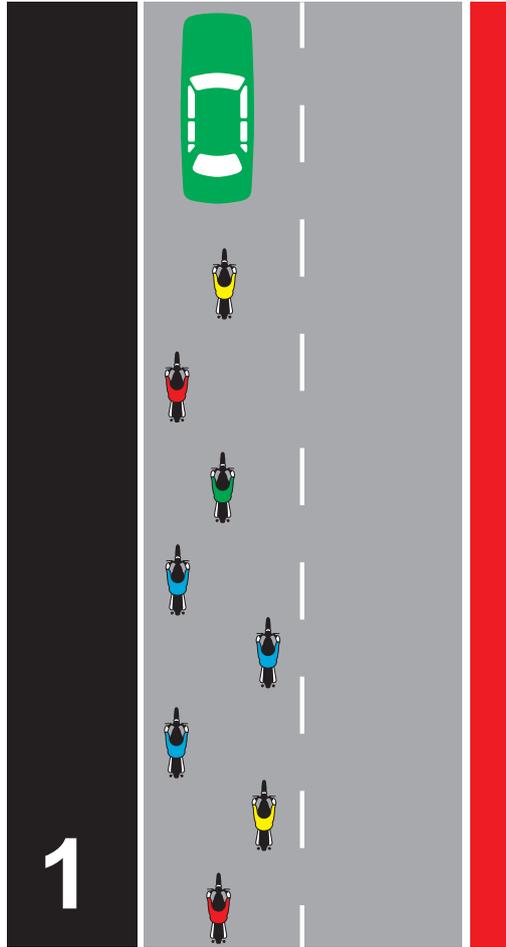
Consider refuelling whether you need to or not, you never know if there will be fuel at the next stop or not.

As soon as you have re-fuelled, move your bike to the staging area. Keep in mind that you don't need to be in the same position in the group for each leg of the trip. When the Road Captain signals to start up the bikes in preparation for departure, raise your hand when your bike is running until he sees that you're ready! When leaving each stop, the group will go slowly until the Sweep Rider signals to the Road Captain that everyone is formed up properly. Only then will the group accelerate to cruising speed.

Unscheduled Stops

If the Road Captain pulls over to the side of the road, STAY IN FORMATION and pull over behind him. If stopped by Traffic Authorities, the President and the Road Captain will deal with them -- everyone else, keep your mouth shut unless specifically addressed by the officer.

Lane Change Chart



Hand Signals Chart

Stop: Arm extended straight down, palm facing back



Single File: Arm and index finger extended straight up



Turn Signal On: Open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



Slow Down: Arm extended straight out, palm facing down



Double File: Arm with index and middle finger extended straight up



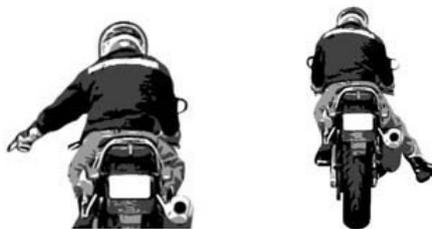
Fuel: Arm out to side pointing to the tank with finger extended



Speed Up: Arm extended straight out, palm facing up



Hazard in Road: on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand



Refreshment Stop: Fingers closed, thumb to mouth



You Lead: Arm extended, pointing with index finger, swing arm back to front



Highbeam: Tap on top of helmet with open palm down



Comfort Stop: Forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion



Follow Me: Arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward



Pull Off: Arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder



NO SIGNALS OF AGGRESSION, FEEL FREE TO PUT A HAND UP IN THANKS WHEN PASSING



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