



Group Riding Tips

With acknowledgement to Tom Kellog's article "Group Riding" from which many of these comments are drawn.

The tips can perhaps be split into two types: those related to safety when riding at speed with a lot of other riders in close proximity; and those related to the etiquette of keeping a pace line in good shape – and some fall in both categories.

Be predictable

Hold your line on turns, don't brake suddenly or change direction – don't jump ahead of other riders half way up the line.

Be aware

With riders in front and behind, other traffic, obstacles, etc. you need to concentrate at all times. Keep an eye on the road ahead – don't turn to talk to your partner. Don't wear earplugs and listen to your music – your ears are an important safety feature.

Problems

Need to remove your jacket – don't attempt this in the middle of the group – drop to the back by signaling that you are moving left or right out of the pace line and drift to the back. Got a flat – again signal and verbally warn others and then make a controlled move – don't just stop or pull over.

Half wheeling

There are two examples of half wheeling:

At the front, where one of the two riders at the front of a double pace line always seems to be a half wheel ahead of his partner – it comes from one rider's unconscious urge to surge – the slower partner is always playing catch up. The pace should be set by the slower of the two riders.

The second example comes further back in the line – stay behind the rider in front of you and avoid overlapping his rear wheel with your front wheel. If he makes a sideways move, maybe to avoid an obstacle, or accidentally when he takes a drink.

Watch for the standing surge

Be aware when you or another rider stand up, whether to climb, accelerate or just to stretch. When you do, the bike can actually move backward relative to the rider's body mass. This results in the rider's bike suddenly moving back towards the rider behind. This can be particularly dangerous at the beginning of a hill, where not only is the lead rider's bike moving back, but the following riders are closing because the lead rider is also decelerating on the hill. Prevent it by putting extra pressure on your pedals as you stand. Following riders should also be on the look out on hills.

Riding in a pace line

Riding in a pace line gives everyone on the group ride a chance to benefit from the energy to be saved by drafting. Remember that it is a group ride and not a race (at least



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until the point when racing starts!). The point is to keep the group together. If want to do sprint repeats or hill intervals, then do so on a separate ride – don't force everyone else to do it too.

So keep a steady pace and wait for the weaker riders on the hills so that everyone can keep together.

Keep a steady pace

Surging or inconsistent pace will shatter a pace line. The trick is not to keep the same speed, but to keep the same effort. The effort to keep a steady pace increases as you reach the front of the pace line. Resist the temptation to surge – note your cadence just before to get back to the front and try to keep it up during your pull. As you pull off, shift down one gear but keep the same cadence; this will start you back in the line.

Share the pulls

No need to be a hero and take a long pull – everybody benefits by rotating through at a steady pace.

Rotation rate

The faster the pace, the quicker the rotation. At race speed, your time on the front is usually just as long as it takes to move beyond the previous rider and move over into the rearward moving line. With easier rides, your time at the front will be somewhat longer before the next riders pull through.

Point out obstacles

Riders at the front are responsible for alerting those behind them to potholes, sand, debris, parked vehicle, etc. If the object is immobile, like a pothole, point to it on the side that you will pass it. Give a verbal warning in extreme cases.

Overtaking

Let those behind you know if the group is passing runners, walkers, slower cyclists, etc. A call, such as "Runner inside", and slapping yourself on the left butt is the usual protocol. Also, lead the group well clear of these obstacles – don't brush by walkers of slower cyclists. Signal and call if the group is going to have the slow down, for instance at traffic lights, making a right turn, vehicle ahead slowing.

Leave room for emergencies

When riding in a pace line, the options for avoiding obstacles can be severely limited, so give yourself some space away from the curb so that you can move left or right. Riders at the front should lead the pace line away from obstacles. Be aware that while you might be on a line to avoid the obstacle, your partner inside might need to move right to miss it – give him/her room.



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Don't look at the wheel in front of you

One of the most important tips – look down the road (you will still see the wheel in front in your peripheral vision) so you can better anticipate changes. You will also avoid the tendency to over-react to small changes in the momentum of the rider in front. And it will be easier to hold the wheel.

Coaching

If you are an experienced rider, don't be reluctant to coach the less experienced ones if you see something going on that shouldn't be – no need to set out to coach, but a helpful comment that improves the safety of the group ride should always be welcome. The converse is that inexperienced riders should not take personal offence if comments are made to them, and should ask an experienced rider if they have questions.

Racing

Many of the tips and advice above apply equally in a race environment. When riding in a group during a race, obviously there is no requirement to take your turn on the front, but you should consider the following:

- Maintain your line when cornering. To make sure that everyone gets through the turn safely, be aware of the lines taken by riders on either side of you, don't suddenly change your line, and try not to cut anyone off.
- Don't be afraid to let a rider know where you are.
- No earbuds and music during the race – if you are using radio communication, only a single ear-piece is permitted.
- Be particularly cautious if you are passing on the inside of a rider – let the rider know where you are.
- Be aware of traffic on the course – do not make any moves involving a extraneous vehicle and certainly do not pass a vehicle on the inside unless it is making a right turn.
- Do not cross the centre line, except in an emergency, or unless the whole road is closed and the race is only moving in one direction.
- We are happy to include any other tips you might want to share – email information@bermudabicycle.org with your thoughts.