



## Are You Road Captain Material?

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Becoming and being a road captain requires a lot of effort to conceive, plan and implement group rides. It is an effort built from a passion to show routes and ride ideas to other motorcyclists.

Do you like motorcycling in groups? Do you like the satisfaction of a project you manage completely from “birth to death” done well? Well, then you have some of the qualities to become a Road Captain and lead a safe and exciting ride.

Top Cats is a premier riding club, known for doing safe group rides to interesting and fun destinations using motorcycle friendly routes. The rides can utilize a variety of roads that help riders to continue practicing their group riding skills. The rides are experiences that contribute to our confidence as group riders. To meet this challenge, a Road Captain takes time to make a detailed plan, solve the problems that arise, and recognize the needs of the riders who will be going on the ride. He utilizes a Senior Road Captain as a mentor who reviews the ride with a second set of eyes to provide constructive feedback. It is a great challenge, a fantastic opportunity AND can be very satisfying. This position requires the conviction and willingness to put the safe group riding above personal riding preferences.

Generally, when I start a ride idea, I begin with a destination. I am looking for places with pleasant, motorcycle friendly, attractions, scenic roads I cull from many sources. Sources I use consist of word of mouth, google and other online ones with motorcycle routes. Road America, HOG Route Planner, Rever are some of the ones I use but there are several you can find. The internet seems rife with route ideas. In some cases, you can even download a \*.GPS or \*.GPX file of those routes. Talking about rides with other motorcyclists and clubs creates a nice forum to learn other ideas.

Now you have an idea and need to make your plan. This is the nuts and bolts of your ride’s logistics. This is the refinement process to make your ride work with normal limitations. Some of those limitations might be something like be home by dark, avoiding grave roads or construction. Appropriate ride plans include routing, scheduling with stops plus lunch time, a start and end point, gas stops, snacks and beverages all to support rider’s doing your ride safely. An important one for rider health is to have a rest stop anywhere between 1 to 2 hours of riding. This combats dehydration and fatigue along with allowing riders to check their motorcycles and gear. These stops can build group socialization opportunities too. Keep in mind, rider comfort is a good goal for any ride.

Here is my advice on how to make sure the ride is safe for all. And to make sure that you have a satisfying experience that will keep you leading rides long into the future!

- Get a mentor from the Senior Road Captains. They all have seen what works and what does not work and can offer recommendations for safety and avoiding potholes (pun intended) in your route. Their support is priceless!
- Learn and know your destination. Choose a place such as a lunch stop, museum, rally, mini-golf course or a strip club or anything that you feel makes your ride fun, interesting and attractive.
- Do a pre-ride with a mentor. There is a big difference between what you can see online vs. the route realities. Pre-riding will allow you to see the less safe portions like crossing four lanes of traffic to go the other direction on the road or an intersection with a stop sign, not a stop light.. Or exiting the gas station in a direction that leaves no room for pulling your group out safely. Or finding your rest stop has only one bathroom and your planning did not allow for the time it takes for a large group to use it. The pre-ride allows you to see the route conditions first hand.

- Ask your mentor to do the ride. With the route knowledge you shared with them, they can be an invaluable assistant for your ride in many ways.
- For rides of 12 or more, ask a road captain on the day of the ride to position themselves in the middle of the ride. When the group gets broken up, they can assist by leading the rest of the riders left behind by a traffic light or missed turn and lead them back to the group.
- On the day of the ride, ask several times for rider feedback. This serves two purposes; to get the knowledge of anything you need to manage and to help your riders feel you are focused on them, their comfort and the overall ride condition from their perspective.
- Promote your ride. It is much more fulfilling to lead a ride with more people than less.
- Train on and learn the Group Riding and Safety Seminar. These modules address ways to ride safely.

Learning all of the seminar helps you lead safer group ridings. The presentation consists of these sections:

Module 1 – Group Riding and Hand Signals

Module 2 – Rider / Co-Rider Obligations

Module 3 – Co-Riders

Module 4 – Accident Scene Management

Module 5 – Road Captain Course

Detailed criteria for Road Captains and Senior Road Captain are in Module 5, Pages 41 and 42 of the seminar. Studying and learning our G.R.A.S.S. information including the criteria and practicing those principles helps you be a safer road captain and rider.

Becoming a Road Captain can be very gratifying. With good research, routing, planning, the guidance of a mentor and a pre-ride you can show all of us a safe, fun, interesting and entertaining ride. And as a safe road captain, you will be an important part of maintaining the strong SAFE traditions of riding in the Top Cats – Illinois!

Some (not all) Online Resources:

Ride Ideas

<https://www.motorcycleroads.com/motorcycle-roads>

<https://www.twistedroad.com/blog/posts/discover-the-top-chicago-and-illinois-motorcycle-routes-and-destinations>

<https://www.rever.co/common-tread/explore/motorcycle-roads/us-routes/illinois>

Google Maps;

<https://www.google.com/maps>

HOG Route Planner;

[https://maps.harley-davidson.com/?source\\_cd=Vanity\\_rideplanner](https://maps.harley-davidson.com/?source_cd=Vanity_rideplanner)

Hope you find yourself thinking of taking these steps and taking our club to your favorite places! We all look forward to having more opportunities to explore! Let's get going!