

Riding two-up is a great way to share the pleasure of motorcycling, but extra care and some planning are required when you have a co-rider on board. The word passenger suggests a person who has no responsibilities for the operation of the motorcycle; one who is simply along for the ride. A co-rider, on the other hand, shares some of the responsibilities for the safe operation of the machine. Sitting in the back seat means a lot more freedom to enjoy the scenery without worrying about the technical part of the ride. But with this freedom comes responsibility. The co-rider should ride as exactly that, a co-rider, not a passenger, but a second rider. Two-up riding is a team sport, and that means working together to make the ride both fun and safe.

In the following paragraphs, I have tried to summarize some of the important aspects of two-up riding. I refer to the rider in the masculine gender and to the co-rider in the feminine, (for simplicity and) only because this is the profile of most of our members.

## **HANDLING CHANGES**

When you put a second person on your motorcycle, you should adjust the suspension and tire pressure to allow for the additional weight. This will help compensate for the changes in the bike's handling characteristics. The added weight of a co-rider will make some riding maneuvers more difficult. The most noticeable change is at very low speeds, when you have to balance a heavier, more top heavy load. Turning and stopping will also be affected. The added weight compresses the suspension farther and uses up more cornering clearance. The weight also makes the bike less responsive to steering input and consumes a chunk of your traction reserves. Braking performance is degraded mainly because the added weight lengthens stopping distance. Braking is usually the most difficult riding regime for a co-rider, who may be thrown against the rider's back, compromising his control. For all these reasons, you should knock your speed and aggression back several notches when you have a co-rider.

## **BEFORE YOU RIDE**

A memorable, pleasant two-person ride starts with a briefing that lets the co-rider know what to expect and tells her how to ride and respond to various situations. The thoroughness of the briefing depends on your co-rider's experience, especially experience riding with you.

Put the motorcycle on the side or center stand and go through the motions. Review all of the different controls and explain how they work, especially the "Engine Cut-Off Switch". Point out the throttle and the levers, indicating which one is the brake and which one is the clutch.

Make it clear that your co-rider should keep her feet on the foot pegs at all times, even when stopped. On a touring bike, show her the saddlebag guardrails and point out that they are heavy steel, like 'roll bars', and will protect her legs only so long as her feet remain on those floorboards. You may also suggest that your co-rider can use her legs to soak up bumps.

Tell your co-rider to sit up straight at all times. Look over your inside shoulder in turns and just lean with the motorcycle. Don't fight it or lean the other way.

## **MOUNTING/DISMOUNTING**

The rider should get on the bike first and do the following:

- Apply the front brake
- Put the transmission in neutral
- Start the motor
- Raise the side stand.

Now that he is holding the bike up vertically with his legs, he should signal to the co-rider that it is safe to get on.

The co-rider should stand away from the bike and wait for the rider to give the OK before getting on. Mount from the left side, use the passenger foot pegs as a step and swing your right leg over the seat. You can grasp the rider's upper arm or shoulder to help brace yourself, but don't lean your whole weight on him. Keep your weight centered over the bike, pushing yourself forward as you mount rather than pulling the bike toward you.

Only after the co-rider indicates that she is ready should the rider put the bike into gear.

At the end of the ride, the rider should apply the front brake, put the transmission in neutral, place both feet firmly on the ground to support the bike, and then tell the co-rider to "hop off". The co-rider should proceed to dismount to the left.

## **RIDER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Make your co-rider as comfortable as possible. If your co-rider is miserable, you will be too, so, do whatever you have to make her comfortable. Passenger floorboards or foot pegs should be adjusted so that your co-rider's thighs are parallel with the ground. If she wants arm rests put them on; it's a small price to pay for the added comfort and security that your co-rider will gain from them. Remember that your co-rider gets more windblast than you do because she sits higher, and she doesn't have the added protection of the fairing nor does she benefit from engine heat in cold weather.
- Carrying a co-rider tests your riding ability. You should be able to shift smoothly enough to avoid bumping helmets, and your stops and departures should also be smooth and gentle.
- If there is a big bump in the road ahead, warn your co-rider. Her spine is right over the rear axle of the motorcycle. It hurts her more than you when you hit a hard bump or rough road. When you warn the co-rider, she can get prepared by leaning forward a bit and changing her spine alignment with the rear axle.
- Communicate with your co-rider. If for instance, you are coming upon a hairpin curve, it is a good idea to say "tight curve ahead". This should prompt the co-rider to look through the curve with you. This way you will be in sync with the bike because you are both looking in the same direction. The bike will be more steady, thus giving you the opportunity to react more smoothly if something were to be in the curve such as gravel or a stopped car.

## CO-RIDER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Keep your feet on the foot pegs at all times, even when stopped. Never put your feet out to try to hold up the motorcycle.
- It's okay to move around, stretch or shake your leg, as long as you let the rider know first. Your movements can affect the balance of the bike, so make all weight shifts gradually.
- Observe the road ahead and look over the rider's inside shoulder in the direction of a turn. You don't have to lean, just look. You will actually be sitting straight up, which is what you're supposed to do. You should never lean opposite the lean of the rider. By looking over his inside shoulder, the co-rider moves with the rider and stays in line with the bike's lean.
- Look all the way through a turn to the exit and keep your head and eyes level with the horizon. This means tilting your head away from the direction of the turn.
- When coming to a stop, sit up straight with your back pressed toward the backrest if so equipped and your eyes toward the horizon. This will put most of your weight on the back tire, thus allowing the brakes to work at their optimal stopping power. If you are leaning forward when the rider is braking, you will change the stopping dynamics of the motorcycle.
- Co-riders don't have the best frontal view and when the motorcycle is stopping, it is tempting to peek around to see what's up ahead. Stop to think for a minute which shoulder you look over when you peek. Do you tend to look over the RIGHT shoulder? If you do this, you are causing the motorcycle to lean more to the right, causing the rider to have to take his right foot off the brake to steady the bike, thus decreasing the braking power. If you want to look, that's fine, just look over the LEFT shoulder.
- While it is always preferable that the co-rider has had a motorcycle safety course, even the normal street skills used in everyday driving will help in spotting hazards. Being an extra pair of eyes for the rider doesn't mean being a back-seat nag. It means spotting hazards and knowing how the rider normally reacts and being ready to help in that effort. If the rider does not show that reaction, possibly indicating that he has not seen the hazard, the co-rider should speak up. But don't get excited, stay calm! Once the rider has realized a hazardous situation exists, he will be tense enough for the both of you. Remember the rider already knows that he has made a mistake and is plenty busy trying to correct the situation. Unnecessary distractions like being yelled at during this time diminish the rider's concentration and may jeopardize your safety.
- As you gain experience as a co-rider, you will know how hard your rider brakes during normal braking, and whether hard-line braking will be necessary. You should prepare yourself by holding the grab rails or seat frame and bracing your feet. You will not slide forward, banging helmets and pushing the rider onto the tank. When you spot a pothole or a large piece of rubber, you will know that your rider will soon swerve, and you will be prepared to let the bike move under you.
- Be the navigator and map-reader so that the rider can concentrate on riding.
- If the rider slumps over while riding, get control of the motorcycle. You must reach the handlebars. You should practice this at home while the motorcycle is on the side

or center stand. Push the rider forward if possible, stand up if necessary. Engage the "Engine Cut-Off Switch". Try to remain calm. Talk to the rider, if possible, to get information and calm him, if he is conscious. When you have control of the motorcycle, steer away from traffic. Also steer the motorcycle to a soft place to fall over, if possible. You will be falling over! Let the motorcycle fall over at the slowest possible speed. Even though you will have a natural tendency to put your feet out, keep your legs in until after you fall over and stop. Don't worry if the bike sputters when it slows down. If you know how and can reach it, pull in the clutch.

Good team riding takes practice. Review these guidelines regularly and make a conscious effort to follow them. After awhile, these practices will come naturally and the ride will be more enjoyable for both of you.

Portions of this article were taken from:

- Along for the Ride by Art Friedman
- GWTA Co-Rider Seminar
- Two Up = Heads Up by Jackie Vaughan
- GWTA "Mountain Riding Seminar
- Co-Rider Techniques by Lori Rowland
- James Davis Master Strategy Group
- Motorcycling Excellence