



Southern Motorcycle Advanced Rider Training

The RoSPA SMART Back Marker System

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Introduction

When riding in groups, a system is required to enable the group to keep together. Our Back Marker system allows a large or small group of bikes to carve across continents, countries, and cities in safety and without the need for members of the group (other than the Leader) to consult a map.

It is a simple system, and works extremely well provided that the members of the group apply the system consistently and sensibly. It embraces both slow and faster riders, and no rider is forced to ride faster than they are comfortable.

As with any simple system, special situations can arise which may require additional rules or clarification of existing rules, and before you know it a simple system can appear to become a complex one. We think that we have managed to avoid that, and have applied the system over a number of years and over tens of thousands of miles to great effect.

If you plan to come on a RoSPA SMART rideout (single day) or 'Wizz' (multi day) then it's essential that you understand the principles of the Back Marker system. Once you're out riding, it's too late to refer to these notes.

We do operate a culture of having a quiet 1:1 word, on the day, with anyone who is repeatedly doing something dangerous or silly that might be a threat to himself or herself or to other riders. We mention this here both as a comfort to new members and so that if you find yourself being quietly spoken to, you won't feel it totally abnormal! With everyone respecting the rules, we can enjoy the session and concentrate on the challenging roads and having fun.

The Simple Explanation

- There is one Leader, who leads.
- There are Followers, who follow.
- A Follower who is marking a navigation point is a Marker.

Followers must not overtake or pass the Leader.

There is one Back Marker, who brings up the rear and who never marks navigation points.

The Leader navigates and marks the route, using Followers as Markers along the way. You **MUST** follow the marked route even if you think the Leader has made a mistake or you know another way.

Followers who are not marking follow the directions given by the Markers. In the absence of a Marker directing them otherwise, Followers continue along the road that they're on.

Markers are released from their marking duty by the Back Marker.

The Back Marker is an experienced rider and wizzer who must not overtake or pass any Follower (except in the special circumstance described in 'Marking/Back Marker' below).

Finally, remember that you are **AT ALL TIMES** responsible for your own safety.

Couldn't be simpler could it? But you'd be amazed at how many ways there are for the system to fall apart when people don't stick to the rules, which is why you should also read the more detailed information below. (And please read all the sections so that you're clear on how the whole system

works.)

Fashion Notes

Leader

The Leader wears an Instructor's yellow vest with blue stripes. If the Leader is carrying a pillion then the pillion must wear an Instructor's yellow vest with blue stripes. (*Explanation: the Leader must be identifiable as such from behind.*)

Follower

Followers should NOT wear Instructor vests or orange vests, as this might cause confusion. (*Explanation: Instructor vest – if other riders think they can pass someone wearing the same vest as the leader then someone's likely to pass the leader and get very lost. Orange vest – markers prepare to move off when they see an orange vest coming. If that vest doesn't belong to the Back Marker then any remaining riders, including the real Back Marker, are likely to go off route.*)

Back Marker

The Back Marker wears an orange vest.

Before Starting Off

Leader

The Leader is responsible for the ride as a whole, from planning to execution.

The Leader should plan the route thoroughly and ensure that he can execute the required navigation quickly and effectively. Having the whole ride stopped at a junction waiting for the Leader to work out where he is and which way to go next is not a good thing.

The Leader should ensure that the Back Marker knows that he is the Back Marker and has an orange vest.

The Leader should know how many riders there are in the group, and that they are all accounted for. (This task will be duplicated by the Back Marker.)

The Leader should give a Pre-Ride Briefing to the group as a whole.

The Leader should ensure that everyone has the mobile numbers of the Leader and the Back Marker.

The Leader should announce the identity of the Back Marker to the group, and the destination for the next scheduled stop.

Followers

Make sure that you know exactly who the Leader and Back Marker are and that you can recognise them easily both from in front (via rear view mirror) and from behind (it's a good idea to know the registration numbers of their bikes).

It is also helpful to get to know everyone else in the ride and what bike they ride, together with at least a vague idea of the registration number. You'll be glad you did when the ride gets mixed up with other (non-RoSPA SMART) riders on the road.

Back Marker

The Back Marker has an extremely important role and this role should only be given to someone who knows the system intimately.

The Back Marker should make absolutely sure that he knows how many riders there are in the group, and should confirm this to the Leader. That way, two people have counted them up. He should ensure that no one is left behind in the toilets or has gone off to find petrol.

Starting Off

Leader

The Leader should ensure that the Back Marker knows that he is about to depart, and should not depart until the Back Marker gives him permission (see below).

The Leader should ensure that he leaves a marker at the departure point to indicate which way to go. (Especially important at coffee and fuel stops.)

Followers

Followers should not hang about the departure point once a departure instruction from the Leader has been given. It is unfair to others in the group to delay the departure. It is not necessary for everyone to leave en masse. If you see the leader elaving and you are ready to go, then go!

Back Marker

The Back Marker is responsible for making sure that no one gets left behind at the departure point. He may delay the departure of the ride if he is unsure that all riders have been accounted for.

The Back Marker should also encourage Followers not to waste time when the ride is departing.

Riding in the Group

Leader

Contact with the Ride

The Leader should not open too much of a gap between himself and the rest of the ride. It's as well to have at least one rider not far behind to act as the next marker.

Short Stops

If the Leader has to stop to do some map reading and navigation then he should find somewhere safe and large enough to accommodate the rest of the ride without causing a hazard to the ride itself or to other traffic. Stopping for longer than a minute or two is best avoided however as the ride may take the opportunity to dismount, take helmets off, light cigarettes, and generally mill around.

Followers

Pace

Followers shouldn't ride faster than they're completely comfortable with. There is no need to keep up with the rider in front. Ride at your own pace. The ride will adjust to the slowest rider, without slowing down those who wish to ride more quickly. The slack is taken up by the time spent Marking.

Spread out. If you ride with small gaps between successive riders then there is a tendency to just follow the rider in front rather than planning and executing your own ride. Your view ahead will also be obscured and overtaking will be trickier. You'll get more out of the riding if you open up a sizeable gap.

Overtaking

Overtaking is permitted and indeed encouraged within the group. Faster riders in a slow group may do a lot of overtaking, which also means that they get to mark junctions more often and help maintain the pace of the group as a whole.

Take care when overtaking, and ALWAYS USE SIGNALS to overtake. Do not obstruct or tailgate other riders. No 'cheap' overtakes. Do not overtake the Leader.

Back Marker

Pace

The Back Marker will generally be an experienced rider who be able to maintain a good pace in order

to keep the ride moving.

Marking

Leader

The Leader is responsible for assigning Followers to Marking duties. He must leave markers at all significant navigation points, or to put it another way, at any point where the absence of a marker might lead to the ride or part of the ride failing to navigate correctly. These include:

- departure points (indicating which way to proceed when leaving a stopping point)
- roundabout exits
- junctions where the ride is to deviate from the road they are currently travelling on. This includes the scenario where the road being followed curves to the right or left while the intended route for the ride is to take a different road that continues straight on
- stopping points (including the final destination, refuelling and coffee stops).

The Leader may also decide to leave “confidence” Markers periodically where a long straight section is being ridden. These Markers are left to reassure other riders that they are still on the correct route.

The Leader will indicate an assignment of Marking duty to the following rider by pointing clearly with his nearside arm and hand to the point on the road where the Marker is to position himself. The Leader should satisfy himself that the following rider has seen and complied with the assignment to Marking duty.

Followers

Be aware that if you find yourself directly behind the Leader you should be looking out for Marking indications from him.

As you approach each Marker, just make sure before you pass that the Marker is not in fact the Leader who has been waiting for a new Marker to arrive.

Furthermore, make sure that the Marker whose directions you’re about to follow is indeed a member of your own group!

As you gain experience you may decide that you should mark a navigation point even when the Leader has not indicated it, particularly when he is busy navigating.

If you arrive at an obvious navigation point (e.g. a T Junction) and there is no Marker to indicate the route then something has gone wrong. If you can see another Marker further up the route (and you’re quite sure he’s part of your group) then remain at the junction to mark it for the rest of the group. Otherwise find a safe place to stop and wait for the rest of the group and the Back Marker. The Back Marker will then decide how to proceed.

Markers

When marking a navigation point your objectives should be,

- stopping somewhere safe and legal
- stopping where you can be seen clearly by Followers on the approach to the navigation point
- stopping with your bike pointing in the direction of the ride (particularly at junctions and roundabouts)
- indicating to approaching riders the direction they should take at the navigation point.

Use your Roadcraft skills and common sense to choose the best place to stop. Make intelligent use of ‘dead’ areas of road that other vehicles don’t use (usually indicated by the presence of an accumulation of road debris).

Do not rely on indicators to indicate the intended direction of travel for the ride. Use hand/arm signals which are clear and unambiguous. Be aware of the possible effect of your navigation signals on other road users who are not part of the ride.

If you have been assigned as a Confidence Marker then wave other Followers on so that they do not assume that you have broken down.

DO NOT leave your Marking position until given permission to do so by the Back Marker. This is a cardinal rule of Marking which must not be broken. If you’ve been marking a navigation point for a long time there’s probably a good reason for it.

Note that if the Back Marker arrives at your Marking point and you are not immediately ready to move away he may have to overtake you in order not to obstruct other traffic. Move away from your position when it is safe to do so and regain your position in front of the Back Marker at the earliest opportunity.

If you are marking a stopping point, either scheduled or unscheduled, you should indicate to the Back Marker that he should pull in and stop.

Back Marker

The Back Marker frees Markers from their marking duties and returns them to Follower status.

When approaching a Marker, the Back Marker should aim, if possible, to free the Marker before you get to his position, in order to keep moving. To do this you must make a clear and unambiguous sign using your arms and hands that is unlikely to be misinterpreted by either the Marker or other road users. Use of headlight or horn alone is not recommended.

Ensure when you give a sign for the Marker to move off that you can clearly see the direction in which the marker has gone or is likely to go. If you get to the Marker's position and can no longer see him or anyone other markers, the way forward may not be obvious.

In certain situations you may decide for safety and/or legal reasons that you will pass the Marker. In this case you should subsequently slow down and manoeuvre to allow the Marker to overtake you and resume his position in the ride.

Unplanned Events

Breakdown or Accident

Whether or not other riders have already stopped, the Back Marker will come upon the incident in a matter of minutes, and will communicate news of the incident to the Leader using both mobile voice and SMS text messaging.

Having received the news, the Leader may choose to return to the site of the incident or to remain where he is, depending on the circumstances. If he decides to return he must retrace his route picking up Markers on the way.

If the Leader does not receive the news he will eventually run out of Markers and stop, or reach a scheduled stopping point.

Coffee / Fuel Stops

Managed Stop

If the Leader makes a Managed stop, he must leave a Marker at the entrance of the service station or café to direct the rest of the ride into the stop. Normal marking rules apply. If the ride is a large one, then the Leader should avoid if possible small service stations and cafés, otherwise a great deal of time will be wasted.

The Leader must not depart the stop until the Back Marker has arrived. From this point normal "Starting Off" rules apply (see above).

Unmanaged Stop

Unmanaged Stops are stops made by anyone other than the Leader or Back Marker, and should be avoided if at all possible.

Unmanaged fuel stops are disasters waiting to happen. In the absence of both the Leader and the Back Marker to keep track of the number of riders, the opportunity for people to be left behind is high.

If a Follower within the ride is low on fuel and sees an opportunity to refuel then he must stop another member of the ride or the Back Marker to mark the fuel stop. He should not encourage other members of the ride to stop for fuel, though they may take the opportunity if they wish.

Motorways

It is extremely difficult and indeed usually illegal to use the Marker system on Motorways, for a number of reasons. Motorway sections of a route should be dealt with in a different way, usually by means of

issuing clear and preferably printed instructions to each rider culminating in reassembly at a pre-arranged meeting point off the motorway, at which point use of the Back Marker system may be resumed.

