



Group Riding

A few key rules you should follow.

1. Be consistent and smooth

- Stay relaxed, loose and fluid
- Remember a cyclist is probably behind you and another behind him. Unpredictable moves will cause a problem for the entire group behind you. Lots of people are depending on you, so try not to do anything unexpected.
- Speed up, slow down and change direction gradually. Brisk changes will make riders behind you work harder, take much of the enjoyment out of the ride and may cause a wheel touch, which can put the cyclists down behind you.
- Don't accelerate to fill a gap and then suddenly brake – close gaps slowly and smoothly.
- When you stop pedalling you will instantly slow down – even going downhill, so keep your pedals moving when someone is behind you. Soft pedalling beats no pedalling.
- Standing up as you ride causes your bike to stop for a split second, and that's long enough to stress the rider behind you. The best bet is to accelerate slightly and, when you stand, do it for the downstroke.

2. Go easy on the brakes

- If a rider is behind you, never brake early without early and clear warning.
- When descending in front of a pack, keep pedalling (lightly) so the group will not have to brake.
- Instead of braking, sit up or move out of the draft to catch some air
- If you must brake, feather your rear brake smoothly and lightly to slow down. Be sure to communicate that you're slowing.

3. Follow the wheel in front of you

- Protect your front wheel. Stay alert. Without training and practice, even a slight touch of your front wheel on another's rear wheel virtually guarantees a spill for you.
- Ride in a straight line. If a rider behind you is overlapping and you sway unexpectedly, he will fall. Maybe you won't go down, but you'll have contributed to a nasty pileup.

- Don't ride beside another rider. Stay no more than a couple of feet from the side of the road. This is safer, and also helps other road users to pass. A tight organised line shows that we're willing to share the road.
- Drafting – about one to four feet behind the wheel in front – is very efficient. You'll expend 15 to 30% less energy than the leader. Don't focus on the wheel in front of you. Instead look forward several riders to see what the group is doing. Do this only with skilled cyclists and say "on your wheel".
- When you draft, don't let gaps open. If you're not at ease drafting, then pull out of the line and move to the back of the group.

4. Communicate

- Call out your actions and road conditions – turning, slowing, stopping etc. Learn and use standard hand signals as well as verbal commands.
- Short, brusque commands can seem rude or offensive. In fact they're just time savers - don't take them personally!
- If you're passing or coming alongside the next biker, call "on your left". This is crucial in protecting yourself, the rider in front and anyone behind.
- Give advance notice of turns, obstacles and other road hazards. Telling the group about a pothole when you're on top of it, or a turn that is underway is all too late. Allow time to plan and react.
- Talk to other riders who aren't following these rules. This is vital for group safety. All riders should be trained in, and constantly practice, the rules of safe riding. If a rider thinks the rules don't apply to them, ask them to ride at the back of the group.
- If you don't understand a signal or command, don't be afraid to ask. You need to know.

5. About changing positions

- Start the ride slowly to allow a warm-up period. Keep it slow for 15 minutes so the group can sort it all out and warm up.
- At stop signs and corners, wait for the back of the group to catch up and then resume speed gradually.
- Keep your speed and effort steady. Avoid unnecessary braking or even coasting.
- If you take the lead and you'd like the group to go faster, wait until the previous leader is back in line, then accelerate gradually. Your responsibility is to all riders behind you, including the one you've just passed.
- Don't fool with water bottles, computers or equipment while leading.
- No aero bars in pace-lines or group rides. Headphones are also taboo.
- When leading, always see the group through obstacles. Don't pull out of line before a narrow bridge, rough road, parked car, traffic, or other potential trouble spots. Consider how any move or decision you make will affect the group.

6. About Common Courtesy

- If your group leader publishes a start time of say 10am, then that's when the ride should begin. Showing up late is asking your fellow bikers, who respect each other's time, to delay their departure so you can be accommodated. That's not what group riding is about.
- When stopping for any reason get totally off the road. Not doing so is dangerous and is annoying for other road users.

Of course, it's easy to read about cycling protocol, and even easier to talk about it. But the key is practice. Take one rule at a time; concentrate on it; master it. Here are a couple of examples:

- Consistency: Practice maintaining a constant speed, even when the rider in front of you isn't doing so. See if you can limit the use of your brakes. Change speeds gradually. Take it smooth and slow; the other riders will love you. Think about the impact of every move on the members of the group.
- Drafting; Start six feet (about one bike length) behind someone you trust. Stay there until you're relaxed, no matter how long it takes. Then move to five feet. The four feet. Ultimately, when you're ready, try to stay just one foot behind the rear wheel in front. Once you're comfortable, you can choose whatever distance you're in the mood for – one foot up to six feet – or whatever the situation dictates.