

Rider Education: A continuing Awareness : Group Riding Hazards, Part I

I'm here, where are you? More than a few accidents have occurred as a result of someone getting separated from the group. That's more of a problem when the leader has no plan other than to "follow me." Without some sort of backup plan, a separated rider doesn't have a clue about what to do.

Two well-known motorcyclists were returning from a rally in 2003, the husband riding his machine, and the wife riding hers. Their riding style was apparently the "follow me" approach, usually with the husband leading. About two days into their homeward leg, the riders became separated in traffic. The husband, failing to see the other motorcycle, pulled over and waited by the side of the road.

After several minutes, the husband decided to turn around and retrace his steps to find his partner. While attempting to make the U-turn, he was struck broadside by another vehicle and fatally injured.

That terrible accident points out that trying to hold a group together visually can distract a rider from observing traffic or surface hazards. Riding in traffic, we must expect that a group (even a group of two riders) will get separated by other vehicles or traffic signals from time to time. So, we should have a plan for what to do when it happens. The absolute worst and most hazardous plan is to ride around in circles looking for the other riders.

If it's a large group, one basic rule should be that the group will not stop to wait for riders held up by one traffic signal in a string of intersections. If the tail end of the group gets separated by a red light, odds are they will catch up. If not, the leader will pull over on the way out of town to allow the group to reform. Clubs who ride in groups often equip their bikes with CB radios to maintain voice contact.

With a small group, the riders could carry cellular telephones. The plan could be to stop and call the other rider if a certain time period has passed without a visual. For instance, if you haven't seen your riding companion for 10 minutes, stop and call.

If riders are independently capable, the plan could be for each rider to continue to a specified destination, say a chain restaurant or hotel. The "emergency" destination can be an hour away, a half day away, or the end of the day's ride. Even without cell phones, the establishment can be contacted and a message left for the other rider.

With a little planning and some awareness of group dynamics, riding with companions can be enjoyable and reasonably risk free. But, if you join a group and aren't having fun, or you think the risks are unacceptable, don't be bashful about dropping out. The mantra has never changed: "Ride your own ride."

Additional articles on group riding will follow in the next few months. (Article published in Motorcycle Consumer News)

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