

How to Recover from Bumping and Wheel Contact

The following excerpts offer tips and practice drills.

In [*Skills Training for Cyclists*](#), author **Arnie Baker, M.D.**, covers the gamut of riding techniques. Everything you expect in an eBook with this title is included -- along with some surprises.

Like the topic of this week's excerpt -- bumping. As a coach and national cycling champion, Dr. Baker knows that even casual recreational roadies can benefit from knowing how to react when nudged by another rider. It's vital to crash avoidance. Like a racer, you need to handle the situation without panicking or overreacting.

To see the wealth of "how to" riding advice in ***Skills Training for Cyclists*** and read another excerpt ("Group Riding Principles"), please click http://www.roadbikerider.com/skt_page.htm. Orders today will be delivered by e-mail today.

Excerpt: BUMPING BODIES

Touching, bumping or leaning into another rider is not a strategy for racing, but it is a part of any defensive bicycling skill program. By practicing this skill, riders become more comfortable with proximity, or closeness, to other pack riders. By practicing this skill, you will be less likely to panic if you are bumped.

---Practice on a smooth grass field. Falling is likely at first. Wear a helmet, long sleeves, leg coverings, and gloves.

---Lowering the saddle or wearing tennis shoes can help nervous beginners catch their balance or put a foot on the ground.

---Initially practice with a partner of similar height and weight. Choose a partner whose handlebars are about the same height as yours. The interlocking of handlebars is a cause of crashing; this risk is reduced when handlebars are the same height.

---Ride side by side, hands in the drops.

---Gently lean and bump shoulders and elbows. Look ahead, using only peripheral vision to see your partner.

---As you become more comfortable, practice more intense bumps. Lean on your partner, do not merely touch. Your partner should be propping up your lean. You would fall without your partner's counter-pressure.

---Switch sides. Practice leaning and bumping the other side.

---Play sandwich with two partners: Take turns riding in the middle, being bumped from both sides.

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From Road Bike Rider - Bumping

Practice some simple, low-speed bumping drills so you will feel more comfortable riding in close confines. Go to a soccer field or similar grassy area with a friend. Have your helmets on.

Drill – Shoulder Bump

Ride side-by-side at walking speed. Gradually move closer to your partner until you can reach out and touch his shoulder. When that feels okay, keep both hands on the bar and touch elbows. Next, touch shoulders. Keep your arms relaxed to absorb the bump before it causes your handlebar to twitch. Finally, lean right into your partner. Press against him, then separate. As you gain confidence, bump more aggressively. Soon you'll be able to absorb a sizeable shot with nary a flinch.

Wheel Contact

Wheel contact can happen suddenly in pace lines or groups – you overlap the rear wheel of the rider just ahead and he swerves slightly. Boom! You're down. Touching wheels is the major cause of crashes in the peloton, so it's crucial to know how to stay up if your front wheel gets hit.

The key to recovering from a wheel contact is to turn your front wheel into the other bicycle's rear wheel. This allows you to regain balance and then turn away without crashing.

Drill – Wheel Tap

Ride behind your partner, again at walking pace. Overlap his rear wheel slightly and steer so you brush against it. Don't bang into him, just tap him. You'll probably get knocked offline and need to put your foot down to regain balance. Try again, and this time when your wheels brush, turn slightly into his rear wheel. This allows you to regain balance and turn smoothly away from the contact without crashing. It sounds counter intuitive, but it works.

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8. TRY THIS ON YOUR NEXT RIDE

Stay upright when wheels touch!

It's the most common cause of paceline crashes. You overlap your front wheel with the rear wheel of another rider. Then she swerves slightly to avoid a chink in the road, the wheels touch and -- boom! -- you're in a heap.

Nothing causes panic faster than that nasty whirring sound of two tire sidewalls rubbing.

But what Tour de France voice **Phil Liggett** calls "a touch of wheels" doesn't mean an automatic trip to the pavement. You can learn to avoid getting too cozy with another rider's rear rubber and stay upright if you do. Here's how:

---**Avoid overlaps.** It's not necessary to overlap wheels to get a good draft. Stay in a comfort zone about one foot behind so small mistakes don't cause big problems.

The exception is during a strong crosswind. Then the paceline will be angled across the road in an echelon, with each downwind bike overlapped the one in front. Riders must stay sharp because one wrong move can bring down the line like dominoes.

---**Don't panic if your front wheel is bumped.** Relax your shoulders and arms. Don't fight the bike.

---**Steer into the offending wheel,** not away from it, to regain your balance. This is the exact opposite of what your instincts want you to do (veer away) so you must . . .

---**Practice.** Your chances of crash avoidance are better if you practice bumping wheels at slow speed on grass. Gather a couple of riding buddies and head to the local soccer field. Don't forget your helmet.

---**Play on your mountain bike.** A standard prank on singletrack is to rub your front tire against the rear tire of the unsuspecting rider ahead. The knobbies make a loud and satisfying buzz. Try it and you'll develop the reflexes to save your skin when your front wheel gets tapped.

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Commentary of the Week: "I agree with Coach Fred that front wheels should be protected when riding in a group, but I felt squirrely just reading the phrase, 'Even slight contact can make you fall immediately.' There's a simple way to survive that scary situation when an overlapped wheel is bumped: Turn *into* the direction of contact. So, if your front wheel taps a rear wheel on your right side, turn the handlebar right like you are trying to use the front wheel as a hockey stick. This provides a counterforce that pushes you and the bike away, together, from the rear wheel without losing your center of gravity. In this technique, your entire body and bike will act as one solid unit and be more likely to bounce off rather than jackknife into a crash. You can practice this on grass with a friend riding in front of you." -- *Frank Karbarz*