



Florida American Legion Riders
Road Captain Guide

Rider's Creed

Riders dedicate themselves to the success of the American Legion. I know that, through my efforts, I can make a difference.

I alone am responsible for myself and to my fellow riders. I will conduct myself with the highest degree of integrity and honor.

Deeds, not words, create change. I will persevere against any and all things that prevent my success. My resolve and strength will overcome all obstacles.

Each rider is first a member of the American Legion Family. I will actively participate and willingly support their endeavors.

Readily will I join other riders in activities and events which support our missions. I will do so gladly knowing I volunteered to be an American Legion Rider.

Success is the only acceptable conclusion. I will allow nothing to dissuade me or impede me from service to my family, community, country and especially our Veterans

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INTRODUCTION: Congratulations!!! You have joined American Legion Riders, one of the greatest riding organizations in the world. Our number one goal is to ride safe and have fun while representing the American Legion in a public venue. In order to have fun riding in a group, we have to be safe and that means all riders know and understand the importance of safety. This manual is designed to help you understand our riding program and what you can expect when participating in group rides. The most important thing to remember is, "You and you alone are responsible for your safety." Therefore, ride your own ride and never exceed your riding capabilities or ride outside your comfort zone. The PRIME DIRECTIVE, don't hit the bike in front of you...or any other bike. Your safety and your life are more important than arriving together as a group; after all, we are all out for fun and enjoyment. Enjoy participating in group rides; we need your inputs and ideas.

PARTICIPATION: Participation is the key for this organization to accomplish all of our goals. If it weren't for the volunteers, we have that make things happen this organization wouldn't be here. From volunteering to cook for Bike Night or dinner nights, to prepping for a run or sponsoring another venue at the post; we are the individuals who make our post shine. We have the best American Legion Riders Program and we are proud of that fact. So come on out and meet the rest of the great people who you will be riding with at your post! Thanks for all that you do...

MENTOR PROGRAM: Purpose: Simple, decrease accidents. Any new rider or members with questions -- contact the Rider's Director to be teamed up with a volunteer mentor that will help teach the ropes. Our mentorship program is to help materialize our number one goal, "To ride safe and have fun while representing the American Legion." The beauty of this mentorship program is that riders can ask any question and receive quality counsel without the fear of being ridiculed. We have all been there, the new American Legion Rider with countless questions about motorcycles and motorcycle customs. A new Rider can really benefit from getting great advice from experienced riders. Mentors enhance a rider's experience by serving as role models and advisors.

A successful riders program requires the support of its members. Post 392's informal mentoring program matches experienced seasoned riders with new riders to provide support in safety, help understand motorcycle dynamics, and to provide knowledge about the American Legion Riders and other motorcycle club etiquette.

GET INVOLVED: One of the most exciting and rewarding ways you can volunteer with the American Legion Riders is to become a mentor. It's simple, contact the American Legion Rider's Director and when a new rider request assistance, you'll be there to help.

SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS:

1. **Food stops:** When planning rides and working with the businesses to add them as a stop on your ride, request that some kind of food be served. It does not have to be a full meal as heavy appetizers work as well. They do not have to give away food but maybe ask for a few dollars or donations. Our riders would appreciate having meals along the way.
2. **Water:** Request that all stops place coolers by the door with cold bottled water that would be accessible to riders coming in the establishment and leaving. Whether it is hot or cold weather, it encourages our riders to stay hydrated and have a water as a drinking alternative. If an establishment does not want to accommodate this request as bottled water is not costly – offer to provide cases of water to them or maybe rethink the stop altogether as this is important for the safety of our riders.

3. **Road Captain:** Training offered at the ALR Summit annually.
4. **Communication:** Any group that is leading a ride should have uniform communication between the road captain and tail gunner/sweeper and any assistant road captains that may be in the middle on larger rides.
5. **Group size accommodation:** Have enough road captains to spread the larger groups into safer, smaller groups.
6. **Behavior:** Road Captains and Directors/Assistant Directors should always be vigilant in discouraging inappropriate behavior whether the riders are ALR or another group. We are not just representing the ALR but also the American Legion and should act accordingly. This should also be clearly stated in pre-ride safety briefings.
7. **Safety Cage:** It might be good practice to have someone with a car go along on rides to be available to transport parts that might become disconnected or transport riders who for whatever reason cannot complete the ride and need a ride back. Most places that are stops on rides have no issues with storing a bike overnight if the rider cannot complete the ride.

Let's all ride safely and responsibly and set an example for others!!!

Ride Positions

1. **ROAD CAPTAIN**: The Road Captain is a fundamental part of any ride planning and he/she is in charge of group rides. The Road Captain deals with the police and other unexpected surprises making sure everybody has a fun and safe ride.

He/she will instruct any rider to ride in a specific position within the group, or to leave the group entirely, for reasons of misconduct, disorderly or unsafe riding, or for observed faulty / unsafe equipment. Watch for his/her directions and signals.

He/she helps educate new riders in hand signals and other riding etiquette. You can feel comfortable asking the Road Captain questions on all aspects of motorcycle riding and safety.

At each ride he/she typically, but not always, does the following:

- Conduct pre-ride briefs as necessary and answer any questions you may have.
- Review the ride route and change the route as actual road conditions / weather dictates.
- Appoint a trail rider (Safety Officer/Sweep) to ride at the rear of the group.
- Advise riders about the pace of the ride and the ride formation.

2. **MID CAPTAIN**: A Mid Captains responsibility is much the same as the Road Captain. In a large group, Mid Captains are used for "breaking up" the main group into smaller more controllable sizes. Most often this is used while traveling in heavy traffic or in areas of multiple stop signs or lights. Smaller groups help the ride to be completed more safely. Small groups will blend back into the main group at a later point in. Mid Captains help prevent riders from speeding or otherwise using poor judgment in the attempt to "keep up" with the main group.

3. **RIDE SAFETY OFFICER/SWEEP**: This very important position is often overlooked, but can be a critical part of the successful and safe group ride. The Safety Officer sees all... because they take the "last" position in the group. And, the responsibilities of this position can be varied and multiple.

The Safety Officer communicates to the Ride Captain, through hand signals, the status of the group. The most used signal is a fist high in the air signaling to the Ride Captain that everyone is together and made it through that traffic light or a turn. The Ride Captain will "acknowledge" this by signaling back the same way. This also helps to remove the anxiety of the riders in the group, wondering how everyone is doing. Other signals are used and discussed directly between the Road Captain and Safety Officer to insure proper communication.

If the group becomes separated, the Safety Officer moves to a lead position and becomes a Mid Captain. If there is a problem, it becomes the Safety Officer's responsibility to oversee, and communicate appropriately so that emergency help can be notified as necessary. Obviously, the Safety Officer is equipped with a cell phone, radio or device capable of doing so.

Individual Responsibilities

RIDE WITHIN YOUR OWN KNOWN SAFE CAPABILITIES - PERIOD

Participants in a group ride must be willing to follow basic and sensible rules to ensure the safety of everyone involved. **If you are unwilling to follow the rules, then do not participate in the group ride.** Ride behind or separate, but not between the Ride Captain and the Safety Officer or you will be asked to leave the group.

Riders should know the basic hand signals of group riding and "use them".

Every rider in the group has the capability and responsibility to use hand signals at any time necessary. The Ride Captain may miss a road obstacle, or not signal for a variety of reasons, including the fact that he/she just didn't see it. It becomes your individual responsibility to signal to the riders around you and behind you that there is an obstacle in the road. Other riders depend heavily on these signals; riding as a group reduces your view of the road.

Any rider that is uncomfortable with the speed of the ride, should motion the riders behind to pass and take a forward position. The Ride Safety Officer will take the responsibility to ride with this person separately or stop to assist if there is a problem.

If the rider in front of you, including the Ride Captain, signals an obstacle in the road, **you are "obligated"** to pass that information on to the riders behind you using hand signals. If you do not - and the person behind you hits the obstacle - you might be facing a serious discussion...

All signals from the Ride Captain should be relayed through the group by repeating the same signal back to the Safety Officer. It is important that all signals get passed through the entire group at all times.

Less experienced riders should ride near the front of the group to minimize the rubber band effect. This helps aid the Road Captain in adjusting the pace of the ride. More experienced riders should ride towards the back of the group.

All riders are expected to be ready to depart the assembly point with a **full tank of fuel**, full stomach, empty bladder, and appropriately clothed. Be prepared to ride for at least one hour before stopping.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. Do not consume alcohol or use any drugs or medication that could impair your judgment and ability to ride.

Never block traffic yourself. It's dangerous and it is against the law. Can you spell LIABILITY?

If you have any concerns about the ride, talk to the Road Captain and he/she will try to address your concern.

Hand Signals

Stop - arm extended straight down, palm facing back



Slow Down - arm extended straight out, palm facing down



Speed Up - arm extended straight out, palm facing up



You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front



Follow Me - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward



Single File - arm and index finger extended straight up



Double File - arm with index and middle finger extended straight up



Hazard in Roadway - on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand



Highbeam - tap on top of helmet with open palm down



Pull Off - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder



Turn Signal On - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended



Fuel - arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended



Refreshment Stop - fingers closed, thumb to mouth



Comfort Stop - forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion



Riding Together / Group Rides

1. **Formations:**

- If at any time you feel the riding intensity is beyond your current skill level you should drop out of the group ride. Trying to keep up with the group may be hazardous to you and other riders in the group.
- Watch for signals from the Road Captain. Turning, staggered/single file, slowing and hazard signals are to be passed back through the group.
- The group will stop for all traffic signals and obey all traffic laws. Do not run stop signs. Only official police escorts may block intersections.
- Watch for traffic signal changes and be prepared. Safely bunch up at approaching intersections to shorten the group length. DO NOT RUN CAUTION OR RED LIGHTS.
- Staggered formation is the norm on most roads. In staggered formation you should follow the bike directly ahead by 2 seconds and the bike in the other left or right lane position by 1 second. This is not always possible. Single file formation is normal for twisty roads, Interstate entrance and exit ramps and construction areas. Watch for Road Captain signals.
- The entire width of the lane belongs to you or the other rider; so, do not ride beside another rider. Allow room to swerve in case of an emergency or road hazard.
- Maintain your location within the group and do not pass. If you need to change location in the group wait until the next stop then change your position when the ride starts again. It is common courtesy for the rider who is following, in the other position of the lane, to signal to the next rider in the lane with the vacancy to move up one position. If the rider does not signal, slowly begin to move into the vacant position.

2. **Lane Changes and Passing:**

- Watch for and pass back to the Safety Officer all turning signals from the Road Captain.
- Multi-lane highway lane change; all riders will hold their position. The Safety Officer will reposition into the new lane to open a gap for the rest of the group to enter. Again, riders, hold your position until the rider in front of you changes lanes.
- Two lane highway; no more than one or two bikes should enter the passing lane at any one time. When those bikes have passed and pulled into the lane, the next 1 or 2 riders may begin to pass. The Road Captain will stay in the passing lane after passing, as long as the road ahead is clear, to create a large gap ahead of the passed vehicle. Following bikes pass as individual riders and return to staggered formation after passing if appropriate.
- Vehicles in the formation: Other vehicles may enter the group for a short period. Respect their right to use the road. They usually leave the group at the first opportunity. If you get into a dispute with the driver of a vehicle, the vehicle driver will always come out ahead.

3. **Group Separations / Dropping Out:**

- If you must leave the group, exit from the side of the group, preferably at a location that does not disturb the other riders. Signal to another rider that you are leaving so they may inform the Road Captain at the next stop.
- The Safety Officer will follow at the back of the group and will stop to help any rider who has to drop out of the group. When the Safety Officer rider stops to help someone, the last rider in the group becomes the Safety Officer rider and will inform the Road Captain at the next stop that riders have been left behind.
- If the group gets separated at a traffic light/stop the last rider of the forward group becomes the Safety Officer of that group. The Road Captain will stop or leave a rider to wait for and direct the following group at any intersection where the group makes a turn. If you become the lead of the trailing group and do not know the group ride route, then stop your group at the nearest safe pull off point and get a rider who knows the route to lead the group to the next scheduled stop. The Road Captain may send two riders back to check on the missing riders and/or opt to continue the ride.

4. **Breakdowns:** On long rides, pair up with a riding partner. If your riding partner drops out, you are to drop out and assist if possible. In this instance, the Safety Officer will continue with the group to the next stop where the Road Captain will be informed of the missing riders. If the rider breaking down does not have a partner, the Safety Officer will stay behind and call the Road Captain to advise him of the situation.

5. **ACCIDENT:** If a mishap occurs with a rider in the group the Safety Officer and rider partner will stop to render assistance. Other riders should continue with the group. The group will pull off the road at the first safe place and respond to the incident. Do not create congestion on the roadway in the area of the mishap.

USE EXTREME CAUTION.

6. **Parking:** Watch where the lead Road Captain positions him/herself in the parking area. Slowly ride behind him/her and get on-line. After everyone is on-line the group backs into the parking slots. When the Road Captain pulls into a small parking space; that's your cue to find your own spot to park.

Time to Ride

1. **Meeting Place and time:** Riders should strive to arrive on time at the meeting place. This gives riders an opportunity for a final gear check. Local rides will normally meet, depart and return to the American Legion Parking lot. The Road Captain will normally arrive at the departure location a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the Pre-Ride Brief. If you have questions about the ride, the route, or even about the American Legion Riders program, this would be a good time to approach the Road Captain.
2. **Overnight / Out-of-Town Trips:** These rides usually have more than one ride plan involving multiple Road Captains. The meeting locations will be pre-determined by the Road Captain leading each group. Each Group Road Captain will lead their ride and they are responsible for all the planning information.
3. **Pre-Ride Briefing:** The Road Captain will conduct a briefing for the entire group – **BE THERE**. Road Captain will review the route to the final destination, planned stops, procedure for the return ride (i.e., on your own, organized groups, and planned routes). The Road Captain(s) and Safety Officer(s) will be

identified should it be necessary to break the riders into groups for safety. The briefing generally contains the following:

- a. Staggered Riding – 1 sec interval minimum, alternating lane positions.
 - b. Stop Signs - double up, proceed through as pairs and then return to normal staggered formation. Authorized by Florida State Statue 316.209.
 - c. Stop Lights – stop if the light turns red, regardless of your position in the group. Proceed on green when the way is clear. The Road Captain will slow-up so that you may safely rejoin the group.
 - d. Lane Changes – pass the signal back. Each rider is ultimately responsible for their own safety. On multiple lane highways, hold your lane until the motorcycle in front of you changes lanes. The Road Captain waits on the Safety Officer to secure the lane. Once the Safety Officer has secured the lane, the Road Captain will initiate the lane change followed by each of the riders.
 - e. Passing Traffic – single up while passing, use your own judgment. The Road Captain in the passing lane indicates no oncoming traffic. Return to your lane and proper formation when it's safe and as soon as possible. Only pass when legal.
 - f. Hand Signals – Pass signals back to the rider behind you. Do not maintain or perform any hand signal if safety requires two hands on your handlebars. (Basic Signals are on page 7)
4. **Getting Your Head in the Ride:** There are a lot of traps out on the roads, all roads have hazards that we need to negotiate. This thought-provoking section highlights only a few road hazards you may encounter. While every hazard may appear the same; all hazards are different and there is no single solution. The rider must decide their own course of action to successfully cope with the obstacle. From one patch of surface to the next, one day to another, it's not realistic to assume the road surface will be consistently good. Look for changes in color or texture of the road ahead. Avoiding common hazards means observing the hazard in time to do something about the situation. Source of the following information is from "Proficient Motorcycling" by David L. Hough – "Mastering the Ride". Remember, practice is training and when you're excited, you are reliant on your training.
- a. Road Configurations – Twisting and curving roads increases the enjoyment of riding on back roads for most riders. Familiar roads free of surface hazards may still take a rider by surprise as a rider doesn't recall every curve exactly. Small errors can have magnified consequences when riding in a group or formation. Always operate your motorcycle at a safe speed not to exceed your vision.
 - Unexpected Objects – Always be prepared for an abrupt stop or altered course as you negotiate each curve. Prepare for whatever combinations of dips and turns in the roads that may be just beyond or out of your sight.
 - Apexes / Cornering Lines – The "Tail of the Dragon" is a great example as many riders sharpen their floorboards accelerating through curves. Almost all 318 curves in the 11 mile run camber (slant) nicely into the turn thus increasing traction and leanover clearance. However, there are a few curves that slant the wrong direction decreasing leanover clearance and available traction. An improperly graded road can be a disaster in the making. Use the "slow, look, lean, and roll" technique.

- b. Roadway Contaminants – Spend time learning how to read the road ahead and adjust your speed and line to keep a lot of reserve traction available. The key is to look for changes in the appearance of the surface that indicate a possible change in the road condition. Avoiding common hazards means observing the hazard in time to do something about it.
- Sand – We live in Florida, expect sand to build in the corners and/or be blown across the road. Loose sand normally decreases traction on a dry road but might actually improve traction in the rain.
 - Edge traps – Work zone warning signs may be your first indication and shouldn't be ignored. Keep your tires away from raised pavement edges. If you must cross over an edge, do so at maximum angle. Treat it like a curb, swerve away from the edge and cross at a 45-degree angle. Roll the throttle to bounce the front wheel over the edge then straighten the bike.
 - Loose Gravel – Stay out of the deep stuff and away from the center line on a two lane road. Riding too slow causes more wobbles than moving along a little faster. Nothing excites a rider like the front wheel plowing into loose gravel. The deep gravel near the entrance to our post can take down an unsuspecting rider.
 - Tar Snakes, pot holes, and slippery stuff – It's important to devote part of your attention to road conditions. Even when riding in a group, you alone are responsible for your course direction. A rider in front of you may not be aware or may not be able to point out a hazard in the road.
 - Dirt – Dirt blown across the road might decrease traction to some extent but will quickly turn to slippery mud with rain.
 - Oil – When stopping, look at the pavement where you put your feet down. Vehicles leak oil and oil buildups are common at intersections. Be aware of the temperature and current weather conditions. If the weather is hot and dry be suspicious of dark puddles. It may be water that will quickly evaporate off your tires or it may be oil that will lubricate your tires for several miles.
 - Bridges – Assured encounter in Florida. Be aware of smooth concrete or the hated steel grates. Steel grates will cause your tires to wiggle around and change the available traction.
 - Agricultural areas – We all enjoy the country side rides. Scrutinize the road for colored areas indicating farm equipment has tracked dirt or mud onto the pavement. While the speeds are generally the same, usually the back roads are not maintained as well as a major highway.
 - Objects – Even flat objects are reason for concern. Flattened soda pop cans have been known to become a ski when the tires cross over the can at the same time the breaks are applied. Always attempt to put your tires over the best surface of the road. Let off the breaks and allow your tire to roll over the object if it becomes lodged under your tire.

- Logging trucks – One of Florida's favorite vehicles. Riders should increase their following distance significantly when stuck behind a logging truck. Logging trucks are known for falling debris as with any vehicle hauling an open load. Be careful when passing as drivers of these trucks have turned left with little to no notice where you least expect a turn. Log trucks must travel dirt roads to be loaded with timber.

Ride Types

1. **Meet & Decide Rides**: Rides occur on Sunday but any day may serve as a suitable substitute. This is not an organized ride; rather, members meet at the post at a designated time (presently 10:00 a.m.) and choose the destination and route. If the Road Captain is participating, he may choose to lead the ride or allow anyone interested to lead the ride. Usually, there will be a stop for lunch either during the ride or at the conclusion. The goal is to drag more people out for rides and getting to know your fellow riders on a more personable level.
2. **Sponsor Rides**: Ride occurs any day of the week and usually at night Monday – Friday. This is not an organized ride. It's designed to get maximum participation from our riders to show appreciation to a business that sponsored the Run. A good show-of-force is expected and will help ensure that we receive quality sponsorship packages from businesses for future runs.
3. **Poker Runs**: An organized event where riders (sometimes other vehicles) visit five to seven checkpoints drawing a play card at each checkpoint. The event has a time limit, however, the participants are not timed and winning is purely a matter of chance. Usually, a small part of the fee may go to funding the event, including the prizes while the rest goes to the event's charity recipient. There are several variations such as the West Coast rules (each card has an assigned value) and dice runs (participants roll dice at each stop).

Equipment

1. **Safety Equipment**

- A DOT approved helmet goes a long way towards saving your skull in case of an accident. Even if you've decided you don't want to protect your brain, helmets offer shelter from wind noise and rain. It may be prudent to bring a DOT approved helmet when traveling on overnight trips or when traveling through a state or on a military base with a helmet requirement. **All military installations require helmets, long sleeve shirts, eye protection, boots, and gloves.**
- Eye protection is required by law for both the rider and passenger. Eye protection not only keeps wind from making tears streak down your face, they also keep all manner of debris and bugs from flying into your eyes. Florida has a lot of bugs ranging in various sizes.
- Earplugs cut the wind noise on a motorcycle at highway speeds and helps preserve your hearing. Nice item to have on cross country trips.
- Gloves can protect your palms, knuckles, and fingers. It's a basic human reflex to brake your fall by a cat-like extension of the arms when a rider is thrown off his/her bike.

- Boots not only protect your feet, boots help keep your feet firmly planted on the floor boards and the pavement, when stopped. Any shoe over the ankle will help protect your skin from coming in contact with the blistering hot tail pipes.
2. **Tool Kits**: Most Road Captains and Safety Officers carry an extensive tool kit. It's recommended that you bring your own tool kit. If you are without tools and find that you need to make adjustments to continue the ride, check with any ALR officer or some of the more experienced riders. Tool kits are invaluable when needed. A tool kit checklist of the most commonly used tools can be found by searching of the internet.
 3. **First Aid Kits**: There is an old saying that, "There are two types of bikers, the ones that have gone down, and the ones that will go down." A kit can be as large or as small as you desire. An ordinary first aid kit just won't cut it, mainly because of the size but also because of the type injuries bikers suffer. You probably won't have much time to read instructions so know what's in your kit and how to use it. It's always beneficial to take a course in CPR, learning how to stop bleeding, treating burns and eye injuries and how to stabilize a fractured limb. A quick response to someone's medical needs can make a definite difference and help ensure the most positive outcome possible.

DISCLAIMERS: Information in this manual is derived from a variety of valued sources. If any information that you believe needs to be reviewed, bring it to the attention of the Department Leadership for review. The safety and the ride belong to each rider and their passenger and if for any reason the rider and their passenger believes that they cannot ride in a safe manor the rider needs to discontinue the ride in a safe manner.

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