

**Road Captains & Tail Gunners Guidelines**

**Chapter 437 – Ottawa/Gatineau**

**Introduction**

1. First of all, thanks for volunteering to take on the position of Ride Captains (RC) and Tail Gunners (TG). You have been trusted with the safety and security of the group you are leading. As such, you are responsible for making sure the ride goes smoothly and that you adapt not only to the prevailing road conditions, other road users, and the weather, but also to all the riders within the group (type of motorcycle, skill levels, etc.). Riding in a group requires a different mindset than when riding solo or with a few friends, whose riding style is known.

2. RC and TG must exhibit a greater degree of self-discipline. The main goal of the RC is to keep the ride safe and keep the group together. He or she is helped by the actions of the TG. Remember, you are leading a group that can extend a few hundred meters behind you, which means that your every moves will take time to be completed by the last rider (normally the tail gunner)

**Communication (Riders Brief)**

3. Before heading out, the RC and TG and sometimes the Safety Officer will address the group. The main items to be covered are as follows:

1. Know who is in your group;
2. Know and understand the riding abilities of each participants, especially new additions to the group; and
3. Know how many riders will take part in the ride.
4. Discuss any known road hazards and or any safety issues you feel might be warranted such as:
5. Provide a general overview of the route, time to complete, stops, etc.;
6. Ask for gas requirements. Not every bike has the same autonomy;
7. Type of roads expected (highway, through towns, back roads, etc.);
8. Road particularities, i.e. turns in the road that might be problematic or gravel at a certain intersection, etc.;
9. Emergency procedure;
10. What to do if separated; and
11. Check with the group at stop and use the opportunity to adjust and correct.

**Formation Riding – Stagger**

5. Riding in a Staggered formation (two lane offset) is the only legal formation for group riding in most Provinces (except for single lane riding under some circumstances. At no time will we be riding side by side. This is the only riding formation used by the Chapter. The stagger exists for rider safety and is also impressive to watch and ride in as we go down the road. We want to look like we know what we are doing so keeping a proper stagger formation is definitely an important aspect to keep in the forefront of your mind.

1. Standard group guideline has a **2 second** gap behind the bike directly in front (same lane) and a **1 second** gap behind the bike adjacent (other lane). This creates your safety cushion to enable and provide space and time to react to issues during the ride, especially at highway speeds. Most “Short reaction time” for manoeuvres is at least one-half second so the one second interval should allow adequate time to manoeuvre and avoid any contact with adjacent bikes. This reaction time frame is however much greater when breaking so advance warning is suggested prior to breaking (if possible) by tapping the break or indicating a slow-down signal with your left hand prior to actual breaking. (See the signal page on our Website)

7. Be proactive in filling in gaps and or directing others to do so if a rider leaves the group unexpectedly causing a gap in the stagger. The method we use to fill gaps is by **switching lanes**. We do not come up the lane. If riders do not automatically switch lanes to re-introduce a proper stagger it must be mentioned to the group at the next stop if you are not able to achieve the correction while on the move.

8. As for the timing, it is somewhat subjective as it can become shorter (or the ride can become tighter) at slower side road speeds, but please save the close rides with your pals for other times. Also understand the stagger can become a brief single lane orientation when cornering as riders can and are able to select the comfortable lane position for themselves thru a corner. The ‘single file’ signal is not necessary at every turn unless deemed necessary by the Road Captain

**Ride Speed**

9. Generally expected and accepted to be 10km to 15km above posted speeds. The speed is adjusted to the type of road (Highway, local, rural, etc.). This will discourage the majority of ‘cagers’ wanting to pass or enter the group at any one point. Once again, it is the responsibility of the RC / TG to keep an eye on riders that cannot keep up or are crowding others, taking away the safety cushion of space between riders.

**Avoid breaks in the group**

10. Avoid unnecessary breaks in the group by being aware of what might cause a break. The main reasons why a group will split are:

1. Traffic Light changes: when some of the group have already passed the intersection;

b. Hurried lane changes or quick corner turns to beat oncoming traffic;

1. Riders going at a different pace, which extend the length of he group (Slinky effect);
2. Lead riders going faster than the rest of the group;
3. Going to fast in zone where there are multi stops (lights, Stop, Merger, etc.) and
4. Not informing the group of the Route, so they cannot prepare on what to expect.

**Note:** TG blocking for lane changes initiated by the RC or closing the door on merging lanes are also a requirement to keep the group together. Remember the drop-back rider is more the exception than the rule. You can always find a safe location to pull over to allow trailing riders to catch up if the group is separated for any length of time. Remember, **at no time** will a TG voluntarily block and intersection, stop traffic or take any other actions to disrupt traffic. **This is illegal**.

**Pace and Space**

1. Oftentimes, a group ride is made more challenging when pace and speed, are not respected by all. Accelerate at a slower speed from stop (maintain slower speed 10-15 seconds depending on group size) then reach your desired riding speed. This gradual acceleration will help avoid “the Slinky” throughout and especially at the back of the pack. A gradual increase in speed allows the group to stay closer together longer and creates a “group” sensation for all riders. Group safety is our main concern and consistency of “pace” and “space” will encourage a ‘safer’ riding environment. Note that riders in the group cannot leave excessive spaces between themselves and other riders nor should they be crowding the rider ahead. It is the responsibility of the RC / TG to keep an eye on the group and address any issues at the next stop. (See ‘Communication’ topic below).

12. No use of Cruise Control while leading a group ride, unless on the long-haul….. Do mention you will be using cruise control to the group.

**Riding Regimen**

1. **Stop at Stop signs** and look both ways, twice before proceeding. Listen if necessary, for oncoming traffic if a clear view down the road is not possible due to a curve or incline or some form of obstruction in the road or along the roadside.

14. Extending the ‘Stop’ time (within reason) at a ‘Stop’ sign, briefly allows the group to catch-up and compress. Stopping allows time for a glance back to contact with the TG and encourages acknowledgement from the TG (“All okay” or “issue” identification). Once you roll-on, the group can ‘roll’ thru but each rider must look left & right for their own safety. Remember, all riders are responsible for their own decisions and must not simply follow along blindly. Stopping where required also results in a ride that will not feel ‘rushed’. Take your time and enjoy the ride.

15. During ride intervals or breaks, talk with the TG and discuss any abnormalities or riding concerns and address the group (in general terms) prior to continuing the ride or discuss the concerns with an Officer of the club if you wish not to address the group personally.

**Communication (During the Ride)**

16. While on the way, Learn (and understand) the traditional hand signals. Hold them a few seconds longer than you feel okay to ensure riders behind catch the signal and allow the group more time to react. Point out direct hazards, as you see them first. All riders should pass every hand signal down the line.

**Maintaining Awareness**

17. **Mirrors**: Check your mirrors often. Keeping your eyes on the riders behind and especially for the TG for any concerning signals. Left and Right mirror checks through ALL INTERSECTIONS is a must. You must be aware of who is in your group and if anyone has been left behind. Encourage all riders in the group to keep an eye on their mirrors as well, so they will realize they have suddenly become the next ‘drop-back’ rider when the group has made a turn.

18. **Eyes and Ears OPEN**. While leading rides or Tail Gunning, you are responsible for the group and not permitted to be wearing ear-buds or headphones of any kind. Remember communication is important and you must be able to hear fellow riders and the surroundings for hazards. Best to save the ear-buds for your own personal riding time. Earplugs, used for noise reduction are OK.

**Motorcycle, Legal Papers and Riding Attire**

19. The Safety Officer, RC and TG are responsible to ensure riders show up with a motorcycle in good repair, that they have the proper level of licensing and insurance and that they are dressed according to Provincial / State laws. Verbal confirmation is enough; there is no need to physically check unless you have a positive doubt.

20. As we mentioned, riders are responsible for their own decisions. Nonetheless, some decisions might adversely affect the group as a whole, thus it is proper to do a pre-ride check. The main items to check (just ask really) are:

1. Protective items according to the laws of the Province/State are present (helmet, jacket, glasses, gloves, etc.). In general, all riders should be wearing protective clothing including proper motorcycle boots (that cover the ankles), gloves, denim jeans and/or leather chaps for protection and a leather or padded jacket;
2. Daytime glasses vs. night time glasses. If the ride might extend past sundown, it is a great idea to check with the group to ensure they have both for the ride;
3. If cooler weather or rain is expected, check if appropriate clothing is available; and
4. If riders are not properly dressed, you have the authority and responsibility (at your discretion) to ask any particular rider to leave the group and not ride ‘the ride’ if safety is or becomes a concern or have them situated at the back with the TG where they should not pose an issue to other riders. If there are repeat ‘offenders’, an Officer must be made aware.

**Additional Safety Issues, Recommendations and Procedures**

21. **Understand Riding Skills**. At one point in our riding career, we were the new kid on the block. Even with years of experience, Group riding is an art. Chapter 437 encourages new or slower riders to join us, yet we do not want to jeopardize the safety of others in the group. We encourage new or slower riders to be positioned up front with the Road Captain, in the ‘co-pilot’ position (first bike Right lane) or behind the RC if more than one rider. This places the rider of concern in the safest position(s) in the group and tends to eliminate the Slinky felt at the back of the group. The rider(s) of concern will also see the signals that can sometimes not reach the back of the group properly. Depending on quantity of new or slower riders, an orientation ride may be considered prior to actual group riding. The new or slower rider can also take instruction from the RC more easily as the ride progresses.

22. When a rider **drops out**. Unless under an emergency situation, dropping out of formation should be planned and the RC and TG informed of where it will take place. Most of the dropping out happens on the way back home where riders will take a different route. At the last stop before going home, the RC and TG should ask the intentions of the riders. The formation should then be adjusted to prevent to many criss-crossing. Ideally, if a rider tells you they plan to leave the group at some point during the ride, ask that they position themselves at the back of the pack with the TG so that the rider can leave the group without causing the need to correct the ‘stagger’.

23. Under an emergency, the TG will stop to assess the situation. Mechanical emergencies will be dealt with accordingly. Accidents involving a member of the group would require any riders behind the accident to stop and render aid. If a rider has bike troubles or happens to have the attention of a police car and needs to pull over, or goes down during a ride, the TG is expected to stop with that rider and offer assistance. Whatever the situation, the group is expected to be lead away from the scene by the RC and down the road to continue the ride or most likely, stop at a “safe” location for a cool down period and or “debriefing” of the situation. Hanging around an accident scene creates additional distractions and can be very dangerous for everyone in the group so keep riding and lead the group onward and stop the group where you feel safety can be managed. The remainder of the group ahead will follow the direction from the RC. At no time will any rider in the group become free runner without the direction of the Safety officer, RC or TG.

24. **Minding the Gap**. Chapter 437 uses the “cross-over” method (switch lane) to re-align the stagger formation when a rider drops out either unexpectedly or planned. It is our belief that each and every rider must have the full width of the lane for their own safety and comfort at all times. Other Chapters may not ‘cross-over’ but simply move up either side of the stagger to fill the gap from the drop-out rider. This results in riders passing adjacent riders in the process. Some riders will wave you up to pass, others may not be aware, thus the importance of making the effort to advise the group ahead of time, what is expected of them when the ‘drop-out’ occurs and/or asking what a host Chapter is likely to do when a ‘drop-out’ occurs.

25. **Lane Changing**. Typical lane changing has the RC put the left or right indicator on, the signal makes its way back to the TG and the TG then takes or secures the appropriate lane when safe to do so. The RC must keep an eye on the TG to see the lane has become secure then the RC begins the lane change move, followed by each rider one at a time from **front to back**.

26. The opposite can occur where the RC signals for a lane change, the same signals move back to the TG and the TG again, secures the lane when safe to do so. In this “opposite” case, the group will start to move over from **back to front.** This “opposite” method is called “the tail wags the dog” and some Chapters do use this method. Once again, it is important to ask other Chapter Officers and Road Captains how they perform the act of changing lanes when we ride with them. In most cases Chapter 437 uses the front to back method.

**Note:** The RC might not always be in position to wait for the TG and can instigate a ‘quick’ lane change if situations dictate. The group will simply follow from front to back.

27. Remember, **lane changing is a group effort** where all riders are following you. It is important to remember the length of the group and number of bikes behind you when changing lanes or getting back into a lane once a pass has been made. To the RC’s discretion, you can take the entire group beyond the vehicle being passed before the lane change back occurs or move over one bike at a time as you see fit. However, we create an issue of “safety” when getting back into the prior lane using the “one at a time” method because group riders seem to have a fear of being separated and try to follow the bike ahead as quickly as possible. In doing so, the follow up riders all too often cut it too close to the front of the vehicle being passed as they get back into position behind the riders ahead. Also, there is a tendency for riders to slow down once they have completed their pass, basically closing the gap behind them for other riders trying to get back behind them. Passing speed should be kept until the TG has passed and joined the formation. Be aware of this issue and make best efforts to give the group and individual rider’s adequate space to get back into the main riding lane.

28. **Rider Signals**. A standard set of rider signals has been prepared for our Chapter and posted on our website. As with other safety issues, signals can change from one Chapter to another, so it is important to review signals with your group prior to riding and/or to ask host Chapter Officers or Road Captains how the various signals will be demonstrated if not part of a pre-ride discussion. Every rider taking part in a rides has to be familiar with the hand signals and pass them along during the ride.

29. **Highway Riding – Intersections – Heavy Traffic**. As a responsible RC/TG or rider in general, anticipation and avoidance is important to help minimize dangerous situations and infiltration into the ranks of a group ride. To reduce the danger of group infiltration (other vehicles coming into the formation), maintaining a tight formation in the group should be encouraged when instances of higher risk occur, such as when approaching and passing exit and entry lanes on highways, passing through critical intersections, when in heavy traffic or when emergency vehicles are nearby. The group should be doing this automatically, but there is always the tendency to slack a bit, especially when cruising at speed or on the highway. Despite training, sometimes these risks are not apparent or visible to all riders so it becomes the responsibility of the RC and TG to be aware and signal a tightening of the ranks when and if necessary in these situations.

30. **Trikes and other Three-wheelers**. The position of trikes and other three-wheelers is generally noted to be behind the TC to allow him or her to see the entire group ahead, up through the middle of the pack and up either side as deemed necessary. This also allows clear passage of signals from front to back. Of course, this is not a hard and fast rule and the location of these larger and wider rides is at the discretion of the RC / TG.

31. **RC and TG, it is Your Ride**. In general terms, Road Captains and Tail gunners are responsible for the ride and the group as a whole, getting them from one point to another. While every single rider is responsible for their own ride and safety, the RC / TG carry the “extra” responsibility of trying to make the ride as safe as possible for everyone. If you see a rider (or passenger), who is not dressed properly, i.e. not riding with eye protection for example, or has an issue with their lighting, i.e. a light is broken off or the bulb burned out, or a mirror is missing, etc. you have the responsibility and obligation to either remove that individual from the group or ask that they ride at the back with the TG where again, they should not pose an issue to other riders. Again, if there are any repeat “offenders”, an Officer must be made aware.

32. As a RC / TG, you have to be fully aware and apply the above. Nevertheless, as anything in life nothing is set in concrete. The above will give you the basis of the job, but nothing can replace your brain, common sense and being able to react correctly to a given situation. The RG and TC positions are very important in a Chapter; the executives of the Chapter have put their trust in you. Thank you again for taking on these tasks.

**Remember Safety First Everyone........**