

TEAM RIDING MANUAL

Written By Roy Myers and Dan Hood

Edited 1993 by Sam Liles; Edited 1994 by Paul Hildebrand and Pete Woodruff

Edited 2005 by Mark & Mary Zingery

INTRODUCTION

The Gold Wing Road Riders Association is a touring motorcycle organization comprised of people from all walks of life that share the common interest of riding a Honda Gold Wing or Valkyrie. This manual has been written to help those who enjoy riding in a group plan for a safe ride together. Whether it is a first time adventure, a weekend trip, or a short distance to a favorite ice cream parlor, this manual is geared to aid in maintaining a safe and enjoyable motorcycle group ride.

The fun, pleasure, and the enjoyment of riding your motorcycle in a group with other GWRRA friends is an important part of what GWRRA is all about. It's also exciting! If you have never ridden with a group before, this manual will help you become comfortable with team riding. However, any kind of team riding is very different from individual riding.

Whether you ride as an individual or in a group, in order to survive on the open road, your motorcycle riding habits and techniques must be constantly thought of as "defensive". When you ride in a group, your actions not only affect you, but the other riders as well. Therefore, it is important to recognize and remember that riding in a group is a "TEAM" effort. To be safe, you must rely on the cooperation and coordination of all riders in that group. If you are new to this form of riding, studying the enclosed techniques before your first group ride will help you understand and become more comfortable as a team member in the group. You will find that a team ride can be most enjoyable. If you are an experienced team rider, we hope this handbook will be a refresher on some of the basics.

The team riding procedures set forth in this handbook are developed from years of experience of many MSF (Motorcycle Safety Foundation) instructors and riders like yourself. These procedures have been proven to be effective and safe.

The subject matter of this handbook deals with "Team Riding". Two

other types of group riding styles are “Mass Riding” and “Leisure Riding”. Mass Riding is considered an undisciplined group traveling down the road doing its own thing with no one paying any attention to the other group riders. Leisure Riding is considered to be traveling in a group of people you know with some ground rules that have been set which everyone agrees to abide by. It is generally considered a little more safe than Mass Riding using an element of discipline and coordination such as traveling down the road maintaining at least two second spacing with each other. But, and this is an important “but”, the individuals are primarily riding their own ride without the ongoing coordination and communication between group members. Typically, there is no “formation” or “team” technique to Leisure Riding.

This manual offers safe team riding techniques as guidelines for you and your group to follow. Please study the following techniques, talk about them with each other, and practice them on your next team ride. If everyone learns and practices these procedures, all of us will be safer and more comfortable with any GWRRA team ride we choose to participate in.

PLANNING A TEAM RIDE

Any project that is done well is usually well-planned. A good team ride is planned well from the very beginning. All participants should be aware of where they are going and how they are going to get there. The following considerations are the bare-bones minimum in planning a successful team ride.

1. Choose the destination and the routes to and from.
2. Prepare a map for each rider in the group. Identify all points of interest along the route that your group may like to visit or stop at.
3. Plan your teams. Consider who will be the Road Captains (Drag and Lead). These two positions should be filled by individuals who have completed the GWRRA Road Captain Course. The Drag position is the last bike in the group and the Lead position is the first bike in the group. These two positions work together to keep the team in formation, coordinated, and safe. The main function of the Drag in a Team Ride is to control the group by overseeing all team riders and making sure a safe following distance (spacing) is kept within the team and that the speed is comfortable and appropriate for keeping the team together. The Drag also assists the Lead in any lane changes. If a bike breaks down or runs into trouble during a ride, the Drag is the one who will stop and assist the individual. The main function of the Lead is to control the group from the front by setting and maintaining safe, consistent speeds, by providing direction relative to the travel route or by managing the ride when the inevitable changes occur or obstacles appear. The Lead is the primary decision maker during the ride. The Lead is the first bike and therefore will first be aware of any hazards in the road, slow drivers, or other obstacles that may impede the progress of the team. The Lead works in conjunction with the Drag in lane changes by notifying the Drag

when it is necessary for the team to change lanes. As discussed later in this manual, the Drag assists by securing safe lane changes for the team.

4. Discuss and agree on the speed that the team will travel. When discussing this topic, you should always take into consideration first time bike riders, first time team riders, and anyone who is uncomfortable at high speeds. The team should accommodate these individuals and adjust speeds accordingly. If need be, some individuals who prefer to ride at a higher speed, may want to form their own team and ride on ahead. Splitting into more than one team is discussed later in this manual as well.

5. Plan "pit" stops, photo opportunities, meals and other breaks. A well-planned and organized trip makes it more enjoyable for everyone in the team. Again, consider the individuals in your team and try to meet their needs.

6. Consider each bike size and gas requirements. Team speed and travel distance between breaks will be determined by the smallest bike of the group.

7. Team members should notify the Road Captains of their lane preference and position, as well any other special needs or requirements. Road Captains will take these notifications into consideration when arranging riders in the group for the team ride.

BEFORE THE TEAM RIDE BEGINS

1. Every rider should start the ride with a full fuel tank. Most Gold Wings burn fuel at approximately the same rate, however, plan fuel stops which will allow a comfortable margin for bikes that may get lower fuel mileage (such as sidecar rigs, trikes, or bikes pulling trailers). If smaller bikes with less fuel capacity are included in the group, fuel stops must be planned within their comfortable travel ranges.

2. Everyone should take a minute and check their machines for proper operating conditions. Better still, use the MSF list (see Appendix A) to help you make sure your bike is in peak riding condition. This list is also referred to as a "TCLOC". If your team has a Safety Specialist or MSF instructor, perhaps this individual can help perform the safety and equipment checks with everyone. Sometimes it is helpful for another person to look over your motorcycle. They may catch something that you missed. It is not uncommon that someone else will find unsafe conditions that you may have overlooked.

3. Everyone should carry essential tools, spares, equipment, and a first aid kit. You should also consider special weather conditions and pack accordingly. Carry water when riding in the hot summer. Carry rain gear for inclement weather that may pop up. Carry warmer gear for colder riding conditions. Being dressed comfortably will make for a more enjoyable and safer trip.

4. Memorize the Group Riding Hand Signals (see pages ? and ? in this brochure). Group Riding Hand Signals are universal and assist those riders whose

bikes are not equipped with a C.B. radio. It's important for Co-Riders to learn these hand signals as well since they function as part of the team too.

5. All riders and co-riders should study the route map so all will know where the group is going. Ask questions if anything is unclear.

6. Riders and co-riders should know the ride schedule, be on time, fueled up and ready to go!

TEAM RIDING TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

Large groups of motorcycles (more than 5-7) may have a negative impact on safety traffic flow and are more difficult to coordinate. Consequently, it has been found that it is safer to break the large group into more manageable teams. The optimal team size is considered to be 5 bikes, but should never be more than 7. Each team rides apart from the other teams during the ride. It is suggested that with more than one team, a minimum distance of a quarter mile (approximately 15 second separation at 60 mph) be maintained between the teams on expressways or highways. On two-lane roads this distance may need to be increased. This allows better assimilation of the team(s) into the flow of traffic. Have you ever tried to pass a group of 25 motorcycles? A team consisting of 5 motorcycles is more easily dealt with by the other motorists we share the road with, is easier to maintain visual control over, and is better at coordinating the ride.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

Each team should have a Drag Rider and a Lead Rider. The Lead rides at the front of the formation (Bike #1) while the Drag rides at the back (Bike #5).

These two positions should be equipped with functioning C.B. radios. Their responsibility is to communicate, coordinate, and maneuver the team in formation safely through traffic, as a unit. The Drag and the Lead have joint responsibility for the safety of the team and safe conduct of the ride.

A GOOD TEAM MEMBER . . .

1. Assumes a responsibility to ride with and work with the other team members for the safety and protection of the whole team while on the road, and especially, while in traffic.

2. Maintains steady speed and spacing. Yo-Yoing or straggling behind disrupts the rhythm and efforts of the other team members, and reduces the benefits of riding as a team.

3. Stays alert and announces to the other team members any obstacle, condi-

tion or potential situation which could become hazardous to the team or a team member.

4. Will be aware of the other team members and maintain the formation (staggered) and a safe riding distance (spacing) between team members. Spacing will be determined by the road, weather conditions, and visibility.

“HOLES” left in the formation (large spacing gaps between team members) invites aggressive motorists driving at faster speeds to cut into the formation, which may result in tailgating our teammate ahead of us. This creates a very dangerous situation. Each team member must protect the other by maintaining the appropriate spacing.

REMEMBER: *Pace yourself 1-second stagger, and 2-seconds following distance behind the bike directly in front of you. However, during darkness or inclement weather, a 2-second stagger and a 4-second following distance should be maintained to provide an extra margin of safety. (See Figure 1)*

TEAM SEPARATION

Each team should be separated on the expressway or highway by no less than 15 seconds allowing sufficient room for other vehicles to safely pass a team. Distances between teams traveling on two-lane roads may need to be greater.

FORMATION

Each team travels in a staggered formation within a car lane. The Lead rides at the front of the group, in the left track of the lane. The next team member positions their bike one second behind and in the right tire track of the same lane, the next team member is in the left track two seconds behind the Lead and one second behind the #2 bike in the right track, etc., etc., until all bikes have been positioned. (**FIGURE 1**)

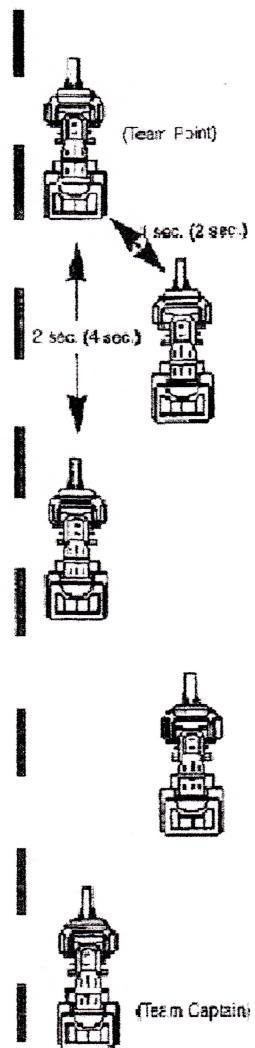
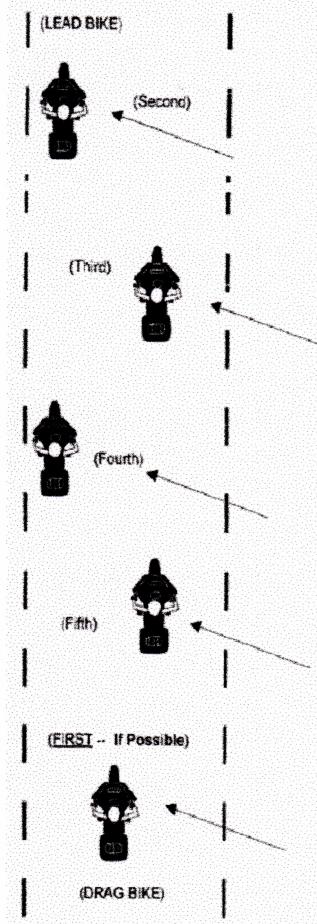


Figure 1

SOLO RIDERS

ENTERING HIGHWAY FROM ON-RAMP



Anyone not wishing to Team Ride should separate themselves to a safe distance from the teams and meet at the acknowledged destination or break point.

ENTERING TRAFFIC

When entering traffic from a parking lot or rest area, the Lead moves into the flow of traffic after waiting to find an opening big enough for all members of the team to be able to pull out into position. The Drag will inform the Lead once all team members are out on the road and in riding position. If traffic is heavy and all bikes cannot get out at once, the Lead and all successive team members will enter traffic one at a time as traffic and safety will allow. Once all members are out on the road, they should safely fall into position behind the Lead bike as traffic allows them to do so safely maneuvering through traffic. (FIGURE 2)

PASSING TRAFFIC (FIGURE 3)

When passing a vehicle on a two-lane, "single" road, each team member should pass, SINGLE FILE, in order. The Lead will make the decision to pass and will notify all team members by C.B. and hand signals to assume a single file formation. Single file formation prior to passing provides riders maximum maneuverability and visibility of approaching traffic.

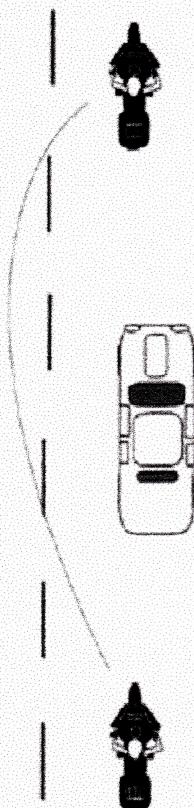
The Lead will initiate the pass. The Lead, after passing the vehicle, should accelerate far enough ahead to make room for the rest of the team to safely pass and reform in the normal staggered configuration. Each rider will then pass individually safely when traffic is

clear. Remember, although you are in a team, each person is responsible for their own bike safety and must choose and decide when the pass can be executed safely. Using the C.B., the Drag informs the Lead when the entire team has safely passed and is back in riding formation.

LANE CHANGES

Lane changes by the team on multi-lane highways with two or more lanes traveling in the same direction should be made as a unit. Using the C.B., the Lead informs the Drag of the need to move the team into another lane, and

SINGLE LANE PASS



which lane the team should move into (left or right). Only the Drag should acknowledge this C.B. transmission. In light traffic, the Drag will announce when the lane has been secured and that it is clear (safe) to make the lane change. Riders without a C.B. should be alert and observe the hand signals of the other team members.

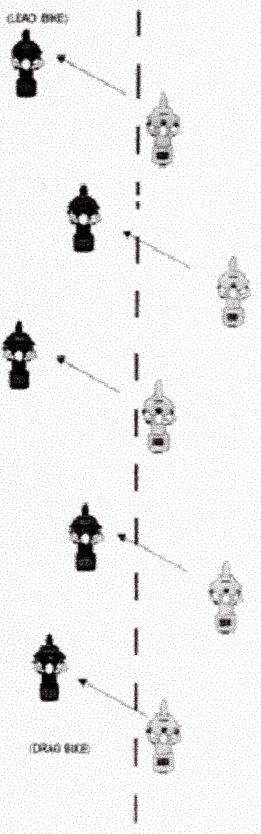
Each member of the team, after making a head check (physically turning the head around and looking beside and behind) to confirm the lane is indeed secure, moves into the new lane as a unit maintaining a safe time and space cushion following the Lead. Teams should never change more than one lane at a time.

Changing lanes in heavy traffic should not be attempted as a unit move but as a progressive move. The Lead requests the Drag to secure a lane (right or left of the current lane). The Drag secures the lane at the earliest safe opportunity and informs the Lead that the lane has been secured and this it safe to begin the lane change. At that point, the team members make head checks, and each rider, in succession, FROM THE REAR TO THE FRONT, will transition to the new lane when it is clear. The Lead is the last to move into the new lane thereby keeping the team's integrity. This will protect the team during heavy traffic where vehicles could break up and/or endanger the formation. Each team member may have to drop back a little from the team to maintain a safe time and space cushion. (**FIGURE 4**)

With practice and experience, the team will be able to transition from one lane to another as a team, demonstrating superb skill and team coordination.

STOPPING AT A TRAFFIC LIGHT

When it is necessary for the team to stop at a traffic signal, all team members should stop in a position of almost two abreast (still slightly staggered). Each rider should still have a slight "space" safety advantage of the staggered formation. This "compressed" staggered formation will help keep the line of traffic behind the team as short as possible. While waiting for the signal to change, each rider in the compressed formation should wait directly behind the rider in front. (**FIGURE 5**). When the team leaves the "compressed" formation at a traffic light, the #2 bike, which is stopped slightly behind and to the right of the Lead, will move out only after the Lead has traveled far enough forward so that

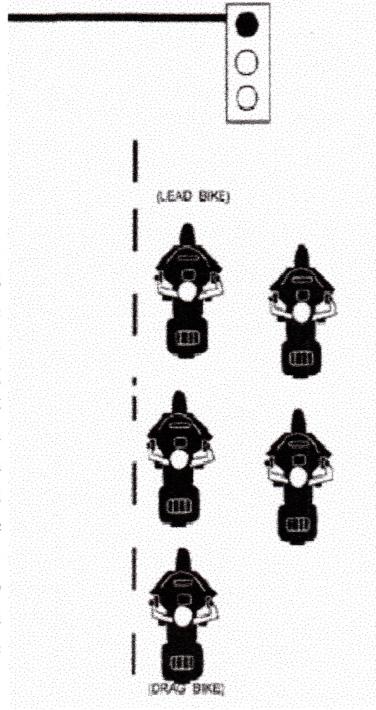
LANE CHANGE

any sudden sideways movement will not result in a collision.

The other team members start, in turn, and in the same manner, leaving the Drag the last to move. When the team moves from a stopped position, the Lead should accelerate at a rate that will allow all team members to get re-grouped as soon as possible. Each team member should do so quickly but safely. The Drag will inform the Lead when all bikes are through the light, so riding speed can be attained. No rider should accelerate next to, or past any team member who is in front, either while traveling or while stopped. This can lead to a very dangerous situation.

STOPPING AT A STOP SIGN

When stopping at a stop sign, the team should come to a stop in a compressed staggered formation as described above. The Lead should wait until

STOP LIGHT

the entire team is stopped before proceeding. When the Lead determines that the intersection is clear, he/she should proceed through the intersection (either straight through or by executing the appropriate turn). Bike # 2 must then decide, ON THEIR OWN, when to proceed following the Lead. Each successive bike will in turn approach the intersection and choose the safe opportunity to enter the intersection. At no time should the team attempt to enter the intersection as a group or in pairs. Each rider must be responsible for their action at each intersection.

TURNING AT AN INTERSECTION

Although it is best if each team member remains in their respective lane position throughout the arc of the turn (unless a single-file formation has been signaled by the Lead) riders must plan for and provide a space cushion sufficient to allow a team member the full use of the lane if necessary.

NARROWING HIGHWAY

When approaching a narrow portion of the highway, such as a construction zone or bridge, the Lead will announce “single file” on the C.B. in addition to giving the appropriate hand signal. All bikes in the group should, after individually signaling to the riders behind, transition from the staggered formation to single file increasing the spacing to allow for a minimum 2 second following distance to the preceding bike.

HILLS

If a hill is encountered such that it is impossible to see oncoming traffic, the Lead will give C.B. and hand signals for single file. Starting with the Lead, each rider will transition to the center of the lane (increasing the spacing to allow for a minimum 2 second following distance to the preceding bike, until the group reaches the top of the hill and can see the oncoming traffic. The Lead will then give the signal to resume staggered formation.

CURVES

Prior to a team entering a curve, the entire team should automatically transition into a single-file-pick-your-own-lane formation for three reasons:

1. Increased visibility through the curve from the perspective of seeing through the curve as well as being seen while in the curve.
2. Allows the use of the full lane width by each team member providing a safe area to the right of the center lane for avoidance of any oncoming vehicle which may stray across the road and allowing each team member to use the outside-inside-outside path of travel.
3. Increase the safety margin as most debris or edge drops are along the “outside” edge of the road.

CHANGE OF SPEED

When it becomes necessary to increase or decrease the team’s speed, the Lead will call for and give the appropriate hand signal. This signal and all other hand signals should be passed on by every member of the team.

OBSTACLE

Any team member who observes a pothole or other obstacle in the road should use the appropriate hand signal to alert the following team members of the obstacle.

PARKED CARS

When entering a town where cars are parked along the side of the street, the Lead may signal for single-file. The team should then transition to the left portion of the lane and proceed very carefully, being alert for children, "toys", or animals that may appear from between parked cars.

Also, watch vehicle tail lights, front wheels, and drivers for "hints" that a vehicle is going to back up, stop or its driver might be opening his door to get out of his vehicle.

ENTERING A PARKING LOT

The team should assume a single file formation behind the Lead. If necessary, the Lead will "loop" the parking lot seeking an area large enough for the whole team to park side by side. All team members should remain in single file at or near the entrance, but off the road to avoid obstructing the flow of traffic, until the Lead locates suitable space for all.

If the Lead determines there is insufficient space for all team members to park at one location, the Lead should signal this to the team and each team member should seek their own parking spot.

BE INFORMED

Members of the team can never be "over informed". The Road Captains should always keep their teams informed about the destination, routes, possible problems, and change in plans, etc. Team members should also inform the Road Captains of any hazards they may see, problems with the bike, changes in physical condition, or if they need to stop for any reason.

C.B. RADIOS

C.B. radio channel utilization for motorcycles varies state by state throughout the country. The entire team should be briefed on what channel will be used, and any alternates, before a ride begins. The C.B. is a very useful and important tool in team rides. In addition to information regarding road surfaces, hazards, pit stops, etc., the C.B. provides effective group coordination between the teams, and communications between all Road Captains.

Any time you are "off the radio", it is best to inform the Lead and Drag, however, BE ALERT FOR HAND SIGNALS. Team members should refrain from monopolizing the radio channels or excessive idle chatter.

TRANSMITTING

Listen before you push the transmitter button. Don't "step on" and block another rider's transmission. Important group and team safety information could be blocked in this manner.

VOICE TECHNIQUE

Some C.B. radio installations, radio signal propagation, and certain microphones can distort voices. Some C.B. operators seem to think that if they yell, their transmission will be heard better and farther! That is absolutely not true. In fact, yelling into the microphone will cause further distortion of the voice and make it almost impossible to understand. Speak into the microphone slowly and distinctly with normal volume. Also, pause briefly after pressing the microphone button before speaking.

MALFUNCTIONING C.B.

If your C.B. is malfunctioning, do not transmit. If you are the Lead or the Drag, give up that position to another qualified rider. A bad C.B. transmitter is worse than none at all.

COURTESY

Much can be said for courtesy on the radio. Simple courtesy, like restraining from the use of profanity on the C.B. is appreciated by everyone. Contrary to popular opinion, it is OK to use your name and bike position when you communicate on the radio. Those in your team who are not frequent team riders may not recognize your voice.

BIKES WITHOUT C.B.'s

Bikes without C.B. radios should be put in the middle of each team. The Drag should brief all riders without a C.B. on team riding hand signals. The Drag and the Lead, in addition to using the C.B. for information and instruction, will also use hand signals for the benefit of bikes without C.B.'s and to provide visual confirmation.

EMERGENCIES

If an accident or emergency should occur, consider all options and priorities. First, secure the accident site making certain to provide as safe an environment as possible for those attending to the accident scene. Then treat the injured. Attempt to contact help by C.B., cellular phone, pay phone, or send someone for help. Stay with the injured. If no one is hurt, try to clear the roadway, and make sure everyone knows what is going on. Additionally, on an accident scene, someone should monitor oncoming traffic in both directions. Every team should work out in advance, a procedural plan to be followed in case of an emergency. If someone disappears from a formation, gets injured or sick, the entire team may choose (depending upon their "Plan for Emergency") to continue to an appropriate place then stop and wait until that rider and bike is taken care of. The Drag will stop with the bike in trouble and communicate with the Lead.

CONSIDERATION

Finally, an important part of any team ride is consideration. Have consideration for all members of all teams. Always give consideration to the other vehicles on the road. Even more important, have consideration for your own safety and the team. Have consideration for your own capabilities, skills, health, physical fitness, and feelings. Never drive beyond your comfort level! Enjoy your Team Riding. . .and be careful!

These are the standard GWRRA signals for use in communication with motorcycles not equipped with CB radios which are following the lead bike.

Following bikes should acknowledge comprehension by a head nod or flick of the dimmer switch.

To gain the attention of the lead rider, following bikes should flash their headlights. The lead rider can then nod acknowledgement, or give the "Come Alongside" signal when safe, so the following rider can signal his or her needs.

"Stop or Slow"



Arm extended straight down. Palm back.

"Follow Me"



Arm extended straight from the shoulder. Palm forward.

"Speed Up"



Arm down to side. Fist clenched. Twist as if turning throttle.

"You Lead"



Arm extended down. Palm forward. Swing forward from hip in arc.

"Hazard in Road"



Point immediately with emphasis. Sometimes done with right arm.

"Single File"



Arm and index finger extended straight up.

"Double File"



Arm extended straight up. First and fourth finger form "ram's horn" sign.

"Check Headlight"



Tap on top of head with open hand, palm down.

“Need Fuel Stop”

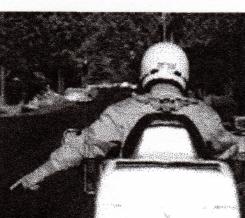
Arm out to side. Point to fuel tank.

“Need Food Stop”

Arm out to side. Fingers closed. Thumb to mouth.

“Turn Signals Left On”

Repeatedly open and close hand with thumb and fingers extended.

“Come Alongside”

Same as “You Lead,” but ending with alongside pointing motion.

“Pull Off”

Arm positioned as for right turn. Forearm then swung toward shoulder.

“Need Comfort Stop”

Upper arm extended. Forearm straight up and down. Fist clenched. Short up-and-down motion (like pulling a toilet chain.)