

# **Huronia HOG**

## **Safety Seminar 2011 – Group Riding Safety**

This Chapter has had an excellent track record of putting on safe enjoyable rides over the past twenty years. I am going to make sure that this doesn't change under my watch as your Safety Officer. This program is for your benefit so that you all have the confidence you need to participate in any of our rides.

### **Preparation**

A quick check of your ride before you head out can make all the difference in how your day is going to turn out. Nobody wants to be standing at the side of the road as the rest of the group rides off into the sunset. The two most important components of your bike are the wheels. You need to do more than check the air pressure. You also have to look for tire damage and, you guys that have spoke wheels, make sure all the spokes are still there and you don't have any loose ones. A proper circle check of your bike inclusive of lights, secure hand and foot controls, and any bolt on accessories can make a difference. The great thing about riding a Harley is the power and vibrations of those big V-Twins that set it apart from the crowd. However, those same vibrations can cause components to come loose. You need to make sure all is secure before heading out. You are responsible for your own safety.

It is also important to make sure you are properly outfitted for the days ride. Wearing the appropriate clothing, not shorts and a t-shirt, to protect you from worse case scenarios. Unfortunately we always need to dress for an accident. Asphalt has a very unforgiving texture when we come into contact with it any any speed. You should also make sure you have proper eye ware. That means having a secondary set of glasses in case you are out late at night. The sunglasses won't help you much once the sun has gone down. Rain gear should also be stowed away and handy in the event of a sudden humidity shower. Being in the wind has a great poetic sound to it but that wind from other vehicles can some times take all the glory out of the poem.

### **Protocol**

The advantage we all have of being members of a H.O.G.<sup>®</sup> Chapter is the group rides that we put together. It is far better to ride with a group of friends than to wander aimlessly down the road. The success of these rides are determined by a number of factors, (i) The preparation and layout of the ride, (ii) The communication of the details of the ride, (iii) The participation of members and the attitude they bring, (iv) and the weather. I am sure you can think of a few others but these are the main components. Now we can't control the weather and we rely heavily on the Road Captains to put the ride together. What we can control is our participation and the attitude we bring out to the ride.

In order for everyone to have fun, and that's why we joined H.O.G.<sup>®</sup>, we need to all be on the same page. Understanding the rules of the road and the fact that safety needs to be a priority at all times. It is also imperative that you always arrive with a group riding attitude.

What does that mean, group riding attitude? It means that we all can't ride at the back or the front, it means we all can't ride in the left track or the right track, it means taking our time and allowing our newest members to get the feel of riding in a group without intimidation. At one time or another we all were pretty wet behind the ears and we need to make sure that our Chapter continues to grow with new enthusiastic members. You all can make that happen with your experience.

Another key point to remember when you turn out for a group ride is that it will be based on the Ride Captains agenda. So don't ask if you are going to be home in time to watch Jeopardy. Most of our rides will take up all of your day and if the group is enjoying itself and wants to take an extra ten or fifteen minutes at a rest stop the Road Captain should not feel pressured to move everyone along to meet anyone's particular time table.

Always arrive on time for the ride with a full tank of fuel and an empty bladder. It is quite disrespectful to your fellow members to make them wait on you or have to make an unscheduled stop for fuel. This takes away from the group riding attitude.

If you want to participate in a Road Captain's ride but know you can't get free for a half hour or so from the start time call the Road Captain and see if you can pick up the ride at one of the rest stops. The same is true if you know you can't stay until the designated end of the ride. Talk to the Road Captain and he will give you a couple of suggestions and place you within the group so you can depart early.

The main thing is that the Road Captain is the only one leading the group. You are to follow his directions. He has been assisted by his fellow officers of the Chapter and knows his responsibility. That responsibility is a large one. The safety of a group of fellow riders is in his hands and he does not need any more pressure on him than the one that comes with the job.

If the Road Captain feels that you are not riding in a safe manner he will privately ask you to alter your style. If you don't, he can ask you to leave the group. As you should know all H.O.G.<sup>®</sup> rides are alcohol free. Only ZERO percent alcohol level is acceptable. If you decide you want to have a drink at a designated stop the Road Captain has the authority to ask you to leave the group.

## **Communication**

Proper communication with the Road Captain prior to any ride can make or break a ride. If there is something you think he needs to know you should discuss it with him, privately, well in advance of the ride. If you have allergies and carry an epi pen make sure he and his sweep are aware of this. These type of things will be kept confidential if you wish but it could be quite serious if he isn't made aware ahead of time. You are still responsible for your own safety but we will assist you as much as we can when we can.

## **Starting Out**

The Road Captain will go over a few basic safety reminders before each ride. He will also give you a general description of the ride such as roadways, fuel and rest stops and meal breaks. You will be given a chance to ask a few basic questions but should limit those so you can all get on the road. Every detail or turn doesn't need to be explained before the ride.

The Road Captain will appoint a sweep before each ride. The Road Captain and Sweep will always ride in the left track of the lane. This gives them a better chance on keeping a visual of each other to make sure all is going as planned. The sweep will generally be the only bike with his high beam or multi-lights on. The rest of the group should avoid riding with their auxiliary or high lights on. This will give the Captain and sweep a better chance of keeping things under control. The sweep should also have a good understanding of the ride so he can take control if the group gets broken up.

The sweep will also be the only bike to stop in the event of a member of the group breaks down and pulls off from the ride. This means that the Captain should have some form of communication with his sweep with a radio or cell phone connection. In the event of a break down the Captain would continue the ride until such a time as to find a safe place for the group to pull over. The Road Captain is responsible for the safety of the group. However, and this is a big however, you are responsible for your own safety. Always follow the Road Captain even if you know he has made a wrong turn on the designated route. Maybe he knows something has changed that you don't or maybe he did make a mistake. Allow him to correct it when he feels safe enough to do so.

## **S.E.E.**

When riding you should always be using the S.E.E. Method. This method of riding should be used whether you are riding in a group or solo. S.E.E. stands for Search Evaluate Execute.

**Search:** You should always be keeping a watchful eye and searching the roadway ahead of you. Be watchful of the other traffic, road conditions, animals or small children on the side of the road, the car parked on the side of the road, the car approaching the stop sign at the next intersection. Is that other vehicle paying attention?

Maybe they are busy on the cell phone or trying to get the kids in the back seat to settle down, maybe they don't see that stop sign and are travelling too fast to stop when they do. You are responsible for your safety. Are you expecting the unexpected? You don't have any seat belts or airbags to save you now!

**Evaluate:** You have been searching the roadway ahead of you and you have made your evaluations. Is all well? Is that dog going to stay on the sidewalk? Is that car seeing you as it changes lanes? You have to make these evaluations as you ride.

**Execute:** Now that you have made your evaluation what are your options? Can you alter your speed? Change lanes safely? Maybe you have to exit stage right into the ditch at a slower controlled movement? That might be better than trying to take on that out of control car. You need to be prepared to execute an alternate route at anytime.

By using the S.E.E. method of riding you should be able to avoid most of the unpleasant obstacles that will come your way. This habit of riding is not that difficult to get used to putting into practice. It has been proven that it only takes thirty days to form a bad habit and likewise it only takes the same thirty days to develop good ones. So try using the S.E.E. method going forward. Search, Evaluate, Execute.

## **Ride Formation**

H.O.G.<sup>®</sup> Chapter group rides are always done in a staggered formation. The law states that no more than one vehicle can operate in a lane at a time. This is not why we ride in staggered formation. We do so for safety. Staggered riding is not a requirement by law. We could and some times do ride single file but this would be very detrimental to the flow of traffic and would not be taken very kindly by the motoring public. Our groups will range from eight to fourteen riders so we need to occupy the roadway with only as much space as we need to ride safely. When groups exceed a certain number we will break into more than one group. This is determined by the Road Captain of each ride. They know their route and if it will accommodate larger groups.

When possible the Road Captain will line his group up in two columns. As you move forward you will immediately go into staggered formation. Keep a constant speed with the group and try to avoid drastic speed changes. Once you have formed the stagger you should never attempt to change it once the group is in motion. That is because the only way to do so is to ride into another rider's space. Remember just because they are in the right or left track they own that entire space to their right or left and you cannot violate it at any time. If you see that somebody is in the wrong track don't worry about it there is no law saying you can't have a whole in the group. It will correct itself at the next stop. When we stop at a stop sign or stop light we move into a tandem or double file, side by side, configuration. When we move forward again the stagger should correct itself. The Road Captain could also call for everyone to go to single file formation and then back to staggered when the group is in motion. This will also allow the stagger to be corrected. The only reason it wouldn't is if someone was not

willing to ride in the left or right track of the lane. If you have a problem with one or the other speak to your fellow member and ask to change spots after the next rest stop. We will always try and make sure everyone feels safe and comfortable when riding with our groups. However, you must remember that not everyone can be in their desired track and this reflects back onto the group riding attitude.

## **Staggered Spacing**

The spacing between bikes in a staggered formation is critical to the safety of the riders. There should be a minimum spacing of two seconds between riders in the same track and a minimum one second between riders in opposite tracks of the lane. Keep in mind I said a minimum. You may feel you need more space for your comfort level, and experience, in riding in a group, and that is ok. If you feel three or four seconds between you and the bike in your track is where you should ride then ride there. You should try and limit that spacing to four seconds or the pack could end up spaced out to the point where other vehicles could try and slip into the group.

If the bike in the opposite track is riding three or four seconds spacing you, you still must keep a one second spacing behind them. The best way to know how far two or four seconds of spacing is you need to get out on your own or with a friend on an empty roadway and practice to see how far you travel in that time frame. The distance will surprise you at first because you can travel quite the distance at road speed in two seconds. Another way to judge your distance between riders in the opposite track is by looking to see if you can see their face in their mirror. If you can't see them they can't see you and that's when we run into trouble. Our rides are all about safety. Not just our own but also our fellow riders so don't put them in a difficult situation where they don't know or can't see where you are behind them.

When going into a curve allow the rider in the outside track to have the ability to move to the inside of the curve. Remember the same rules apply in group riding as they do when solo riding when curves are in question. Always look ahead of you to where you want to go. You will always instinctively ride where you look.

As any part of riding practice is the essential tool. Be observant of the behaviour of the more experienced riders around you and follow their lead. With that said our more experienced riders need to lead by example and try not to let some of our bad habits show.

## **You are Responsible for Your Safety**

When travelling in a group you are responsible for your own safety where as the Captain is only responsible for leading the group. I know I have said this a number of times and I will continue to emphasize that standard. When travelling in a group and using your S.E.E. method of riding you should be keeping a number of areas in your

Search pattern.

The first is the spacing between you and the bike in your track and the opposite track. The second would be the approximate four second interval between you and the group ahead of the bike you are following. The third would be about twelve seconds ahead or about one city block. Do not rely on the rider ahead of you to give you ample warning of changes ahead of you. There is not enough time for you to make the changes you may need to make even at the proper spacing distances of two seconds or even four seconds in some circumstances. By using the S.E.E. method you can safely travel in a group ride and maintain the responsibility for your safety.

## **Hand Signals**

The best form of communication we have with each other are hand signals. The Road Captain is responsible to give direction to the group through a number of hand signals. It is the groups responsibility to pass the signals down the line to each other. Understanding them all will keep you and your fellow riders safe. You should all know the basic hand signals of left and right turns. You will also be signalled when to start to slow down.

One of the more frequent used hand signals for group riding is the single file formation signal. The Road Captain will hold up his hand using his pointer finger, not the middle one, and point skyward. This means all bikes will fall into single file behind the Road Captain. You will commence to slow your bike as to allow for more spacing between you and the rider ahead of you. This is done for a number of reasons. There could be a bicycle rider on the right track, a vehicle parked on the shoulder too close to the lane of traffic, pedestrians walking on the edge of the roadway, poor pavement conditions in the left or right track of the roadway or maybe even oncoming traffic of someone trying to make an unsafe pass.

Once the Captain feels comfortable that the conditions have improved he will give the signal to resume staggered formation. This is done by raising his hand again and using his pointer finger and his little finger pointing skywards. He does not use his pointer finger and middle finger as in a peace sign. This would indicate double file riding which is not done on H.O.G.<sup>®</sup> group rides.

Another signal that is commonly used does not involve the hands. The Captain may use his left or right leg to indicate a road obstruction. These would include a pothole or road kill on the roadway. The manual calls for the rider to use his hands to point to the ground left or right to indicate such road obstructions but depending on the circumstances it is safer for the rider to keep both hands on the hand grips to keep himself/herself in control of their motorcycle.

Other hand signals may be used such as tapping your fuel tank to indicate fuel

stop required or motioning a hand to your mouth that its time to stop for refreshments. By understanding these basic hand signals you will feel more comfortable and confident in your ability to group ride.

## **Changing Lanes and Passing**

Changing lanes and passing other vehicles while group riding takes on a different set of challenges. All group rides within H.O.G.<sup>®</sup> will always be done according to the Highway Traffic Act. All speed limit signs will be observed and adhered to at all times. The fact that we observe the speed limit while unfortunately many others don't puts us into a position of not having to worry about passing very often but when it does occur you will need to know the proper procedures.

### ***Multi-Lane Passing***

Lets start with the easy one first. On a multi-lane Highway like the 400 series the Road Captain will signal his attention to move from the right lane to the left lane or vice verse. The Sweep will pick up the sign and signal and will move first to block the lane temporarily allowing the group to change lanes from front to back. The Road Captain needs to make sure there is sufficient room between vehicles to make this manoeuvre. Keep your stagger formation while in the new lane the same as you where in from the lane you left. Once the pass is complete the Road Captain will move you to the travel lane with the Sweep blocking the lane and the group moving from front to back into the travel lane.

An exception to the rule is when passing larger vehicles. Once established in the passing lane you as individual riders need to observe why the pass or lane change has taken place. If it has been done to pass a large vehicle like a tractor trailer or bus there should only be the max of three riders alongside the larger vehicle at any time. This is purely for your safety and nothing else. The Road Captain will have you form a single file keeping in the track furthest from the vehicle in question. If something where to be picked up by the larger tires of the vehicle being passed you should be spaced out with enough room to make whatever defensive move you need to make. Remember that in single file formation you should have started to make more space between you and the rider ahead of you. Once the pass has been completed the Road Captain will return you to the travel lane with the Sweep blocking the lane and the group moving from front to back into the lane. When the Road Captain sees all is well he will return you to a staggered formation.

### ***Two Lane Passing***

The rules completely change when passing on a two lane highway. If the group approaches a slow moving vehicle such as a farm equipment on a two lane road the Road Captain will signal his intentions to pass. You will then move into position to pass the vehicle as if you are a lone rider. Just because we are travelling as a group does not

give us any legal right of way to pass as a group. We have to observe the laws governing such actions. So as space and safety permits you will each take your turn at passing until the group can be reestablished. The Road Captain will pace the group so as to allow all the chance to make a safe pass and once the group has been reestablished he will then proceed at the appropriate speed. Don't panic and think you need to take any chances to catch up. You are responsible for your own safety. Take this seriously and ride within your comfort level. You should note that if any rides are done in areas such as the Grey Highlands where you may be put into a position to pass a horse and buggy you need to do it as professionally as possible. That means not twisting the throttle to make everyone for miles hear that unmistakable Harley sound. There is a time and place for everything.

### ***Being Passed***

The next thing we need to be observant of when it comes to passing is when we are being passed. There are a lot of impatient people out there and they see groups of motorcycles as a nuisance. It is kind of like being behind a large truck. Even though the truck is moving at the speed limit people will do anything to get in front of it and once they do they slam on the brakes to get back to the proper speed. The same holds true for us when we group ride. They will take chances to get by us without using the S.E.E. method of driving. They won't look twelve seconds down the road to see if they have enough room. They won't acknowledge that once they realize there isn't enough room that they haven't evaluated an escape route and we will become the victims. In these circumstance we can have the upper hand. You have been using the S.E.E. method and have acknowledged the presence of the vehicle behind you looking to pass. You have evaluated what you will do if they try an ill advised attempt to pass. You will be ready to execute your plan of escape. The best plan is to let the other guy have the right of way even if that means letting him into the middle of the group. It is far better to let them be right than for us to be dead right. This also holds true when the passing vehicle is coming from the opposite direction. This is when the S.E.E. method of riding becomes even more prevalent than before. Because we travel in staggered formation we are already half way there when it comes to the S.E.E. method of riding. We have already evaluated the worst possible scenario's by riding in the proper form. We have allowed ourselves the ability to execute a number of manoeuvres to keep ourselves safe by leaving adequate spacing in our group.

Unfortunately, the reality of proper group riding and using the S.E.E. method of riding is only too evident when not observed and disaster does strike. Let's not make any statistic books and ride by the rules.

## **Parking**

You would think that parking wouldn't be much of a safety concern. We all should know how to pull into a parking lot or space. That may be true but when in a group there are certain dynamics we must keep in mind.

The Road Captain needs to make sure he pulls into a parking area that will accommodate the size of group he is leading. All bikes need to be well off any part of the roadway. It is not a free for all when you reach the parking lot. That can create disastrous effects. Keep the group ride mentality even in the parking lot.

You will need to move into single file formation as directed by the Road Captain. Allow him to pull up ahead of the farthest spot in the parking area. Then one by one pull up along the left side of the bike ahead of you in a 45° angle to the curb. Each bike needs to pull ahead of the spot and allow the bike behind to do like wise. Once the other bike has pulled alongside your left you may then back into your spot. Once all bikes are in place then if required you should move safely off to fuel if that is required. If for some reason the Road Captain is not able to pull far enough into the designated parking area to allow you to be off the roadway continue safely to another area. Remember you are responsible for your own safety and the Road Captain may be put into a situation that could not be planned for and has to take the safest measure he can.

## **Communication**

At the start of this program I mentioned the importance of communicating with your Road Captain. Giving him your cell number, informing him if you are a police officer, nurse, paramedic, or if you have been professionally trained in emergency situations. This could be of great assistance if the need should arise. We realize you are here to have fun just like everyone else and you will not be put into any position you don't feel comfortable with.

Ride Safe, Have Fun,

Thom  
Safety Officer  
Huronian Chapter