

**It tackles the subject of staggered riding. What do you think ???**

Are you having fun? of course you are. That's why you're here.

Motorcyclists know the wonderful feelings that go with riding. The freedom, the exhilaration, and the camaraderie.

I enjoy it, and I want to do so for a long time to come. The problem is that we face lots of dangers on the road, many that we have little control over.

But what we can do is work on those things that we can control, and one of those must be how we ride in a group.

Back in 1994, I spoke to a guy about a group ride, I think it was near Bathurst in NSW, that went wrong, with 5 bikes out of the 13 going down, fortunately with no major injuries.

It seems the bikes were riding in a close staggered formation when a car appeared from a side street on the left. The nose of the car slightly intruding into the intersection before is stopped.

The bikes in the left hand wheel track began moving over to avoid the car, and the ride rapidly closed up with the last 5 bikes crashing nose to tail.

The problem was not the staggered formation, it was the distances set between the bikes.

Some organizations and people promote a 2 second gap between the bikes IN THE SAME WHEEL TRACK, reasoning that there is a 2 second safety zone.

The problem is that when something occurs, such as car intruding into the path, it instantly removes any maneuvering or stopping space.

If you look at Figure 1, you can see how there is an illusion of space in front of each bike. But when you look at the distance to the nearest bike, you can see it is less than 1 second away, and this is FAR TOO CLOSE.

Staggered formation riding is a very good way to ride, because it does allow you to see the road ahead better. The mass of bikes is easier to see through because of the staggered lines.

But when you are riding, you must have room to maneuver around dangers or obstacles, and this calls for space.

Promoters of close staggered formation riding tell me "You have to stick to your wheel track" but where does this leave you if something happens.

What do you do if you are riding along in the right hand wheel track and an oncoming car drifts over the centre line? Are you just going to sit there, or will you move away from the danger?

Figure 2 shows just how the safety gaps disappear when bikes start moving around to avoid danger. In a situation like this, the bikes at the rear of the group will find themselves in a very crowded bit of road.

The only way to stay safe when riding in a staggered formation group is to increase your gap to at least 2 seconds to the NEAREST BIKE. That way, when something happens, you have space.

On the right is a group 2 of 8 motorcycles riding in staggered formation with a 2 second gap to the bike in front in the same wheel track.

Bike number 2 sees a car intruding into his part of the road and takes avoiding action, moving across in front of bike 3, who reacts to this intrusion by throttling off.

Bike number 4 will also want to avoid the object, but when it goes to move into the other wheel track, it will be confronted by bike 3 which has slowed.

Bike 5 now finds that the gap to bike 3 has shrank due to the roll off, and bike 4 is trying to get in to this decreasing gap. So bike 5 brakes.

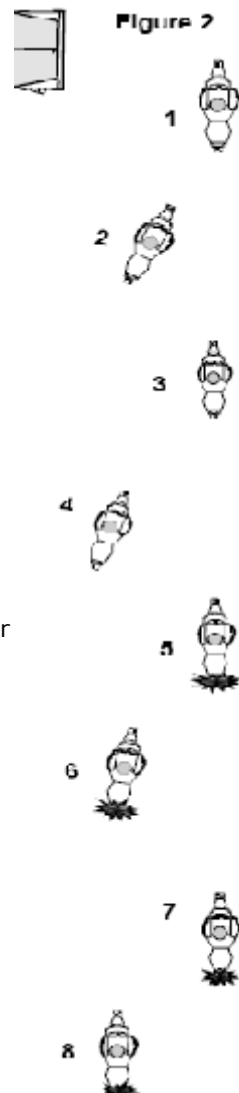
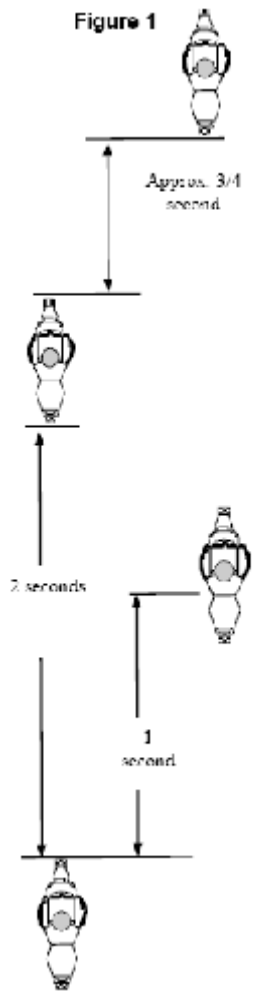


Figure 3

Compounding the issue is that as the front of the ride slows, the gaps at the rear of the ride close up. This is the rubber band effect and it will increase the danger of a crash.

On the right, bike number 1 stays away from the intersection and the car waiting to exit.

Bike number 2 was in the left hand wheel track but moves right to create more space as it passes through the intersection.

An oncoming car is drifting over the centre line, and bike number 3 moves away from the oncoming car to create more space as they pass.

Bikes 4 & 5 maintain a 2 second gap even though they are in different wheel tracks.

As the oncoming car approaches, bike 5 will move away from the centre line to create space.

And space gives you time to slow down and avoid the crash.

Figure 3 shows how a group riding in staggered formation with a 2 second gap TO THE NEAREST BIKE can move away from dangers safely. This is a safe ride.

Ride safe-Ian Mathers

