

## Leader Of The Pack

IT WASN'T LONG AGO THAT THE WEEKEND group ride was an outing enjoyed exclusively by men — Bob Biker and his buddies meeting every Sunday morning at the local coffee shop for a day of testosterone-driven

fun. Well, have you noticed that many riding groups now include women? As more ladies move to the front seat of a motorcycle, the dynamics of the Sunday cruise are changing. Questions naturally are raised as to who should lead, who should pick up the rear, who should ride in the middle, and, gosh ... can a woman lead the pack?

I've made some observations during my 16 years as a front-seat rider. First, there are two types of men when it comes to having a woman lead the way: those who can tolerate it, and those who can't. And let me tell you, whichever category a guy falls into reveals much about him as a man, but I'll spare you my psychological assessment of the male psyche. The issue of women as pack leaders in a mixed-gender riding group is, I believe, one of those scenarios where subtle give-and-take must be exercised by male riders as they accept the fact that they are now sharing the road with women.

The leader of a pack greatly impacts the group's ride. For example, the group leader determines speed settings, traffic maneuvers, and gas/bathroom stops, among other things. That's a lot of pressure and responsibility for some riders. When I've got three or four people behind me, I don't like to take on the leader role, no matter what the gender makeup of the group. You can never please everybody — you're either going too slow or too fast, you didn't pass at the right time, or you didn't make a pit stop soon enough.

Those who elect to take charge must know when to move the pack to the passing lane, how far in advance to get into the exit lane, and when bladders will be getting full and tanks empty. Yes, reading minds is a skill one must possess to be a successful pack leader.

That said, think about the times you've ridden in a group. How many men and women were in that group? Who were the leaders? I've ridden in many packs over the years, and most times in a mixed-gender pack a woman is not leading — a man is almost always up front.

I do remember a few times during particular rides with men when I, or one of the other women



in the group, was permitted, no ... was gutsy enough to move ahead to claim the front spot. But in each instance, that position wasn't held for very long. The female leader would tend to fall back after a while, sometimes on her own, but most times because a male member of the group decided to test his throttle response and race up in front of her. Most times, I viewed this assertive behavior as simply a way of mixing up the lead spot, not a male ego maneuver, as some may perceive it. Even with male-only and women-only groups, the leader position occasionally changes among the two or three strongest riders. It's not that women can't lead a pack comprised mostly of men (especially when those men are completely comfortable with their manhood and motorcycling), but it's a question of whether women really want to. What's the point of asserting ourselves that way? We're already riding motorcycles, and that's good enough for me.

With regard to that male ego thing, I must tell you that it's amazing to me, with all the women riding today (some highly skilled at the sport), that some men still can't deal with gals riding in front of them. I once encountered a situation where it was obvious that a guy couldn't handle me riding ahead of him. I was participating in a group press ride where we were riding in a staggered formation with little space between each of us. We were holding our positions nicely while enjoying tight canyon turns, but as one of the curves turned into a straightway, I was startled when the guy behind me raced ahead to jockey into the tight 5' to 7' gap I was maintaining between myself and the rider in front of me. His maneuver was so deliberate and unusual (and extremely unsafe) that I could only conclude he was one of the few (I hope) men left who just can't deal with a cute butt and long ponytail sashaying in the wind in front of him. Oh, well, his loss. **AIM**

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