

## Who's Looking Out for You?

By Mark Caldwell

A few weeks ago, on the cover of Parade magazine (which comes with the Sunday paper) was a picture of Bill O'Reilly promoting his new book titled *Who's Looking Out for You*. I have not read the book, but I thought it was a good question for each of us to ask ourselves in regard to our riding. Who IS looking out for us? Is it the Chapter Director's responsibility? Or maybe it's your mechanic's job to tell you when something is about to go wrong on your bike. No, wait a minute...I've got it! It's the Rider Educator's Responsibility! After all, he's in charge of all that "safety stuff", right? Wrong. It's up to YOU to look out for you.

It's your responsibility. This applies to whether you're riding by yourself, with a co-rider, or as part of a group. Even as much as Wingers like to help one another, and we have our great Rescue (formerly Towbusters) emergency assistance program, it's still up to you to look out for your own safety. That includes inspecting your bike on a regular basis (might I suggest before every ride?). Stop right now and honestly ask yourself, "When was the last time I inspected my bike? When was the last time I even glanced at my bike from a safety point of view? When was the last time I bothered to check the air pressure in my tires?" I had gotten sloppy and skipped checking the air pressure in my tires for several weeks. When I finally did, I discovered that my front tire was 10 lbs under pressure! But even more important, I discovered that it's time to buy new tires.

In group riding, one of the most important things to remember is that you need to **ride your own bike**, and don't be a lemming. Yes, we like to stay in a nice staggered formation when we can, and follow the lead bike. But you are still responsible for your own safety. That means if you feel that staying with the group for any reason is dangerous for you, then get out. That includes temporarily breaking formation to avoid a road hazard; taking an alternate route because the one the lead took looks dangerous; or leaving the group because it rides more aggressively than you are comfortable riding. It's also up to you to take care of your own bike's fuel and maintenance needs, although in this situation the group will usually stop together if you communicate with them. And of course, it's up to you to wear appropriate protective clothing and gear, because if anything goes wrong, you're the one who will pay the ultimate price.

So, who's looking out for you? I hope that you are, because the rest of us are busy looking out for ourselves.