



GROUP RIDING ETIQUETTE

Riding in a group can be a great experience. Having like minded people along can have many mutual benefits such as: more ground can be covered in a shorter time, someone can be there to help with a flat or repair and you can even have someone to share a spectacular view.

A group ride can too often be an intimidating prospect for the inexperienced. Watching Pro racers on television can give the beginner a false notion that all group rides are performed with hundreds of riders speeding along in a huge group, just inches apart. Group rides can sometimes be elevated to these levels of intensity, but that usually comes after lots of experience has been gained and everyone in the group has learned to trust each other by spending considerable time riding in group settings.

I have listed below some of the most commonly accepted rules for having a fun, safe and enjoyable group ride.

- 1) **The primary goal is to complete your ride with nothing contacting the pavement besides everyone's tires and maybe the soles of some shoes!** Being predictable at all times (this also applies when you are riding alone in traffic!) is one of the primary rules to follow. No body likes riding with 'squirrely' people. Avoid making quick lane changes, unannounced braking and erratic steering. Any of these actions can (and will) put someone's skin against the pavement. That is not a good way to make friends. So don't be a Squirrel!

Predictably following traffic laws goes a long way towards reducing confusion in various situations. Everyone should be aware of the local traffic laws for both motor vehicles and bicycles. If you are not 100% sure what they are, contact the DMV or check out the laws on the internet. After all, you can't follow the rules if you don't know what they are.

- 2) **Be consistent.** Quick adjustments in speed should always be avoided. There are other ways to slow down besides jamming on the brakes. Soft pedaling, sitting up straight or easing out to one side slightly (reducing the drafting effect) can be utilized to regulate excess speed. Try to maintain a steady line at all times. There are occasions when you

need to swerve to avoid an obstacle like a pot hole or a dead animal, but always try to let the group know what is going on before you execute the maneuver. Nimbly dodging a possum is all well and good, but is it worth the cost of clipping the person's front wheel that is riding behind you? This leads us to the next rule...

- 3) **Don't overlap wheels.** You should never ride in a position that places any part of your front wheel passed the rear most part of the wheel in front of you! If you do and the situation just mentioned occurs, **YOU** will be the one guaranteed to faceplant on the tarmac! The reason why people ride closely behind one another is to benefit from something called drafting. Drafting is when the lead rider in a group is doing the majority of the work towards moving the air. The riders behind the leader do not have to work as hard against air and can go the same speed, but with less effort. Do not feel as though you have to be inches from the person in front of you to benefit from drafting. The difference in the drafting effect one inch behind to several feet behind the lead rider is negligible. The main thing to remember is to not ride any closer than you can comfortably handle. Always try to visualize an escape route for yourself and maintain a distance that allows you to use it.
- 4) **Call out hazards.** The lead rider has the responsibility to let everyone behind know what is coming. Remember that they are tucked in behind you and have limited view. Don't ever be afraid to shout out that there is a dog approaching, road kill on the white line or gravel ahead. No one will be upset about being informed but you will get an earful if you remain quite. The very first rider is not the only person that should call out hazards. If the ride breaks up into sub-groups, the first person in each group becomes responsible. If the group is large and the leader cannot be heard by everyone, then everyone in the group should relay the calls. Riders in the rear are responsible for announcing problems at the rear ('car back', Flat Tire, Dropped Chain, etc.). And anyone in the group should announce any hazard they see that has not been addressed (deer on the right!)
- 5) **Call out signals.** Always call out turns in advance and use your arm signals. (It is perfectly fine to signal a right turn by sticking out your right arm!) Always call out that you are slowing or stopping before you actually start to change your speed. The group needs time to react to the pending change in direction and/or speed. You also want to make sure that your signals are seen and understood by all vehicles around you. Always try to let drivers know the group's intentions.
- 6) **Pay Attention.** As basic as this seems, it is very easy to set your focus on an object (the wheel in front of you, the little animals printed on the riders jersey) when you are trying to stay on pace. Doing this makes it very easy to overlap wheels and crash! Keep looking around and enjoy the view!

- 7) Learn to stand correctly.** When you have to get out of the saddle on a climb, you have to do so correctly or you risk jamming into the front wheel of the rider behind you. Standing incorrectly will NOT make you any friends. When you have to stand on a climb, (announce 'Standing' before you actually execute the maneuver) it is necessary to start rising from the saddle as the pedal on your stronger leg comes over the top of the pedal stroke. Use this extra leverage and forcefully push the pedal down as you rise from the seat. When done correctly, your bike will maintain the same speed or maybe accelerate slightly. This will keep you off of the rider behind you. You should practice this by yourself on a steep hill until you are sure you can do it correctly within a group. Until then, always let the rider behind you know that you need a little space!
- 8) Downhill.** The faster you go, the more resistant airflow becomes. Because of this, the lead rider needs to pedal when going downhill. The riders in the draft will accelerate at a higher rate than the leader, even when they are coasting. It is considered bad form to zip by the leader that has been working hard pulling the group towards a downhill. Lightly feather your brakes, sit upright or move over out of the draft (after making sure it is clear) to maintain your relative spacing. If you repeatedly pass the leader on downhills, don't be surprised if sometime the leader drops you on the following climb and lets you flounder about all by yourself for a while. Remember, it's a group ride, not a race!
- 9) Stay calm and relax.** Staying relaxed on your bike has several benefits. First, you conserve energy for moving pedals if you don't waste it by keeping all your muscles tense. Being tense reduces your ability to absorb bumps and impacts which makes it more likely for you to crash. Being calm and relaxed lets you enjoy the time on your bike more.
- 10) Don't be superman.** Most folks want to do their part and do not want to be seen as a burden, so when their turn comes to pull on the front, they go too fast and too long. So, when they finally do relinquish the leader position, they are not able to stay on the back of the group. You should try your best to maintain the speed of the person that just pulled off the front. If you are not able to pull at that speed, pull off and let the next person through. You will not be looked down upon. Everyone started out where you are and it takes time to build up your strength and skills. The group will be much happier if you just pull off, get back in line and let the group maintain its progress instead of having to stop and wait for you to recover from an overzealous pull. If you are with a group that you know you cannot pull for, remain in the back and let the riders cycling off of the front slip back in line in front of you.

11) Be prepared! Always, always be on time for a group ride! Be ready to start riding at the designated time. Don't show up one minute before the departure time and expect everyone to wait while you stretch, assemble your bike, pump your tires, and change your clothes... Remember that everyone else there also has other commitments after the ride and they made the effort to be on time. You should respect them the way they respect you. If you can't be on time, let the group know that you will not be there and that they should leave without you. Always bring drinking water on any ride! A good rule of thumb is to consume one bottle per hour of riding (even in the winter!) Always carry tools, equipment and supplies to make minor repairs. A spare tube, patch kit, pump and multi-tool should be considered a minimum. Have a friend or the local bike shop teach you how to change a tire properly and quickly.

There is more to group riding, but if you know and follow these guidelines, your group riding will be an enjoyable and safe experience.

Happy Pedaling!

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