



BMW Motorcycle Club
Pretoria, South Africa



Rider Guide

Riding in a group brings a set of dynamics different to riding solo.

The basic question is - how do you keep a group of riders together, safe, and supportive?

When riding together, the BMW Motorcycle Club Pretoria has some pretty easy rules:

- **Stay behind the Ride Leader; never pass him/her.**
- **The designated Sweep rides at the back; don't fall behind him/her.**
- **Ride in a Staggered formation (as explained below).**

Simple as these seem, few riders seem to understand the meaning of these rules, and many fail to observe them. Although to many they are simply common sense, perhaps it is not enough to state the rules, but to explain what they are for. There are, of course, other rules that seem so obvious that one shouldn't have to mention them. These include, but are not limited to:

- **The Prime Directive - Do not hit the bike in front of you!**
- **NEVER pass a fellow rider on the left!**

So what is the real answer? Better understanding of the rules? Or simpler rules? Well, it is a bit of both...

This guide therefore sets out to explain the application of the basic rules as well as to outline a simple and easy way to apply these rules proven to be very effective.

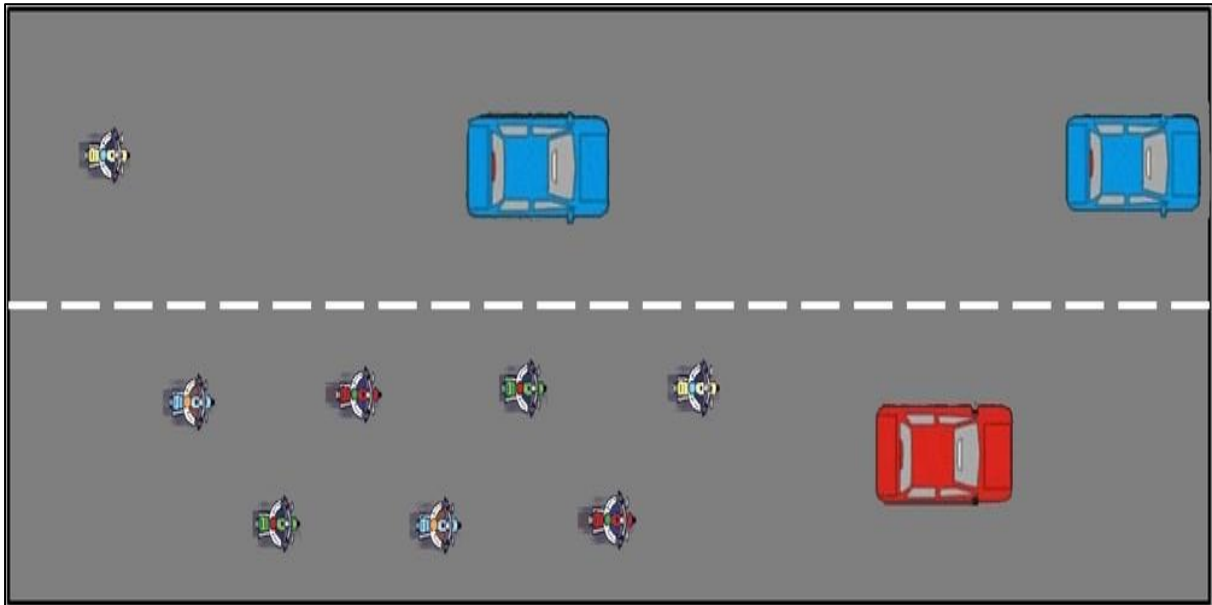
How do we manage a group of riders, riding together, in such a way that they are safe and provide mutual support? This question encapsulates many aspects with only some outlined below:

- Bikes have a tendency to crash into one another.
- People in the group miss a turn and get lost, often leading to part of the group falling far behind or landing up in dangerous areas before anyone notices.
- One bike has a problem like a puncture or empty tank and it is an hour before the leader knows about it.
- Bikes follow one another into a dangerous situation and you end up with a multiple bike crash.
- And the list goes on....

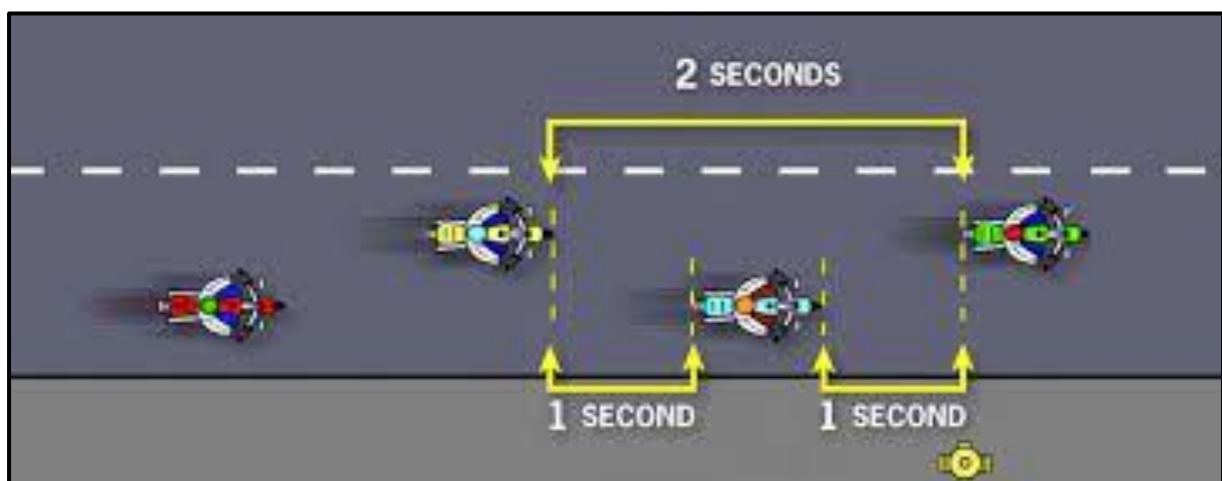
The problem with any set of rules is that it has to cover diverse situations, from high-speed country riding to the slow robot-to-robot shuffle. Herewith the basic rules to avoid the most common problems when riding in a group.

Staggered Formation

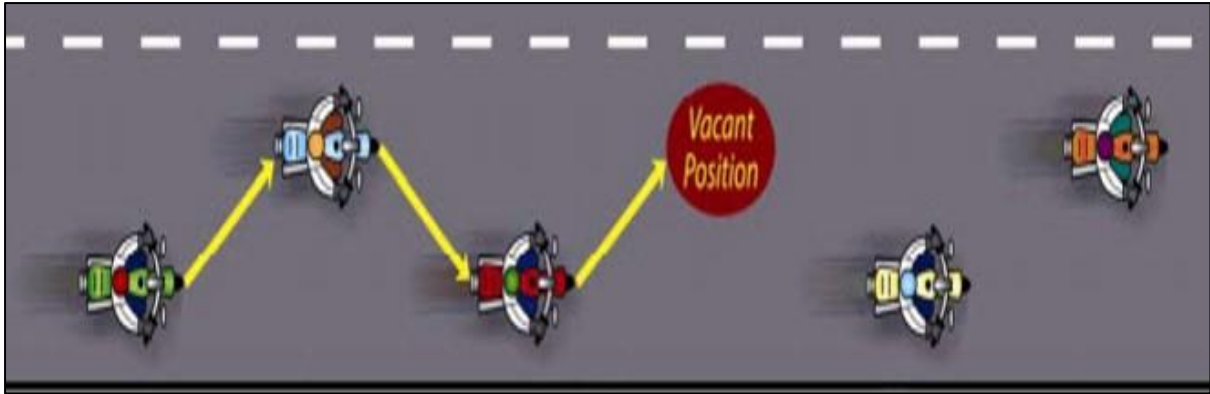
Most of us will have heard of this, and been instructed to use staggered formation, Why ride in Staggered formation? When riding, your safe stopping or reaction distance is a function of the open space in front of you. Put another way, the distance of clear road directly in front of you is your safety area. First let's define a unit and use a "bike length" as the length of the bike PLUS the distance required to stop.



When riding, bikes need about a full lane width to ride comfortably. This allows for some space to manoeuvre. However, in an emergency, a half lane width will do with space to brake in. So when riding together, smart bikers stagger their position to allow the bike behind them a safety margin, and to allow themselves the same margin. You now have *THREE* bike lengths in which to stop, instead of one. Also the bike behind you has space in which to pass you under heavy braking should they have to. Double the safety.



What happens when riders move out of the staggered formation or change positions? In short – *fix the stagger*. If the bike in front of you shifts from one side to the other, shift to the opposite side, maintaining the formation. The bike behind you will follow suit. The Ride Leader and Sweep will take-up the centre position of a lane in order to have a clear view of riders in the group and the road ahead.



In some instances it may be necessary to “break” formation, but only for good reasons and in the interest of safety. Here are some good reasons:

- *The staggered formation rule does not mean you should ride through a pothole or patch of oil.* If you see something potentially dangerous in your path, move around it, and signal to the rider behind you to look out, by flashing your hazard lights or pointing at the road surface with hand or foot. Get back to your side as soon as it is safe to do so.
- *You should not attempt to keep a staggered riding formation through tight bends.* This is extremely dangerous and riders should follow the best and safest line through a bend irrespective of fellow riders’ position. Safe following distances and returning to formation after the bend is key.

Ride Your Own Ride

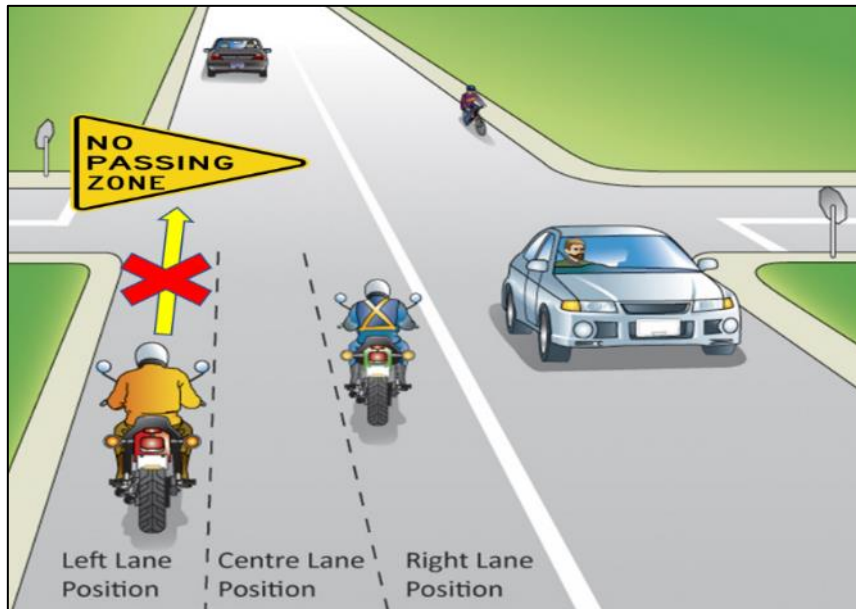
When following a leading bike, there is a natural tendency to keep your eyes on the bike in front of you, rather than on the road. This means you tend to follow the leading bike, braking when he does, accelerating when he does, and taking the same line through bends. This can be a big problem as few bikes have exact matching handling characteristics, acceleration, braking power and comfortable riding speeds. Even fewer bikers have exact matching riding experience and abilities.

So the rule is simple - ***keep the bike you’re following in your peripheral vision, your eyes on the road, and make your own decisions.*** About speed, cornering line, road surface, braking distance, everything. To reinforce this, chant the mantra to yourself “*Ride your own ride, ride your own ride...*” This seems to cure potentially disastrous behaviour quickly.

No Passing on the Left



The area to the left of a rider, between the bike and the edge of the road or another lane, is the rider's emergency area. If the rider knows that under no circumstances will anyone intrude on this space, he is safe in the knowledge that this space is there for him to use in an emergency. A sudden flash of brake lights directly in front, with little in which to react often results in a rider diving to the left to avoid a possible collision. If there is another bike passing on the left at this moment, you have a horrible crash on your hands.



A rider needs to know that this space will always be empty, so he can swerve into it with no notice without even taking the time to check his mirrors.

Leader / Sweep

Most well organised mass rides will have an appointed leader and sweep, who should be made known to all members of the group. Smaller groups can be more informal but should still observe the basics. The leader is the biker who knows the way.

But the leader's responsibilities extend further than this. He is ultimately responsible for the entire group's safety and well-being. He is the first to observe hazards in the road and warn those behind of the danger. He should be able to judge a safe speed in any situation and takes the lead in drastically reducing speed when entering towns. If rain starts to pour, he has to find a safe and sheltered spot for the deployment of rain gear.

The sweep plays a role that is even more important. It is the sweep's job to see that NO-ONE gets behind him. If one member of the group stops for any reason, the sweep must stop too. The reason for this is very simple - NO-ONE gets left alone or left behind.

You may have spotted the flaw in this system wondering who then looks out for the sweep? There is a solution for this – **every rider is responsible for the rider behind them.**

In large groups it is impossible for the leader to keep track of more than two bikes behind him. If each and every rider takes responsibility for the rider behind him, the group stays together and even the sweep has a rider looking out for him/her. Application of this rule is very easy - **keep one bike's headlight visible in your mirrors. If he disappears, reduce speed slightly.** If he still doesn't appear, slow down. You can trust that the sweep will take care of any riders falling far behind for

whatever reason, therefore you need not stop or slow down to the extent that you are also losing the group. Continue riding at safe speed in order to catch-up with the group.

Pointsman/"2nd Man" Duties

Taking responsibility for the rider behind you extends to the responsibility as a "pointsman" (all genders included). The pointsman will be the rider (or rider and pillion) following right behind the ride leader and the duty of pointsman rotates as the riders behind the ride leader changes out.

At a junction, crossing or similar route direction change, the ride leader will point to a specific position that the closest following rider, known as "2nd man", should take up. This is then when that rider will act as pointsman with their motorcycle facing in the direction of travel, leaving their indicator on as an additional sign to direction of travel.

All the riders will then pass the pointsman. **DO NOT** hoot, flash your lights or wave at the pointsman, as this could be mistaken as the sweep coming up from behind. *The positioned pointsman will stay at the designated point, until the sweep approaches and signals (by flashing headlights and hooting) for them to continue at the back of the group.*

The sweep will never pass the pointsman and will stop at the pointsman if required in case of the pointsman not responding to the sweep's gestures to proceed. Please look out for the Sweep so you can continue riding without delay.

Exception: On some rides, the ride leader will identify "wingmen / wing angels" during the ride briefing. The wingmen will be identifiable by their yellow riding jackets. Only the identified wingmen will be allowed to perform the required duties, no other rider should join-in to assist with these duties.

These wingmen will direct the ride at turn-offs, etc. and must be allowed to pass the group on the right, in order to reach the next turn-off. Please always be on the lookout for the Wingmen and move slightly left out of the way to allow them to pass safely.

Where wingmen are appointed, it would normally not be necessary for other riders to take up the duties of pointsmen. *However, the riders following the ride leader should be cognisant of the ride leader possibly pointing at a position with route changes and thus taking up the pointsmen duties, should the wingmen not be able to reach the point of direction change on time.*

Incidents on route

As a community of riders with similar passions and inevitable great relationships growing from this shared love for riding, it is understandable that should any misfortune happen on any of the riding group during a ride, we would want to stop and assist.

PLEASE DO NOT ALL STOP AT AN INCIDENT!!!

The following procedures will be followed, in the unlikely case of mechanical and/or medical incidents:

- 1.) Only the first rider behind the incident can stop to help with the initial assist, until a Rides Committee member arrives and can relieve them;
- 2.) All the other riders proceed with caution to where the Ride Leader deems it safe to stop and regroup;
- 3.) The Ride Leader will take control of the decisions regarding the trip at this point;
- 4.) Do not leave the ride to go assist in anyway unless the Ride Leader or Sweep requests you to do so;
- 5.) The Rides Committee will have spaced themselves throughout the riding group (they all have first aid training) and will stop to attend to those involved in the incident accordingly;

- 6.) The first riders on scene will be instructed to continue on the ride, should the Ride Committee member not need their assistance;
- 7.) In case of a **medical incident / accident**, no more than **3** of the Ride Committee members will attend to the incident and those involved;
- 8.) In the case of a **mechanical incident**, no more than **2** Ride Committee members will attend to the incident;
- 9.) In all cases where an incident occurred the sweep will make direct contact with the Ride Leader to inform him / her of the incident and to decide on the continuation of the ride;
- 10.) In a scenario where the sweep is attending to an incident and held-up for a period of time, a secondary sweep will be appointed from the Rides Committee members attending the ride to fulfil sweep duties to the rest of the group.
- 11.) All changes in sweep duties will be communicated to the Ride Leader as to ensure everyone in the group is aware of such changes.

Riding Standards

Finally, it should be mentioned that there are some minimum standards that the club expects when riding together. Unnecessary injuries due to inappropriate clothing, badly maintained motorcycles or punctures due to badly worn tyres are problems that can ruin everyone's ride and are easily avoided.

The following are regarded as a minimum standard regarding protective clothing:

- Helmet
- Riding jacket – a proper, protective riding jacket. An anorak or windcheater is not enough.
- Gloves – proper riding gloves, leather, or other protective material.
- Boots – riding boots are best, or at the very least strong shoes.
- Trousers – proper riding trousers are encouraged, leather or other protective material. Denim jeans are the very least that will be accepted, and shorts are obviously way off the mark.



Failure to meet the above standard may result in the Ride Leader requesting you not to ride with the group.

When leaving on a long ride, please make sure that your tyres and tubes are up to the trip, bike mechanically sound and tank filled up. Having to find breakdown support, a new tyre or any other motorcycle parts in a small town can be very difficult and can delay the ride by hours or even days.

Follow the basic rules, use your common sense and you will have many great experiences and memories to look back at!