



Cycling Tips – Riding in a Group

Smooth, predictable riding when you're in a group isn't just a matter of style, its survival. Here are the rules of riding steadily:

Leading

Ever notice how easy some cyclists are to ride behind? When you're on the wheel of one these cyclists, life is good.

How does one become such a paragon of predictability? The first step is to understand that you're responsible for the rider(s) behind you. You hold the joystick. This means that you can speed them up, slow them down – or make them crash.

Braking: Just touching your brakes while riding at the front will set off general alarms to the rear. Feather the front brake only and continue pedalling against it. This moderates speed without disturbing trailing riders. If you must brake hard, announce that fact to the bunch by shouting **“EASY”** or **“STOP”**.

Holding a line: It's likely that, despite a thousand cautions, the person behind you is going to overlap your wheel at some point. If you swerve while this is happening and touch wheels, that person is going down. What's more, despite the error, they'll think twice about cycling with you again. To avoid this, ride as if you're on rails. On occasion this means going over a bump or through a pothole you would otherwise serve to avoid. Learn how to make your bike light by transferring your weight to the front or the back to lessen the impact on your wheels, and practice “bunny hopping” over potholes. Larger obstacles, such as road kill and potholes, merit hand and verbal warnings, such as **“INSIDE”** and **“MIDDLE”** and even **“HOLE”**. When cornering, follow the expected line. This means starting wide, gradually



cutting to the apex, then swinging wide again. When you're on a narrow road, if you're riding at the front, warn those behind of a car coming towards you by shouting **"CAR DOWN"** to allow them to smoothly move into a tighter formation. Where there are overtaking restrictions, if you're riding at the back of the group and you're aware of a car behind impeded, shout **"CAR UP"** to warn others of its presence. This may be accompanied by a shout of **"SINGLE OUT"** if the road conditions demand it to let the car overtake safely. We don't win any brownie points by antagonizing drivers!

Climbing: Perhaps the most common new-rider faux pas is "drop kicking" the person behind when standing to climb. This occurs because cadence naturally decreases as you rise from the saddle, causing your bike to slow down. The rider behind then hits your rear wheel, with the inevitable result. To avoid this, shift to the next higher gear before standing to compensate for the slower cadence and maintain pressure on the pedals so that your bike doesn't move "backward" relative to the rider behind. This sit/stand transition takes practice but soon becomes automatic. Concentrate on eliminating any freewheeling as you stand. You should always feel resistance through the pedals.

Following

Never overlap wheels: Instead, stay at least 6 inches behind a smooth reliable rider, and farther back if you don't know the person. One frequent cause of running into someone is "freewheel fixation" – becoming mesmerized while staring at the wheel in front. Instead, look "through" the lead rider, scanning for trouble. Look at nothing but see everything, allowing the rider ahead of



you to remain in your peripheral vision. It's true that experienced cyclists routinely overlap wheels to gain shelter in a crosswind (an echelon).

Looking behind: If you're in a double paceline or riding beside someone in a large bunch, and you want to look back, first rest your hand on your neighbour's shoulder. This provides a stable reference point and will keep you moving straight ahead. We all tend to swerve a little when we look behind, and in a bunch that can spell trouble.

Pulling through: In any situation where you're sharing the work by alternating the front position in a chain gang, don't surge through. Check your cycle computer before you get to the front and maintain the same speed as you pull through. Once you've done your turn at the front, go past the person beside you (left or right depending on wind direction) and get them to shout "OK" when you've cleared their front wheel. Then peel over to provide them with shelter, allowing the next person in the line to come through. As you move up to the front in the fast channel, hold the wheel in front to provide shelter for the other riders as they make their way up to the front. The back of the pack is the least disruptive time to eat or take a swig from your bottle.



- Get used to following closely to get the benefit of the draft.
- Ride smoothly and predictably. Never accelerate or brake quickly. If you are running up on the wheel in front, slow down (without braking) by moving into the wind slightly.
- Maintain a constant speed when you get to the front by glancing at your cycle computer (the tendency is to accelerate).
- If the rider in front charges off, let that person go and hold your speed. Move over and fill the gap just created.
- If you tire, sit out as many turns as necessary by staying at the back. Let riders coming back know that you are resting, and give them space to move in ahead of you.
- As the speed increases, gaps may develop because riders can't hold the wheel ahead, or they miss the last wheel as they try to get back on the end of the pace line. Strong riders need to fill these gaps in order to preserve the flow, even if it means jumping across and moving back up the line early.
- If you're leading, reduce your effort up hills because the benefit from the draft is less. Conversely, accelerate more quickly on descents so that everyone won't stack up from behind.

