

## **Riding Your Own Ride**

*By Jennifer Hort Sandridge, NREMT-P; WITW Safety Coordinator; Sisters of the Moon Chapter*

Motorcycling brings joy to our lives in so many different ways. It can alternately provide excitement, tranquility, challenges, alone time or camaraderie amongst friends. Many of us joined Women in the Wind to further our enjoyment of this sport with like-minded women. For the most part group rides go well and I've written several articles with suggestions on how to improve group cohesiveness. But what happens when there's a glitch in the group's dynamic?

Each rider must contribute to make a group ride fun and safe while also remembering to ride her own ride. So what do you do if you don't feel safe in your group? Perhaps the rider behind you is riding too close for your comfort level, or the rider in front of you is inattentive, abruptly swerving or unable to maintain speed and group spacing, or maybe the leader of the group is behaving in a way that makes you question your own safety like riding too fast or too slow, not signalling turns, or ignoring traffic laws.

What do you do? Well, if you're comfortable speaking with the rider making you nervous the best thing to do is talk about it. It's easy to confront someone with accusations when you're scared or angry, but that is hardly productive. Maybe the tailgater is just used to riding really close with other friends and doesn't realize it's too close for your comfort. The inattentive rider ahead of you might just be too tired to be riding safely and needs someone to suggest she take a break, stretch, get some water or a snack. The unsafe leader could be new to leading a group and just might be nervous and unsure about how to do it correctly. In these cases it's best to see if you can find out the cause of the behaviour making you feel unsafe in a non-threatening manner and possibly offer assistance as a concerned friend and fellow rider.

Another possibility for these behaviours is a bit harder to handle. This is if the above mentioned riders are indifferent to your safety concerns. They may or may not be aware of their riding habits and perhaps don't care either way. In this case talking about it with the rider is still a good idea. But if they aren't objective enough to listen to your concerns and if you truly feel it would be futile and possibly create tension you would otherwise like to avoid then you have two other options. First, bring your concerns to the leader of the organization or chapter and have them deal with it or assist you in dealing with it. If an immediate resolution isn't forthcoming maybe you can move your position within the group for the duration of the ride. In the third case, if others agree that the leader is acting in an unsafe manner possibly a leader change could be made, again for the duration of the ride. If you fear a possible conflict the request could be disguised as, "Sally hasn't led a ride in a while and would like to lead us home, if you don't mind."

The second option is to leave the group. I hate to suggest this as we joined Women in the Wind to ride with other women. But if you feel your safety is at risk, and you cannot find resolution to your satisfaction then, yes, you may need to go your own way for the day. This is certainly a last resort but if you choose to do so be sure to let the group leader(s) know you're leaving the group for the duration of the ride. If you take off without telling anyone you will be missed and cause the group to needlessly worry and spend a lot of time trying to track down what happened to you.

Communication is so very important – I can't seem to stress that enough. Learning to communicate is hard; practicing good communication skills can be harder. Each of us deserves to enjoy a group ride but each of us must contribute to safety and personal awareness of the group to make it enjoyable. To be safe in a group you must ride as part of that group; it is very different from riding alone. But always remember to ride your own ride within the scope of your experience. Take an experienced rider course. It will improve your riding and make you feel more confident with your own skills to make a group ride more comfortable for you. But when it comes down to safety and if you fear for yours then you have a big decision to make. Be smart and ride safe!