

Riding with a Passenger

Instruct Your Passenger

In some ways, this is the most important step – especially if you're dealing with a first-time passenger, or someone, like Liz, who had a bad previous experience. The better you prepare him or her for their ride, the better the chance they'll enjoy it and want to do it again. Let's continue to use "Liz" as an example ...

Getting On

Instruct Liz not to get on the motorcycle until you give the go-ahead; that is, only after you are solidly onboard and have started the engine. Make sure you are on solid ground and hold the motorcycle straight up, steadying it with both feet planted firmly on the ground. Also, any backing up (such as from a parking space) or other tight maneuvering should be done before the passenger boards.

Holding On

For best results, Liz should hold onto you (your hips, shoulders, or waist) rather than the motorcycle and sit as far forward as possible without crowding you. This not only facilitates better handling, by making it easier for you and the passenger to move as one with the motorcycle, it also facilitates warm and fuzzy feelings when the passenger is someone you love (or want to love).

Cornering

As alluded to previously, passengers, for the most part, should not have to consciously do any leaning. With proper turning technique, the lean will happen naturally as the bike enters a curve, and problems arise when passengers either over-lean or fight against the lean and try to remain vertical. Tell Liz to hold on snugly but relax. Have her look over your shoulder in the direction of the turn but not to shift her weight. Let the bike do the work.

Stopping and Starting

As much as possible, let Liz know when you're about to stop or decelerate quickly, so she can brace herself and lean back slightly in order to avoid sliding forward into your back. She should keep both feet firmly on the footpegs when you stop – and it won't hurt to remind her that it's important to sit still even while stationary. She may not realize that the bike is actually less stable when stopped than when it's at speed.

Instruct Liz to lean forward slightly when starting from a standstill or accelerating quickly, such as on a freeway ramp. Again, practice and experience are key.

Bumps

Always warn your passenger (if possible) when you are about to hit a bump in the road, such as a speed bump, a small pothole, or railroad tracks. Instruct Liz ahead of time to shift her weight from her seat to her feet in such situations, and to use her legs to absorb some of the impact, even raising herself up slightly on the pegs if necessary. In others words, she should use the same technique you do to cushion the blow.

Note: When communicating to your passenger, turn your head slightly so he or she can hear you better, but not so much that you have to take your eyes off the road. Caution your passenger against leaning too much while trying to listen.

Adjust Your Riding Technique

Finally, it is your responsibility as the rider to adjust your technique to accommodate the extra weight of your passenger. Again, thinking of him or her as cargo may be helpful, as many of the adjustments are the same. Also, keep in mind that the differences will be more pronounced on a smaller motorcycle, like a Sportster® model, than on a heavier, fully dressed touring bike, such as an Ultra Classic® Electra Glide®.

Speed

The main thing to remember is that the added weight of a passenger will affect your ability to stop (or start) quickly. To compensate, ride a little slower in general, especially in situations where you may have to stop suddenly and through curves, corners, intersections, or bumps. (However, be sure to maintain sufficient speed to keep up with the surrounding traffic flow.) Start slowing earlier when approaching a stoplight or stop sign.

Other Traffic

When crossing busy streets or entering into traffic, wait for larger gaps before you make your move. In traffic, strive to maintain a larger space cushion, both ahead of you and to the sides, to compensate for your decreased maneuverability.

Relax and Enjoy Yourself

Remember, the way to get the most out of riding two-up is the same way you get to Carnegie Hall (according to the old joke): practice, practice, practice. Start out in an empty parking lot somewhere if needed and work your way up through side streets before tackling city streets or the highway.

Don't push it. The more you practice and work on these techniques before you take that first big trip together, the more they'll become second nature. And the better you and your "Liz" will be able to relax and enjoy riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle with someone you care about.