



QUICK TIPS: MSF's Guide to Group Riding

Motorcycling is primarily a solo activity, but for many, riding as a group – whether with friends on a Sunday morning ride or with an organized motorcycle rally – is the epitome of the motorcycling experience. Here are some tips to help ensure a fun and safe group ride:

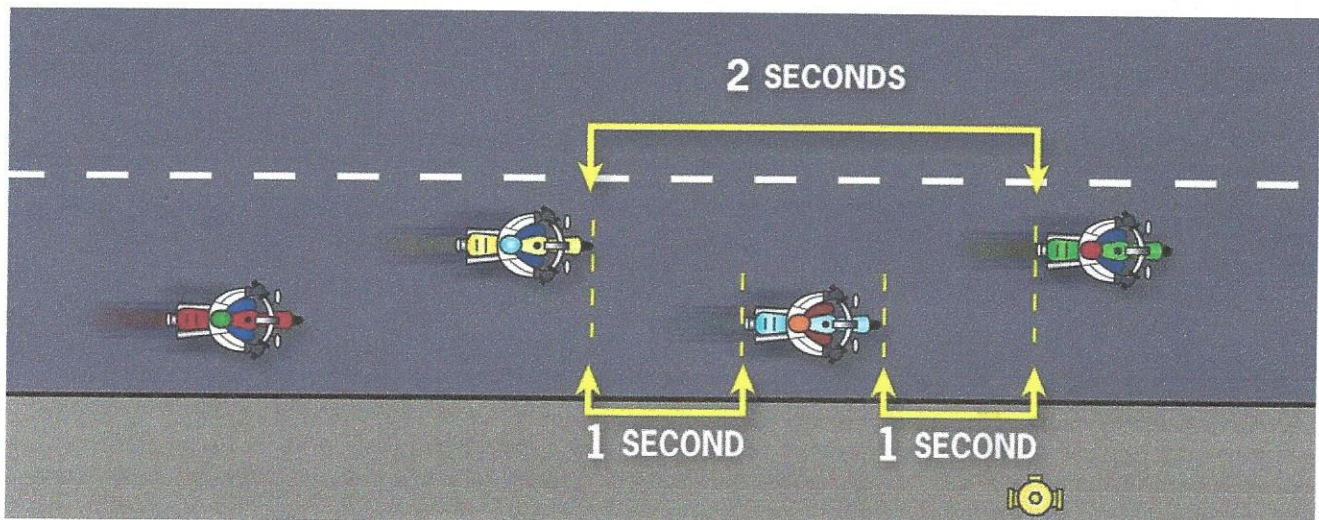
Arrive prepared. Arrive on time with a full gas tank.

Hold a riders' meeting. Discuss things like the route, rest and fuel stops, and hand signals (see diagrams on page 3). Assign a lead and sweep (tail) rider. Both should be experienced riders who are well-versed in group riding procedures. The leader should be aware of each rider's skill level before the ride and monitor the riders during the ride.

Keep the group to a manageable size, ideally five to seven riders. If necessary, break the group into smaller sub-groups, separated by a few seconds, each with a lead and sweep rider.

Ride prepared. At least one rider in each group should have a first-aid kit and full tool kit, and all riders should carry a cell phone, so the group is prepared for any problem that they might encounter.

Ride in formation. The staggered riding formation (see diagram below) allows a proper space cushion between motorcycles so that each rider has enough time and space to maneuver and to react to hazards. The leader rides in the left third of the lane, while the next rider stays at least one second behind in the right third of the lane; the rest of the group follows the same pattern. A single-file formation with a minimum 2-second following distance is preferred on a curvy road, under conditions of poor visibility or poor road surfaces, entering/leaving highways, or other situations where an increased space cushion or maneuvering room is needed.



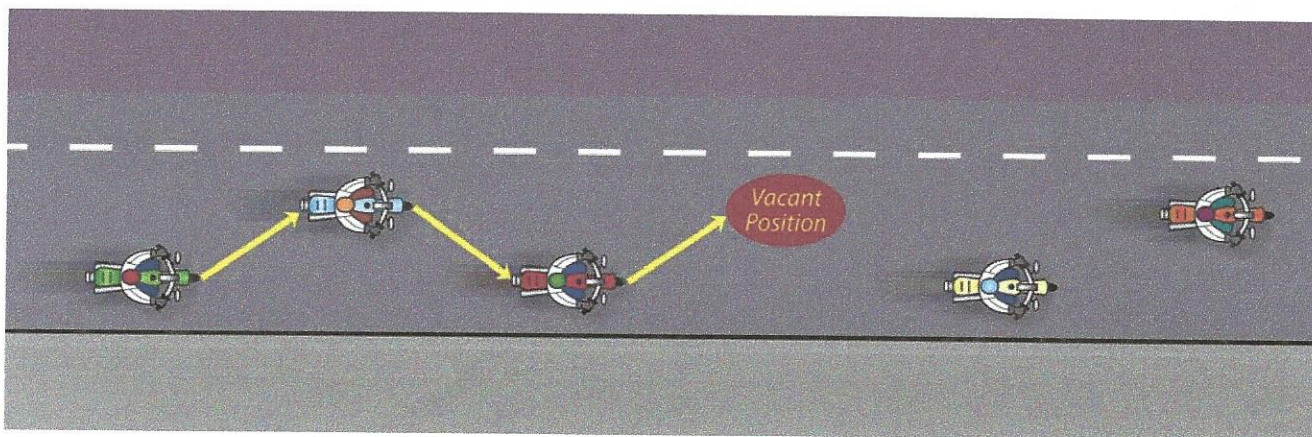
Avoid side-by-side formations, as they reduce the space cushion. If you suddenly needed to swerve to avoid a hazard, you would not have room to do so. You don't want handlebars to get entangled.

Periodically check the riders following using your rear view mirrors. If you see a rider falling behind, slow down so they may catch up. If all the riders in the group use this procedure, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up.



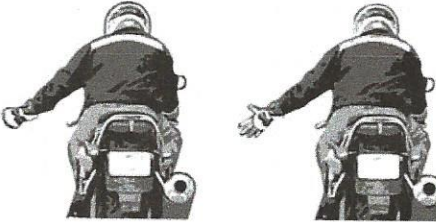
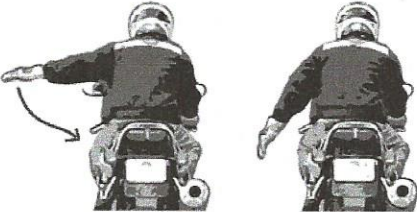


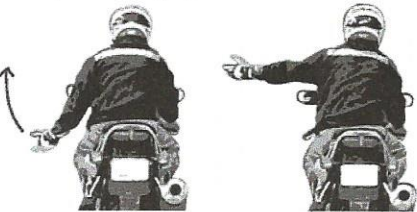
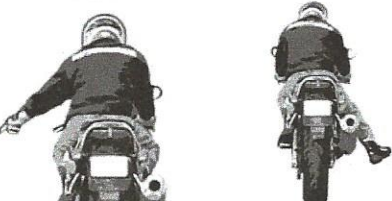





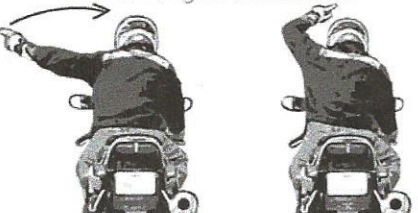
If you're separated from the group, don't panic. Your group should have a pre-planned procedure in place to regroup. Don't break the law or ride beyond your skills to catch up.

For mechanical or medical problems, use a cell phone to call for assistance as the situation warrants.

If a rider leaves during the ride, the rest of the group should re-form the staggered formation by criss-crossing into the next vacant position. Although it would seem more efficient for the column directly behind the missing rider to move up, we do not recommend it because passing another rider within a lane can be risky.



MSF's Guide to Group Riding: Hand Signals

<p>Stop - arm extended straight down, palm facing back</p> 	<p>Single File - arm and index finger extended straight up</p> 	<p>Turn Signal On - open and close hand with fingers and thumb extended</p> 
<p>Slow Down - arm extended straight out, palm facing down</p> 	<p>Double File - arm with index and middle finger extended straight up</p> 	<p>Fuel - arm out to side pointing to tank with finger extended</p> 
<p>Speed Up - arm extended straight out, palm facing up</p> 	<p>Hazard in Roadway - on the right, point with right foot; on the left, point with left hand</p> 	<p>Refreshment Stop - fingers closed, thumb to mouth</p> 
<p>You Lead/Come - arm extended upward 45 degrees, palm forward pointing with index finger, swing in arc from back to front</p> 	<p>Highbeam - tap on top of helmet with open palm down</p> 	<p>Comfort Stop - forearm extended, fist clenched with short up and down motion</p> 
<p>Follow Me - arm extended straight up from shoulder, palm forward</p> 	<p>Pull Off - arm positioned as for right turn, forearm swung toward shoulder</p> 	

Rider Education: Group Riding Guide

Table of Contents

- ["Group Leaders" and "Back Doors"](#)
- [Responsibility of Group Leaders](#)
- [Back Door \(Tail End Charlie\)](#)
- [Defensive Riding Practices](#)
- [Group Riding Techniques](#)
- [Starting The Ride](#)
- [During The Ride](#)
- [Lane Changing and Passing](#)
- [Twisties](#)
- [Intersections](#)
- [Stops and Final Destination](#)
- [Parking](#)
- [Ride Organizers \(for each specific ride\)](#)
- [Chapter Ride Coordinator's](#)
- [Trailers](#)
- [Comments](#)
- [C. B. Chatter](#)

Acknowledgments: This Group Riding Guide, is help new or potential GWTA members become acquainted with our present riding procedures. Some of the enclosed information has been obtained from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation and from various articles written by other motorcyclists.

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The following are suggestions only, not to be considered rules. They are guidelines and not mandatory in order to be members of GWTA, however, the more we as a group think and ride alike, the safer and more fun the rides will be.

Riding in a group is strictly voluntary and should be done only if you feel comfortable with your motorcycle and the riding habits of your particular riding group.

It is recommended that a good quality helmet, eye protection, boots, gloves and protective clothing be worn at all times, by all riding. Also, that the motorcycle be in a safe condition.

"Group Leaders" and "Back Doors"

Responsibility of Group Leaders:

- a. Leadership of the group while in transit
- b. Be firm and decisive
- c. Explain routes to predetermined destinations (see Ride Organizers)
- d. If distance dictates, select some rest stops and stick to the plan
- e. Explain the formations to be used during transit; staggered formation should be used for nearly all the group rides.
- f. Try to find out the riding skill level of the group members you are leading, so that you do not attempt to lead beyond their ability.
- g. Explain the two-second rule and the necessity to keep closed up.
- h. Explain the lane numbers (lane #1 is the fastest or left lane)
- i. The Group Leaders should select their own Back Doors.
- j. Maintain the integrity of the group
- k. If the Back Door advises that one of the group is having a problem and is leaving the group, the Group Leader should bring the group to a safe place to pull off and wait for the Back Door to report.
- l. Recognize and obey all vehicle code rules and regulations. (Watch speed limits).
- m. Slow down if necessary, when the Back Door tells you part of the group didn't make the light, etc.
- n. Lane Changes (2 lane - 2 way traffic): If it looks like it is going to be a long drawn out process to get all of the bikes in your group around a vehicle, consider slowing down instead and keep your group intact.
- o. Lane Changes (highway with at least 2 lanes for your direction): The Group Leader will inform the Rear Bike of the need to move into another lane and the number of the lane to move into. At the first opportunity, the Rear Bike moves into the new lane, preventing any traffic from trying to

pass the team in that lane. The Rear Bike informs the Group Leader when the lane is "secure" and the Group Leader will then announce over the CB to all bikes in his group "Let's all move to the #___ lane, NOW!" The Group Leader hesitates before saying NOW, allowing each bike a few moments to look for themselves, that it is safe to move over. Then all the bikes will signal and follow the bike in front of them into the new lane. This method is used, as not all bikes are equipped with CBs and wouldn't otherwise know that the group is moving to a different lane. This is a better method than a simple free for all and certainly looks better.

- p. Keep in mind that the Group Leader's job is not to be a tourist, but to maintain the group in a safe manner. If you want to just enjoy the ride, don't volunteer to be the leader!
- q. If there is more than one (1) group, use group # when using the CB
- r. You and/or your co-rider should point at any hazards you may see on the road for the bikes behind you, even if you have already said something about it on the CB

Back Door (Tail End Charlie)

- a. Probably the most misunderstood and underrated job in the group rides.
- b. The Lead Bike leads the group, but the Rear Bike controls the group.
- c. Responsibility:
 - 1. Again, the safety of the group and to maintain the integrity of the group.
 - 2. Be the "eyes" of the leader and the "voice" when necessary. (Example: "Rider #3, close it up please"; vehicle passing on right; etc.)
 - 3. Advise the Group Leader, if part of the group gets stuck by a light, another vehicle cuts into the group, etc., then also let him know when the group is back together again.
 - 4. Assist in most, if not all lane changes. Note: Never attempt to hold back other traffic to

- enable the group to change lanes...it's unsafe, not wise and illegal.
5. To assist in lane changes at the discretion of the leader.
 6. Watch for any hazards or problems with any of the group's motorcycles.
 7. Assist any rider in the group that needs to pull over. Advise the Group Leader and pull over with the other rider.
 8. If a member of the group goes down, transmit "BIKE DOWN! BIKE DOWN!" on the CB and stop ASAP to help and/or direct traffic away from the accident.
 9. If any member indicates by voice or action/attitude that they don't wish to or are unable to follow the rules of the group, the Group Leader/Back Door, has the responsibility and duty to remind that member of group safety. (See Pre-ride, paragraph C)
- d. The bottom line is "Safety First" and we should all assume the responsibility for the safety of fellow group members.

Defensive Riding Practices

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Group Riding Techniques

Pre-ride

- a. Always arrive on time, or earlier if possible. Think about this, someone has planned a route, the stops, everything, and here you are late, and the parking lot is empty. The ride meeting is over, you know nothing about where they were going, or what route. If you want to be included, then get there on time.
- b. We suggest that you always wear protective clothing and helmet.
- c. Group riding is disciplined riding and if following

the rules of the group is not for you, then don't get in the group and meet everyone later at the destination. For those who do enjoy group riding, one slack rider, who does not keep the proper distance, either too close, or too far, can spoil their day. Remember the two second rule, explained elsewhere.

- d. The size of the groups will differ due to various conditions and will be determined during the Pre-Ride meeting. The quantity of willing Group Leaders will sometimes determine the amount of groups. Ideal group size for most rides will be from 3 to 7 bikes. The larger the group, the more care must be taken and usually, the more risk there will be.
- e. Positioning: The Ride Organizer should have all Group Leaders pull to an area where their groups will be able to form-up behind them. Riders without CB's probably should be placed directly in front of the ABack Door@, giving them more opportunity to notice the turn signals of the bikes in front of them. If you have a "preferred riding location", like being on the inside or outside of the lanes, let the Group Leader know, during the pre-ride discussions.
- f. Examples:
 1. Seven bikes show up for a ride. The Ride Organizer says "OK, lets have our pre-ride meeting". He/she asks who has CB's. There are five bikes with CB's. The Ride Organizer wants to be the Group Leader and has a CB (his/her number will be #1). He picks someone else, with a CB, to be his Back Door (his/her number will be #7). The two bikes without CB's are placed in front of the Rear Bike and their numbers are 5 & 6. The other three bikes are #'s 2, 3 & 4. The #3 bike had informed the Leader that he has a fear of heights and does not want to ride on the outside edge. That is why the Leader placed him in the #3 position. The Ride Organizer will then inform the group of the various other information needed for the ride,

that was discussed earlier.

2. If the Ride Organizer does not want to be the Group Leader, then the Rider Education Director, Ride Coordinator or the Chapter Director, if they are there and have CBs, would take the role of lead bike, following the Ride Organizer's directions.
- g. It's best to keep the groups an odd number. The Group Leader is always in the left tire track and this would put the Back Door bike also in the left tire track. This way they both have a similar view of the next lane.
- h. If you are pulling a trailer, see that section.
- i. If your gas tank is smaller than the other bikes in your group, let the Group Leader know how many miles you can go before needing to gas up.

Starting The Ride:

- a. Follow the directions of the Group Leader. You have chosen to participate in the ride so when the Group Leader requests you line up at a certain location in preparation for departure, do it. You should have discussed any of your little quirks at the riders meeting. If you have a fear of riding in the right hand side of the lane, let the Group Leader know and he will place you accordingly. If you are pulling a trailer, he may want all trailers together in one group, or one trailer per group.
- b. Gas and relief stops: remember the first rule of group riding, start with a full tank and an empty bladder. If you join the group at an intermediate stop, gas when the group does, so that 30 minutes after the group gases up, you won't have to yell over the CB, "I need gas".
- c. Be ready to go when the group departs. Do all the necessary things right after you stop, don't wait until the last minute. If you want to gossip with someone, go ahead and put the helmet on and visit, but be ready to jump on the bike when the trail boss yells "Head 'em up and move 'em out".
- d. If you want to ride fast, leave first. If you want to

ride slow, leave last. Do not start out in a group and then shoot out of formation and zoom down the road. You have just shown your disregard for the group's safety and ticked several people off.

During The Ride:

- a. Advise the leader and Back Door if you are having any kind of problem and especially if you need to leave the group for any reason. Do not pull out of the group, without warning them!
- b. Headlights should be on low beam if you're not in the #1 or #2 slot.
- c. Never over ride your own, or your machine's ability. Remember, you are responsible for your own actions!
- d. Don't be over confident. Safety will be your primary concern for the entire ride. Remember our previous discussion of group riding. Do not let anyone else do your riding for you. Do not create an unsafe condition.
- e. The two second rule: The leader starts out in the lane's left track. The second bike is in the right track of the same lane and is only one second behind the leader. Then the third rider will be in the left track of the lane, two seconds behind the leader. The fourth rider is in the right track of the lane, two seconds behind the second bike, and so on down the line. Maintaining this formation, and these distances will discourage other vehicle from cutting into the group. However, if a vehicle does try to cut in between riders in the group, back off and let them in. Safety of the group, is the first concern.

Note: One of the reasons a group needs to ride in this close of a formation, is that when you are riding on a multi-lane highway, to keep at least one (1) motorcycle of the group in the other vehicles side view mirrors. This way the vehicle next to the group will not think that he can move into your lane, when in fact, there is another motorcycle, that is

not in his mirrors, already there. This can happen when the group is spread out more than the two (2) second rule.

- f. It is illegal and very dangerous to move into single file and ride the right shoulder in order to allow another vehicle to pass you. If a vehicle attempts to pass you, you may have no choice but to do this. Keep in mind, that if another vehicle is coming at you, it may cause the vehicle passing you to push you all the way off the road. It could also cause a chain reaction with other vehicles also passing you at the same time. It'd be better to pull off the road at the first safe spot and wait it out, or pick up the group's speed.
- g. Don't center your focus on the bike in front of you - that's called tunnel vision. Scan instead, just like you do when riding alone.
- h. The distance between two or more groups can vary depending on the type of roads, intensity of traffic, and many other factors. The groups should not ride so close to the preceding group that in fact they become one large group. There should be enough room between groups that it is obvious to other vehicles they can pass a group safely.
- i. If the group comes upon a motorcyclist or anyone stranded by the road, the Group Leader should let the Back Door know so he can stop to see if assistance is needed. Here again, the group should find a safe place to wait for a report from the Back Door. (The universal HELP SIGN for a motorcyclist needing help, is a helmet by the side of the road as you approach.)

Lane Changing and Passing

- a. Use your mirrors consistently, but never rely on them. Glance over your shoulder to confirm what you think your mirror shows you.
- b. After making your lane change, always resume the same position you occupy in the group. The same rule applies when you are passing.
- c. Car lanes on one-way, multi-lane highways, are

numbered from left to right. The Group Leader and the Rear Bike direct the team of their lane changes by referring to the lane number when lane changes are desired.

- d. When passing a vehicle on a two lane, two-way road, each team member should pass in order and in turn. The Group Leader should accelerate far enough ahead of the passed vehicle to allow room for the rest of the team to pass and the Rear Bike should inform the Group Leader when he's around and back in formation. It really feels good to be a part of a group that can react as one unit when space permits, or snake around a slow moving car like a living thing. But remember, each rider is to pass at their own risk as traffic permits!
- e. Lane changes by the group on highways with two or more lanes going in the same direction should be made by the Rear Bike first, after the Group Leader requests a lane change and then advises the Leader that the lane is "secure". The Leader then announces over the CB to all bikes in his group, "Let's all move to the # ___ lane, NOW!". The Group Leader hesitates, before saying NOW, giving you a chance to look over your shoulder, to see for yourself, that it is clear to move to the new lane. Then all the other bikes are to signal and follow the bike in front of them. This is especially important when every bike does not have a CB.
- f. On some occasions, depending mostly on traffic, the Group Leader or the Rear Bike might decide it to be safer or easier to change lanes from the front. If that is the case, the Group Leader will announce the decision to do this on the CB
- g. Wait to return to the original lane, until the Group Leader decides when it is best to do so, but never before you think it is safe!
- h. There will be times when, due to heavy traffic and/or the group waited too long to change lanes for an off-ramp, that each rider will have to move from one lane to another as an individual, not as a group member. The Group Leader should tell the group over the CB, if possible, that the lane change has to be done "on your own". Be very

careful, this can be dangerous.

- i. Entering a crowded highway could also be a reason to enter "on your own" and the Back Door should advise the Group Leader when the group is back together again.

Twisties

- a. On mountain type roadways and curvy roads, ride single file and each rider use the "line" that is most comfortable. Allow the bike in front of you a little more room (12 seconds), but remain as a group. Resume the staggered formation, when the road straightens out. Do not try to out ride your riding skills. If the bike in front of you is dragging his foot pegs in the curves, do so, but only if you feel confident. The bike probably just needs more air in its suspension anyway. In any group of riders there will always be a varying degree of riding skills. If you are new at group riding, ask someone who has been riding behind you how you have been doing. Hopefully, you'll get an honest answer. Like anything else it takes practice to watch the motorcycle in front of you, the one in front of him, the one behind you and the one behind that one. You will soon get so that you are watching every bike, from the Group Leader to Tail End Charlie.
- b. When not familiar with the road, Slow Down. Speed is still the #1 cause for motorcycle collisions as is drivers error.
- c. The three (3) second rule (or more) applies, even if the Group Leader forgets to mention it. (The three second rule means 1 2 seconds between each and every motorcycle.)
- d. You should know about counter steering, If you have taken an MSF course. That is, to initiate a right turn, push on the right grip. To turn left, push on the left grip. The key, is to use counter steering, or "push steering" all the time whenever you ride.

Intersections

- a. When approaching a vehicle facing toward you that is attempting to turn left, assume that driver does not see you and will turn directly into your path.
- b. When first in line at a signal controlled intersection without a left turn arrow, don't wait at the white line. Move forward on the green signal to the approximate center of the intersection and halt with your left turn signal activated and wait until the left turn movement can safely be completed. This will allow many of the (if not the whole) group to complete a turn at the same time and is not illegal.
- c. When stopping at a traffic light or stop sign, catch up to the unit to your front and wait side-by-side. Bike on left is always first to commence moving.
- d. When entering a through street, or highway, or turning at an intersection, the Group Leader should accelerate slowly until informed, by the Rear Door, that the group is together.

Stops and Final Destination

- a. Keep the same position during transit and after stopping for gas, etc. Re-take that previous position so you are aware of the bikes around you.
- b. If the Team Leader or the Rear Bike approaches you at a stop or final destination, remember, they have the group's best interest at heart, or better yet our safety. Listen to what they have to say, you may be in their place one day, and you'll want others to listen to you. Of course, they will be the very example of tact and diplomacy, when they critique your riding skills. But listen, it just might save your life and the lives of others.

Parking

- a. When entering parking areas, go to single file and

slowly follow the leader to the designated parking area. Be alert! Don't just park anywhere! If possible, back into your spot, side by side. If the leader does not feel that there is enough room for all bikes, he will then tell you to find your own spot. Do so carefully, especially on dirt. Watch out for cars backing up. Remember, most of our bikes are quiet. Try to keep the group together in an orderly fashion. It really looks good when a neat formation of motorcycles comes down the highway, exits in an orderly fashion, and parks all in a row. Spectators stop and watch an orderly group enter a parking lot, close up, and park; you can see the admiration on their faces. It makes you proud to be a part of that group of motorcyclists.

b. If (Heaven forbid) you lose control of your motorcycle while halted and it begins to fall over, don't attempt to hold it up when it goes past center. It's better to hurt your bike than yourself. The co-rider should keep their feet in while the bike is falling and not try to step off, which would take away any chance for the rider to save it.
