



Safe Riding: 6 tips for cycling in a group

The CCCC road biking season is right around the corner. Given the early spring road conditions that we often encounter (e.g., loose gravel/sand, tree branches, and potholes), here is some useful information for our club members to keep in mind when riding in a group:

1) Don't overlap wheels with the rider in front

This is the golden rule of riding in a group. You want to ride as close to the rider ahead of you to benefit from the slipstream effect, but you don't want to overlap your front wheel with their rear wheel. That way danger lies.

That's because if the rider in front suddenly moves across the road your wheels will collide and the likely outcome is a crash, that could take out not just you but the cyclists behind you as well. This is one of the most common causes of crashes in professional pelotons.

2) Ride steady and hold your line — and no sudden braking

You want to ride in a predictable and consistent manner. It's important to consider the safety of the cyclists around you when riding in a group and avoid any sudden, erratic or unpredictable behavior that could endanger the cyclists behind you.

So hold your line and avoid sudden side-to-side movements. You may need to change direction for an oncoming hazard of course, which is why you should be looking well ahead for such hazards and move smoothly around them with plenty of time, after communicating to the rider behind with a hand signal or verbal warning that you intend to move out into the road. If you do need to move out from the pace line, ensure you indicate to the person behind you of your intention to change direction.

3) Follow a wheel

Most groups ride in a double pace line of two columns of pairs of riders. Unless you're riding on the front, you'll be following the wheel in front. Try to make sure you're actually following the wheel of the cyclist in front, don't just plonk yourself in the middle. You'll get a better slipstream effect and it means two cyclists can ride alongside each other.

While you want to avoid overlapping wheels as previously mentioned, it's sensible to ride a little to one side - but still behind - the wheel in front so that if anything happens and the rider in front slows suddenly you can move to one side of them rather colliding with their rear wheel.

If you're new to riding in a group it can be a good idea to ride at the back for the first time and watch and learn from the way the group moves along the road.

Safe cycling in a group is only possible when everyone follows the rules

4) Communicate hazards

When you're following the wheel in front closely your view of hazards (potholes, holes, sunken drain covers etc) in the road ahead is obscured. So to help the cyclist following behind you, point out hazards either verbally or simply by using your hand and pointing towards the ground on the side of the road that the hazard will be coming from.

Verbal call signs include "hole," "car up," "car back," "slowing," "left" and "right" to name a few of the more common ones.

There are all sorts of hand signals you can employ for different hazards, from simply pointing to a hole, to warning of parked cars by placing your hand behind your bike and point in the direction you intend to move, to placing your hand out with the palm facing down and making a dog patting gesture for slowing at junctions.

These and more can be easily and quickly learned from riding with groups, and groups depending on experience and location will have their own signals, but those ones mentioned above are fairly common in cycling regardless of language. When pointing out hazards just make sure you provide enough warning for the person behind you and don't leave it to the last minute.

5) Follow the rules of the road

You might be relaxed about rolling through red lights (please don't), but when riding in a group, and especially when leading the group, it's wise to follow the rules of the road for the safety of the group. When you're riding in a group you have to consider the consequences your actions will have on the other cyclists in your group. So that means adhering to traffic lights, and other traffic signs.

6) Stay relaxed

Finally, as much as it can seem intimidating at first, try and stay relaxed when riding in a group. Riding in close proximity to other cyclists with your wheels several inches from the wheel in front can seem scary on your first experience, and it's common to tense up with nerves, but try and stay as relaxed as you possibly can because you're less likely to make a mistake or panic when you're not holding the handlebars with a vice like grip. Relax and enjoy the beauty of a well-organized group.

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