

Guidelines for safe riding and riding with groups

Published by ERCC for its members safety and guidance.



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Introduction

Cycling is a fantastic recreational activity, regardless of discipline. Cycling is growing more and more popular each year with more and more cyclists riding more frequently in the past 50 years*. It is now estimated that 80% of UK Road licences holders now own a bike.

Whether you are an out and out racer, sportive rider or cycle just for fun, riding safely has to be a key consideration, not just for you but for other riders and road users too.

Group riding is a great way to explore new areas and getting to know fellow cyclists but it does almost certainly need you to ride with a different mindset. As you are riding in a group, you are not only responsible for your own safety but also for the rest of the group too. Equally, this applies to the other individuals within the group too.

Group riding offers many advantages such as:

- You are likely to cover more ground in the same amount of time.
- Learn new routes.
- Making new friends.
- Pushing yourself to a new level of fitness.
- Improving your bike-handling and communication skills.

As a club, we are committed to rider safety and this guide has been written to provide an outline of how to ride within in a group safely and to minimise the possibility of accidents. Some of the advice will be obvious but it's amazing how common sense can quickly disappear if red mist descends because the pace picks up or someone else makes a mistake. However it is your responsibility to ride within your capability, safely and with consideration for your fellow cyclists and other road users too.

Ride with awareness but also to remember to enjoy it!

Happy cycling everyone.



Before you ride

Its always worth checking your bike over before a solo or group ride. This will help to prevent any breakdowns whilst riding. The most important to note are as follows:

1. Check tyres are free of splits / holes and lodged flints or other nasties. Better to discover a potential puncture issue before setting off.
2. Tyres are inflated to the appropriate pressure. This will vary depending on tyre size, person's weight and road conditions. If in doubt, consult manufacturers website or local bike shop for assistance.
3. Check for broken spokes and the wheels are true
4. Brakes in good working order and correctly adjusted.
5. Brake blocks are not rubbing against rim unless you purposely setting out to do strength training and need extra resistance to work with!
6. Chain is lubricated. Its best to do this the night before to allow lubricant to bond onto chain. Be sure to wipe surplus away before riding.
7. No obvious parts are hanging off or are loose which may come off whilst riding.
8. Sustran has developed a handy 11 step bike check which you can find here: [M-Check](#)



Mandatory obligations

1. An appropriate cycle helmet is to be worn at all times regardless of your experience. It will protect your head if you come off. No two ways about it. Glasses and hand mitts / gloves are also highly recommended.
2. Tribars are great for timetrialing and solo riding but not for group riding. Please remove for group rides. Imagine if a bull with horns was riding in the middle of group and everyone came to a sudden halt. It can and will cause serious injuries.
3. Insurance is highly recommended. This can be obtained from your local bike shop, British Cycling through enhanced membership or online from specialist insurance brokers. Cost will vary on bike value, activity and more than likely age. Worth also including Third Party Liability Cover too so you are covered for damage to third parties.
4. Spare kit! Always carry a spare inner tube, tyre levers, pump or CO2 cannister to ensure you are not marooned anywhere because of a silly thing like a puncture.
5. Learn how to fix a puncture on your own. Essential if you are riding solo and even though everyone will help each other out within the group, you should still be able to fix your own punctures.

6. Always, always pick up your litter including discarded inner tubes and gel wrappers.

Contrary to popular belief, there are no wombles to pick up this stuff!

Seriously, it gives cyclists a bad reputation if rubbish is discarded by you. Pick it up and take it home.

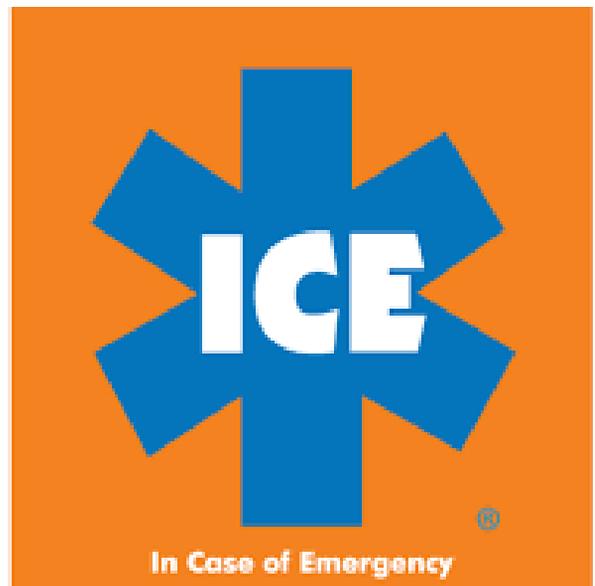


7. Headphones are not to be worn whilst riding with the group.
8. A mobile phone and money are also handy if you have a mechanical or if you fancy a cuppa!
9. Lights: For when there is poor visibility, dusky evenings and night time riding, lights are essential for your own and other road users safety.

In case of an emergency

1. In case the unthinkable happens and you have an accident, it is highly recommended that you carry identification on you, an emergency contact number and details of any specific medical conditions which a first aider / paramedic needs to be aware of before assisting you.
2. There are a number of methods which can be used:
 - Relevant information kept on a credit card sized card which can be kept in your wallet and / or saddle bag.
 - Using the ICE function on your smartphone
 - On a personalised medical identification tag that can be worn on the helmet, shoe or wrist.
3. No single method should be preferred but a combination of all methods is highly recommended so as to complement each other to ease the finding of such information when required.
4. Basic information to be included:
 - Person's name
 - Date of birth
 - GP details
 - Next of kin details

If necessary, this will enable the destination hospital to access the person's medical records before they arrive at hospital so appropriate treatment can commence without delay.



Bike Handling

If you are new to bike riding, you are more than likely to be nervous. This nervousness is likely to increase when riding in a group for the first time until you become more experienced.

If you are relaxed on your bike in terms of posture and gripping the handlebars, its more likely to stay upright and ride through any issues . If you set off tense, it will affect how your bike handles. Your arms are likely to be locked in place or stiff and this will affect how your handlebars and front wheel will react to bumps, holes and changing road surfaces which may cause you problems staying on your bike.

If your arms are locked out / stiff and you hit a bump, the bike is more likely to move around unexpectedly because it has no way of absorbing that shock. However if you are relaxed, the bike is more likely to be compliant and ride through any problems with no issues.

Cornering

To safely navigate a corner, don't look down at your front wheel but look ahead and through the corner. Your bike will go where you are looking so make sure you are looking at the road ahead even if you are in the middle of the group.



The other big no no is grabbing your front brake whilst cornering. This is most likely to end up with you crashing because the front wheel will tend to wash out. If you have to brake, try to straighten your bike first and then apply your brakes gently. Once in control again, you can apply the brakes progressively harder.

With cycling, its good practice to develop your peripheral vision as this will make you more aware of any up and coming hazards and enable you to take the necessary action to avoid an accident.



Life Saver

The “lifesaver” or ”Observation” is drilled into you when learning to ride a motorbike but this technique is equally applicable when riding your push bike.

Essentially it is about looking over your shoulder before committing to a change in direction to ensure its safe to do so. Very relevant when over taking slower road users or parked cars or even turning right.

Below are most likely scenarios when you would use lifesavers:

- Moving or turning to the right - including moving round parked vehicles, turning into a side road or changing lane.
- Moving or turning to the left - including turning into a side road, moving back to the left having passed a large stationary vehicle, pulling into the side of the road or changing lanes.
- Slowing down - again entering a lower speed limit, approaching a junction/hazard/roundabout or slowing to stop.
- Where there is the potential to slow down - approaching green traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, unexpected hazards (horses) or in the event you feel you may have to stop suddenly (children playing by the side of the road).

In essence, an observation should afford you the opportunity to change your mind. In other words, they should be done early enough that you can do something different, but late enough that events are not going to change too much.

Generally, you would hope to see nothing when you do an observation, and they merely act as an insurance against the day that there is something to see. They should be done so that they do not upset the balance of the bike or make you swerve.

The direction you turn your head should be based on where you think that the most likelihood of danger is coming from. So, for example if you are turning right the final “lifesaver” will be over your right shoulder. However, say if you are at a set of lights or in the middle lane at a roundabout then you may feel it necessary to look over both shoulders.

The key here is: Is it Safe? You need to be flexible in your approach and clear in your head about the purpose of the observation/lifesaver – which is essentially you are checking that your next action will be safe and if not that you have time to change your mind and do something different.



Group Riding: Techniques

Riding as part of a group is more sociable and can save you energy during a long event.

The performance advantage to riding in a group is that several people can share the responsibility of setting a manageable pace as well as sheltering their riding mates from the wind - a technique known as 'drafting.'

The most efficient formation for a large group is to ride side-by-side in pairs, with riders gradually rotating and sharing their turn on the front. How long your turn is depends a lot on weather conditions and how strong you feel, but 1 - 5 minutes is a good starting point.

Riding in close proximity to other riders does carry hazards though, so be sure to give enough space to manoeuvre, don't overlap the wheel in front and be sure to keep good communication with your riding companions

Also, you need to be mindful of the conditions around you such as poor weather, black ice, narrowing roads, blind corners etc. You have to adjust your riding style and speed accordingly.

Keep your head up, be observant, ride within your capability and you are certain to enjoy many miles of safe cycling! 😊



Protocol for passing horses

Horses often share the same roads as us and we will not necessarily be aware of their presence until we meet them, often round a corner.

However, it is important that when someone in a group sees horses ahead that the following rules are observed: -

1. If you see a horse up the road, shout 'horses ahead, slow down' and use the slow downhand signal (as per the highway code)
2. Riders should avoid any screeching of brakes as this may cause the horse ahead to take fright,
3. Then shout up the road to the horse rider 'cyclists at the rear' and make sure that the rider turns round and acknowledges your presence,
4. Cyclists should then observe the reaction of the horse and rider in keeping the animal under control – if the horse looks erratic or confused in its movements then do not pass until it is brought under firm control by the rider. The rider may pull the animal off the road to assist.
5. Once you are sure that the animal is settled then each rider should file past in single file slowly, patiently and quietly without unnecessary gear clattering/changing. Remember to give the horse a wide berth as you pass and when no oncoming traffic is visible.
6. All riders should thank the rider for their assistance too – it helps us as cyclists to be courteous.
7. In addition, it is also advisable for Essex Roads riders to ride in smaller spread out groups rather than en-mass, as a large approaching group is likely to be more worrisome to a horse than a smaller approaching number of riders.



Group Riding: Basic dos and don'ts



Obey the highway code, this is the basis that all road users must follow including cyclists.



Group etiquette: It's about the team, not the individual. Work together and ride with consideration for others



Eyes and ears! The best tools you have to spot up and coming hazards. Use them to protect yourself and the group. Don't be shy, use hand and voice signals accordingly.



Following wheels: Do not overlap the wheel of the person in front of you otherwise you are likely to come off and bring everyone else down.



Communication: Use your voice and hands accordingly. No room for shyness when riding in a group. Your fellow riders are reliant on you to pass messages / warnings up & down the group.



Try to think about where other riders might be and how your actions may affect them. Your action near the front can be magnified many times by the time it reaches the back and can result in a more dangerous situation than is apparent. i.e. when approaching a junction



Group Riding: Basic dos and don'ts



Horse riders: When passing horses on the road, pass wide and slow particularly if approaching from behind. Say “hello” or make the rider aware you are there before overtaking.



Do not undertake or move up the inside of another rider without first making that rider aware of your intentions.



Don't make sudden movements in the group, like braking or swerving or suddenly slowing up on a steep part of a hill for example, especially in a large group. Keep your riding smooth and avoid surges



When pulling up at a road junction as a group, do not scatter across the road. Don't pass or crowd around vehicles that are waiting at the junction either as this will confuse and annoy drivers. If the group splits up whilst crossing, wait in a safe area to regroup



If riding in a group of more than 6-8 riders and cars have difficulty passing you, consider splitting the group so it is easier to pass. The gap should be big, at least a minimum of ten car lengths so there is a definitive clear gap for cars to pass without danger to cyclists

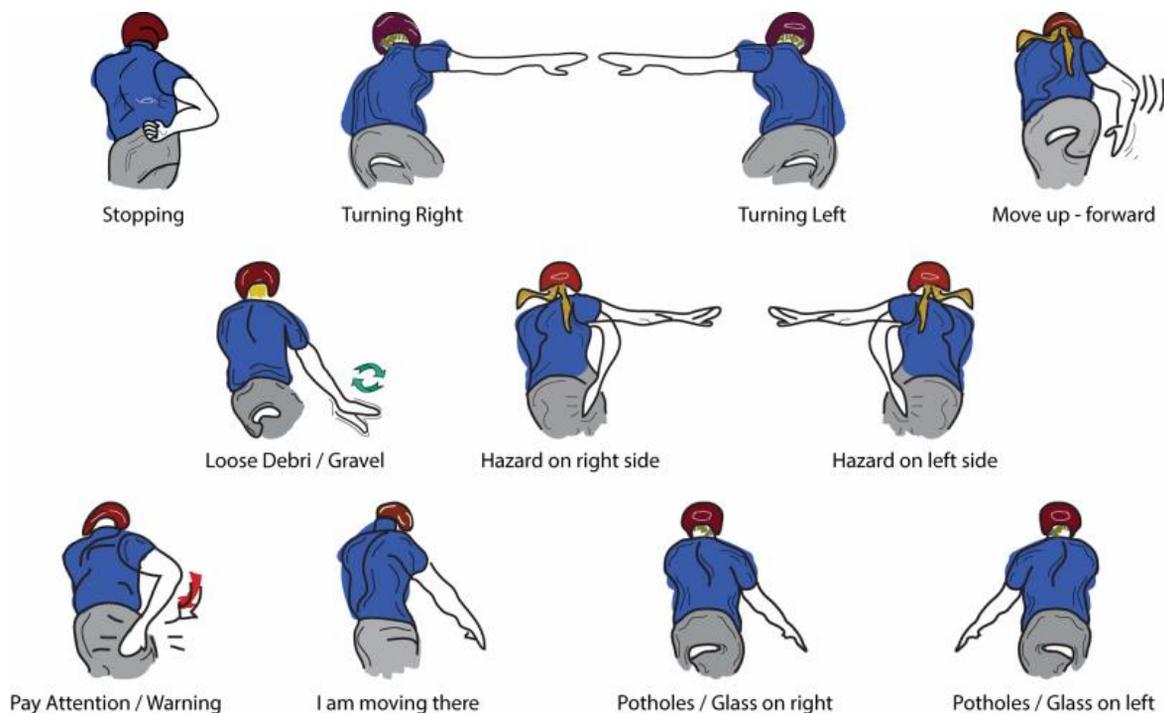


Other road users: Be considerate and treat other road users as you would like to be treated

Group Riding: Communication

Communication when riding in a group is vital. Communication can be a combination of voice and hand signals.

Even though variations may exist in the various signals and people will have their own preferences to whether they use voice or hand or a combination of both, it is important that the communication is passed up and down the group to for everyone's safety.



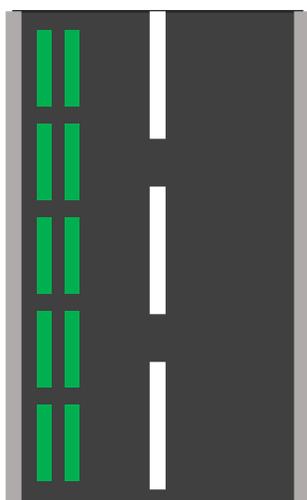
Warning / Hazard	Verbal Signal
Vehicle approaching group from front	"Car Front" or "Car Up"
Vehicle approaching group from rear	"Car Back"
Parked vehicles on nearside of road or other obstruction such as walkers	"Walkers", "Car Left" or "Car Right"
Hole	"Hole"
Gravel	"Gravel"
Slowing	"Slowing"
Stopping	"Stopping"
Puncture	"Puncture" or "Mechanical"
Horse	"Horse"
Approaching junctions	"Clear left" or "Clear Right"

Group Riding: Positioning

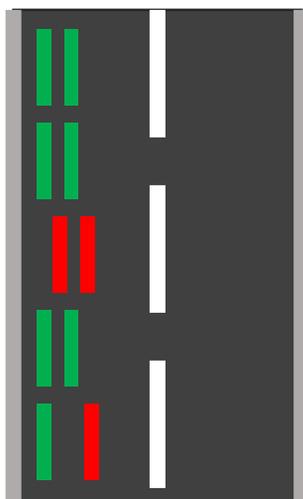
When riding in a group, consideration needs to be given to others within the group and other road users. There has been a lot of debate about whether its safer to ride side by side or in single file.

Ultimately its down to width of the road and how easy it is for other road users to overtake the group safely. If it's a main road with great visibility, then riding side by side in a group should be fine. If it's a narrow road such as a country lane then you should ride in single file.

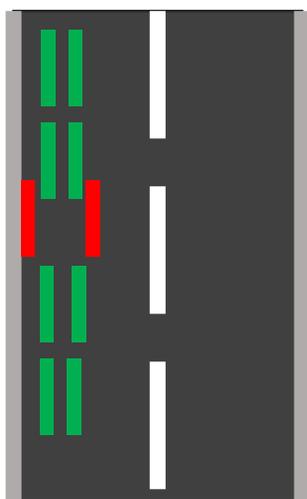
Whether riding side by side or single line and the group is large, you should consider splitting the group so its easier for other road users to overtake you safely.



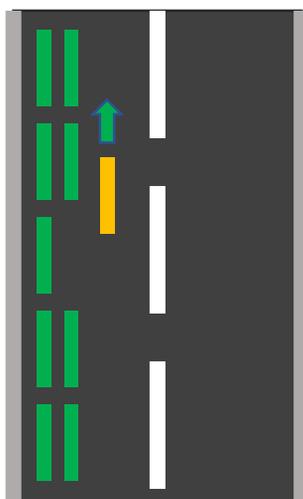
The perfect scenario!
Combined with smooth changes. Ride is efficient, fast and less stressful



Riding out of line gives the appearance that the group is riding more than two abreast which will aggravate other road users

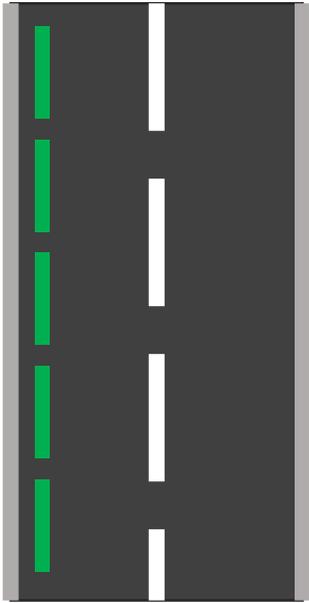


This is very dangerous on many levels. Overlapping wheels for starters which can bring the group down and also appearing to be four abreast to other road users

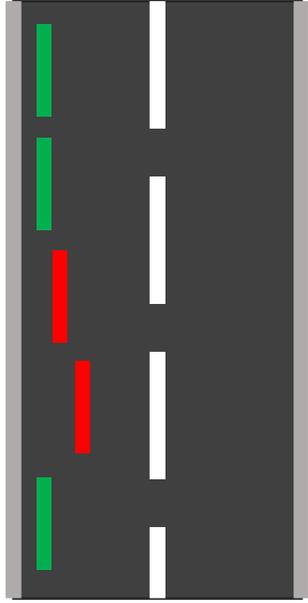


If you are going to overtake and move to the front, ALWAYS look over your RHS shoulder to check for other riders & road users and you can also see clearly ahead. Warn riders in front of you that you are coming through

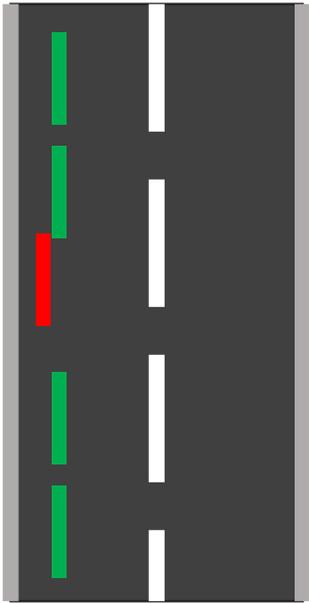
Group Riding: Single line Positioning



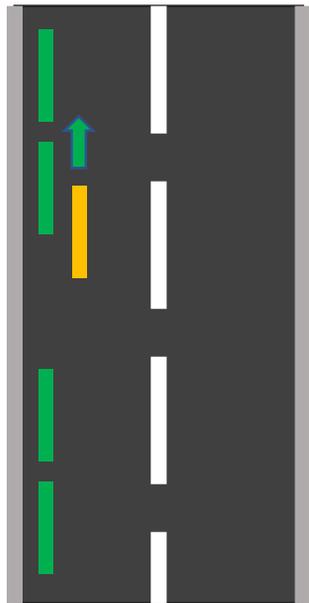
The perfect scenario!
Combined with smooth changes.
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Riding out of line gives the appearance that the group is riding more than two abreast which will aggravate other road users



This is very dangerous on many levels. Overlapping wheels is more than likely to bring you down as well as other riders. Learn to control your pace by keeping a sensible gap.



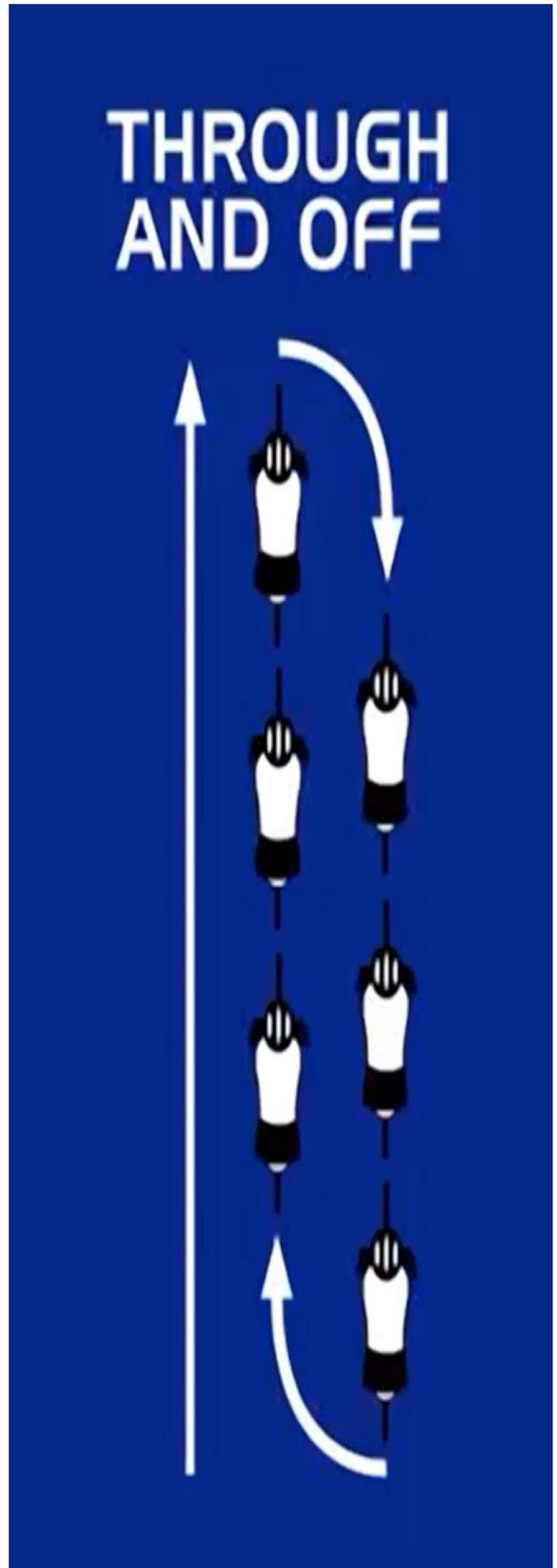
If you are going to overtake and move to the front, ALWAYS look over your RHS shoulder to check for other riders & road users and you can also see clearly ahead. Warn riders in front of you that are coming through

How to ride in a chain gang

The first step toward riding in a group is learning to draft another rider. Drafting can cut your effort by a third sometimes more depending on how close you follow the rider ahead of you and how large that rider is. The bigger the rider, the better the draft. The best way to learn how to draft is to ride in a chain gang and they come in three flavours.

The simplest form of group riding to learn is the single chain gang. Single chaingangs are usually made up of a small group of riders, they can be hard to keep organized with more than 10 or 12 riders. Your turn at the front is like playing locomotive to a train and it is called taking a pull. This isn't literal, of course, but your effort is referred to as your pull.

After pulling at the front for a period of time (some groups might choose 30 seconds, a minute, or more depending on speed, fitness, or other factors such as traffic), the rider will pull off, meaning the rider moves to the right and drops to the back of the group. In this version, riders line up single-file and the rider at the front pulls the group for a period of time (again, the length of time may be dictated by speed, fitness, or road conditions) and then rotates off and drops back. For the safety of the group, it is generally best to pull off to the right after checking the traffic behind the group.



How to ride in a chain gang

The pace should remain consistent when you get to the front. If the pace is high higher than you are accustomed to it is preferable to take a shorter pull at the higher pace than a longer pull at a slower pace. Do not slow until you have pulled off, that is, until you have moved far enough to the left or right that the rider just behind you may pass unimpeded. When you drop back, begin to accelerate when you are even with the last rider so that you move smoothly into that riders draft. If you wait to accelerate until that rider is ahead of you, you are likely to have trouble getting back into his draft.

Riding in a chain gang is easier to learn if the other riders are experienced. Initially, the most difficult skill to learn is how to keep a constant pace that matches the speed of the rider in front of you. Many riders try to learn with other inexperienced riders; its nearly impossible to learn how to maintain a consistent pace if the rider you are following doesn't know how to do it either.

A single chain gang is an easier circumstance to learn in because if you find yourself gaining on the rider in front of you, you can move either to the left or right of the rider.



Avoiding crashes

- 1. Overlapping Wheels.** When riding in a bunch, the golden rule is DO NOT OVERLAP WHEELS. What is meant by “overlapping wheels” is that you shouldn’t ride behind someone in a position where your front wheel is ahead of his rear wheel. You are responsible for your front wheel, not the person ahead.
- 2. The second crash.** When riding in a bunch and you hear that awful sound of carbon and metal cracking and sliding along the pavement behind you, there’s often a second crash quickly after. This is caused by the riders looking behind them to see what happened. When you hear a crash behind you, don’t panic and continue as you were.
- 3. Braking while cornering.** Most crashes happen on corners. The most common thing that happens is the front wheel washes out and before you know it you’re sliding along the pavement. The biggest thing to remember is not to suddenly grab your brakes while in the middle of a corner. When braking, the weight of the bike and rider moves forward and the front tyre makes the transition from unloaded to loaded. Making this change too quickly won’t allow the front tyre cope with the sudden requirement for additional traction.

All of your braking should be done before you enter the corner while you are upright (not leaning). If you arrive at corner and suddenly recognise that you are going too fast, straighten the bike and feather the brakes (more rear than front) and get into it again.
- 4. Changing your line in the middle of a corner.** This comes back to entering a corner at the correct speed. When you decrease the radius of your turn, you’ll increase the amount of force pushing you to the outside of the corner. This is when your front tyre can potentially wash out.
- 5. Too much tyre pressure.** This is one of the biggest mistakes made by new cyclists. There’s a misconception that more tyre pressure is better and makes you faster. It’s astonishing how many people pump up their clinchers to 140psi, the road gets a little bit wet, and then someone comes-off though a corner
- 6. Riding differently on wet roads.** The same rules apply on wet roads as they do on dry roads, however you need to be extra careful and let down your tyre pressure. Many people will change their technique on wet roads. The only difference between wet roads and dry roads is that flaws in technique will be amplified and potentially dangerous. There are many things you have no control of out on the road, but recognising which situations to stay away from and how to handle your bike properly are the first steps to staying upright.



Highway Code

- [Rules for cyclists 59-to-82](#)

Additional reading on riding techniques:

- [How to ride in a group | Ride Smart British Cycling](#)
- [Cycling Weekly: Guide to group riding](#)
- <http://www.bicycling.com/training/health-injuries/make-save>
- <https://cyclingtips.com/2011/03/crash-prevention/>
- <https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/knowledge/skills/article/izn20130802-What-to-expect-on-a-club-run-0>
- http://www.lostrivercycling.org/chain_gang.html
- http://www.bicycling.com/training/fitness/9-chain_gang-rules
- <http://pelotonmagazine.com/wisdom/group-riding-skills/>
- http://www.active.com/cycling/articles/riding-in-a-chain_gang-is-a-basic-cycling-skill

Bike Maintenance Tutorials courtesy of Global Cycling Network

- [Tyre pressures explained](#)
- [6 Checks to do before you ride](#)
- [How to fix a flat tyre](#)
- [More bike maintenance tips here!](#)



Acknowledgements

In writing this guide for our members, we researched the internet far and wide for practical advice and tips on how to become a safer, more confident rider which we hope people will find useful.

We also like to extend our thanks to the massive contribution made by our own members and riders in no particular order:

- Ashton Parker
- Gary Conn
- Tony Dixon
- Dave Brown
- Sunday Club Ride Captains Safety Group
- ERCC committee

Internet Resources include:

- [Highway Code](#)
- [British Cycling](#)
- [Cycling Weekly](#)
- [GCN](#)
- [LightningPass.com](#)
- [The Smart Cyclist](#)
- <http://www.bicycling.com/>
- <https://cyclingtips.com/>
- <http://www.lostrivercycling.org/>
- <http://pelotonmagazine.com>
- <http://www.active.com/>

In memory of Brian Howard RIP

