



Bulletin # 31

November 1994
Based on Instructions by
Margi Oller
With Additions by
Robert Balcomb

📖 Riding 🌿 Collecting 🌿 Restoring 🌿 Research 🌿 History 📖

Sag Wagon Support of Touring Riders

An important aspect of operating any Wheelmen Tour, whether it be an OHWT, a Century Ride or a multi-day cross country tour, is providing the riders with services and support. Modern bicycle touring clubs, who have needs similar to ours, have given the name of “Sag Wagon” to their support vehicles. No one seems to know how the name originated, although one of the dictionary definitions of “sag” is to lose vigor, and one of the early functions for the modern clubs was to pick up stragglers who could not finish the course. Although some of that is still done, it is discouraged. Riders are advised that both their bikes and themselves must be in shape to complete the tour. They are also advised that each rider is his/her own mechanic and should carry appropriate spares, tools, etc. Sag Wagons do not provide free “taxi service,” serve as mechanics or act as rolling bicycle shops. However it came about, The Wheelmen also use the term Sag Wagon.

That having been said, we do want to do whatever we reasonably can to ease the way for our riders. Most of this Bulletin is a first person note from Margi Oller, who was a principal Sag Wagon Driver for the 1976 Wheelmen Bicentennial Tour which traveled over seven hundred miles, from the replica of Independence Hall at Greenfield Village, Dearborn Michigan, to the original in Philadelphia. These notes were written shortly after that tour, as an encouragement to others. Now they are being incorporated into an expanded Bulletin on the subject. Although there have been a few changes since 1976, such as the inclusion of old pneumatic tired bikes on our tours, most of the functions have remained the same. Where appropriate, updates have been incorporated into her text, and a few additions have been made. Her edited and amended text follows:

SAG WAGONING:

Of all Wheelmen activities in which you can participate, none will afford you the chance to get to know the members like Sag Wagoning. It is true that you can spend a lot of time, but the rewards are worth it.

There are two types of Sag Wagon duties. The first type is stationary, as used for comparatively short “loop” routes, such as multi-lap centuries. For this type you find a convenient spot for parking next to the route of the riders.

It should be comfortable for yourself and the riders. Having good water nearby is helpful. Then just park and set yourself up. Experienced Sag Wagoners take along a book or other entertainment, but you may find that you don’t get to it very much. As the riders come in, they like to spend time talking to you and the other riders. They also like to know who has been in or how many are left on the route.

The other type of Sag Wagon, such as used on the 1976 Philadelphia Tour, is Over the Road! Use it for long loops as well as point-to-point routes. For point-to-point you can leave about an hour after the riders. Then catch up with the leaders (noting where the other riders are along the route). Find a nice spot somewhere ahead of them, park and wait until all the riders have passed you. As the day progresses, the riders will get farther apart. It may be well to have other Sag Wagons on the road too. If there is a big difference between rider abilities, you might need two additional units. They should stay at least five (5) miles apart. (Without radio communication, this distance may be difficult to maintain). The first and last Sag should carry lunch, one for the fast and one for the slow riders, making sure everyone gets a meal. The other could just have drinks and snacks, like cookies, candy and fruit. One primary lunch wagon should be designated, and that one should go immediately to the designated lunch area. It should be in place by 10:00am. A second wagon should join the lunch

wagon for the peak time to help serve. After all riders are fed, the lunch wagon should be free to go to the end of the ride. The other two will remain on the road, leapfrogging the riders and arriving at the end just ahead of the riders. Toward the end of the day, if riders are still on the route, one of the Sag Wagons should sweep the route from the farthest point the trailing rider was last seen, until the last rider is in. You should prevent riders from trying to finish after dark. It is very dangerous. Even if you follow riders with "flashers" on, to give them light, a motorist could pass you and quickly cut back in, not realizing you are anything other than a slow moving vehicle. They have no way of knowing that bikes are in front of you.

Now that I have described how the Sag Wagons work, I will say that you not only serve food and refreshment, you also:

- aid the rider by encouraging the tired and disheartened ones;
- administer first aid to both riders and their bicycles; and
- act as caretaker for coats, jackets, shirts, cameras and whatever else may get in the way of a rider.

You may also be asked to receive items from collectors of beer cans, posters and other along the road items. Paper sacks to keep things separate and neat are handy.

Don't be discouraged by what I've said, or think that it sounds like too much work. I did it for twelve days and seven hundred miles, accompanied by my two year old son, and I enjoyed every minute, even when the complaints of "where were the sag wagons" came. Always remember too, when complaints come in, as they will, they come mostly from tired muscles and discouragement talking. A kind word and sympathetic listening to the complaint usually will resolve the discontent. A rested rider then joins the group again. And they'll remember your kindness more than their complaint. You may have given them the encouragement, refreshment, rest and incentive to finish the ride that they may brag about for years to come.

Most of what follows is applicable only to long tours. For OHWTs and other short tours, the first aid kit, simple tools and cool water are sufficient, although reviewing the following may give you some ideas on how to improve your short tour. For short tours, you may also have to act as a traffic cop. Occasional stopping and regrouping is advisable, particularly if you have a wide range of riding skills represented among your riders, or if you have traffic conditions to contend with. One Sag Wagon can then stay close to all riders. Its driver can also assist in traffic control if needed to help a mass of riders across a busy intersection. Having a fluorescent construction worker's vest for this is helpful. It not only helps visibility, it also adds a touch of

authority. Enlisting the help of local law enforcement is sometimes the best answer, however.

BEFORE THE RIDERS START:

There are some things that should be prearranged before the Sag Wagons or the riders leave:

1. Coordinate a place to call for help. Make sure that each rider has the number. The person at that phone should have helpers on call at all times. Providing riders with phone numbers for State Police, Sheriff, Ambulance etc. in case of serious emergency, is also helpful. (Is 911 applicable?)
2. Be sure the riders know who the Sag Wagon volunteers are and where and when the lunch stop will be. Sag Wagon drivers should know who and how many riders will be on the route. Also, make sure that the person who is on lunch duty stays until all riders have passed.
3. Agree on and demonstrate signals to be used. Sag Wagon drivers should beep their horns lightly when approaching riders, to signal that they are there.

PROPOSED SIGNALS

Riders' Signals:

- Arm over head/hand over shoulder means I'm OK!
You can go on.
- Arm straight out from shoulder means STOP! I need assistance!

Bicycle Signals:

Note here that to avoid being passed by, be sure to tell riders that, whenever they stop they should be sure to leave their bike close to the road, in plain sight, so a passing Sag Wagon driver will be certain to see it and know that they are there, even if they do not need help. If the following signals are agreed upon beforehand, bicycles can be used to signal the driver:

- Bicycle set perpendicular to road means STOP! I need HELP!!!
- Bicycle set parallel to road means I'M OK! Just resting!

These signals are not universally used, so make sure that the riders understand the signals and be sure all drivers know to watch for them. Nothing is more aggravating to a rider than to want a drink, or need other help, and have the Sag Wagon pass your signal by. When you see the "Stop!" signal, stop as soon as you can get off the road safely, for both you and the rider. If in any doubt, check your rear view mirror. The rider may not have seen you until after you have passed.

EQUIPMENT YOU WILL NEED:

Here is some of the equipment you will need to take along. Line it all up well in advance to avoid last minute panic.

For Refreshments etc.:

- Large cooler full of ice (the number of coolers will depend on the number of riders, heat of the day, and possibility of access to ice and refills on route.)
- Paper plates
- Sharp knife(s)
- Paper cups
- Paper towels and napkins
- Trash bags

For Riders:

- A well stocked First Aid kit (and the "know how" to use it)
- Elastic (ACE) bandages
- Vaseline (for sore "seats")
- Sun screen
- Solarcaine
- Large bandages (the ones most likely to be needed)
- Wound wipes
- Hydrogen Peroxide is helpful too
- Poison Ivy lotion
- Insect repellent
- Bags for personal items left behind
- Extra route maps (They have a way of getting lost.)

For Bicycles:

- Furnace (duct) tape
- Electrical (friction) tape
- Oil can
- Crescent wrench (sets of box & open wrenches)
- Pliers
- Hammer
- Small wire
- Allen wrench

If the Tour accepts pneumatic bikes:

- Stand pump
- Patch kit

For Communications:

- Cellular phone(s) or
- Ham radio or CB radio or
- Ready access to telephone with another "attended" phone

Note: that successful CB "communications" requires staying "in range."

NOW FOR THAT "TASTY PART" - FOOD

For a one day-long tour, you will probably want to provide your riders with the convenience of a lunch. However, with some preplanning you could pick a route that would include opportunities for your riders to buy their lunch along the route.

IF YOU DO PROVIDE LUNCH, HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

If you are in charge, try to poll the group for special diets, likes and dislikes. For shopping, here is a suggested list.

- **Sandwiches:** Figure 2 per person. Stick to plain meats and cheese. Mayonnaise, catsup and relish are good with them. This will serve as your carbohydrate and protein portions. Lettuce on them adds vitamins and moisture. Having some peanut butter and jelly makes for some inexpensive variety.
- **Desert:** Use fresh fruit as much as possible. Apples, plums, white seedless grapes, black sweet cherries, peaches, nectarines, and of course, "the bikies favorite" bananas. Provide small baggies for riders to place snacks in and take along. Also have handywipes in the bag to clean hands after the snack. Sticky handle grips are not appreciated. Cookies and small cakes are good too. You will need a variety, about 6 kinds to suit all.
- **Snacks:** Small bags of peanuts, nutty type candy bars, bags of finger type candies, bags of small candy bars, bags of Trail Mix. (Avoid chocolate! It gets awfully messy.)
- **Salty Snacks:** Although salt tablets are out, it is probably advisable to let riders replace lost salt with potato chips, Fritos, etc. Be sure to get plenty.
- **Drink:** For all rides you must provide something to drink. For "free" short rides like some OHWTs, etc. cool water may be enough. Figure at least a half a gallon per rider per day. Have more for very hot and humid days. The following types of drinks are recommended:
 - **"Gatorade"** or similar sport drink: The powdered is the most economical, although some riders prefer the bottled kind.
 - **Lemonade or punch:** A number of Wheelmen avoid carbonated beverages while riding. Be sure to provide drinks for them too. These or Koolade would be suitable. Make them a bit on the weak side, however. Strong or syrupy drinks don't work well when one is exercising.

- **Milk:** Both white and chocolate. This was especially enjoyed mid-morning with a cookie. (2% milk is a good compromise between those who like whole milk and the skim milk drinkers.
- **Water:** A large container will be needed. Cold water will be used for drinking and filling water bottles. Be alert for “sulfur water” and other unpalatable water for en route replacement.
- **Pop (Soda):** Many Wheelmen like to have these as an afternoon treat. Many riders prefer the more tart types.
- If you Anticipate Cool Mornings, hot coffee and tea and hot chocolate will make a big hit. (Also see Bulletin #28 for additional ideas.)

This should give you an idea of what will be needed in the way of food and snacks.

These are some of the things we’ve found helpful. Use your own imagination. Try to think of other things that could make the day more pleasant and rewarding for your riders and for yourself. (If there’s a “Big Game” that day, how about having a portable radio or TV.) Some modern clubs even provide free massages for their century riders. That may be a bit far out, but it shows that any tour can be “improved”.