

Group Ride Etiquette

Pick The Right Group Ride

Group-ride levels and objectives vary. Determining the group's goal and pace will ensure that you join a ride that's right for you. Is the ride social or sadistic? Is it considered a training **ride** or a training **race**? How far will the group go? What route will it follow? What are the rendezvous points? Are there any rest stops? Will quicker riders wait for those who've been dropped? Answer these questions before the ride so you don't jump into a blistering hammerfest when all you wanted was a social "coffee" ride and vice versa. If you're not sure what a ride offers, ask.

Don't Be Late

Many riders have a limited amount of time to ride. So group rides typically start within minutes of the official starting time. If you're late, you'll miss out. Plus, if you hold the group up, you'll make a bad first impression. And, don't forget to allow for donning your equipment, pumping up your tires and reassembling your bike if you drive to the start. It's a good idea to arrive at least ten minutes early.

Be Prepared

Be prepared for the challenges of the ride. Learn the route ahead of time to ensure you don't get lost. Also, if you know the route, it's easier to shortcut the ride if you get into trouble.

Always bring:

1. Spare tube(s)
2. Air pump and/or CO2 cartridges
3. Plenty of water and/or Sports Drink (generally rule of thumb - 1 bottle per hour)
4. Snacks for rides longer than (2) hours
5. Bringing a cell phone and cash is a good idea, too.

Keep in mind that not all rides stop for flat tires, so you may be riding in alone if you puncture.

Ride Carefully And Considerately

Bikes are considered vehicles, just like cars, and are required to obey the same traffic laws. And, getting a traffic ticket or placing your fellow riders in danger is certain to make a bad impression. Make sure that any actions you take are possible for those behind you. Avoid darting in front of cars while making a left or crossing an intersection when only 2 or 3 riders can successfully get across. It's a natural tendency to follow the rider ahead of you and having to make a split-second decision whether to cross or not places the cyclists behind you in jeopardy.

Communicate

Communication is the key to safe group rides. Because roads are full of traffic and hazards, and because visibility is limited when riding in a group, it's important to warn others about hazards and to remain alert at all times to the warnings shouted and pointed out.

Warnings you're likely to hear include:

Car back: there's a car approaching the group from the rear

Car up: car approaching from the front

Car right (or left): a car's approaching on a cross street

Stopping: the group is stopping for a stop sign or light

Walker or Runner up: there's a pedestrian on the road ahead

Gravel, Sand, Glass or Hole: there's a road hazard ahead

Tracks: Approaching a Railroad crossing

Ride Smart To Stay Safe

Group-ride dynamics are interesting and ever-changing. As the pace and terrain changes, the pack stretches and compresses. The latter can cause some very tight quarters and even an occasional crash. In order to ride safely it's important to ride smoothly and avoid hard braking as much as possible. In fact, even light braking or swerving by someone in front can have a ripple effect and cause problems at the rear of the pack. Inexperienced riders who panic and touch a wheel may crash. Never fear! You can avoid problems by practicing these simple rules:

1. **Stay alert at all times.** Never assume that it's safe. Keep "reading" the dynamics of the group and always leave yourself an out by keeping on opening to one side that you can escape through if there's a crash or obstacle you have to avoid.
2. **Do Not Do Anything Sudden.** This is key to good Group and Pace-line riding. Sudden movement causes erratic behavior to ripple through the group and may lead to a serious accident. Remember you are not only responsible for your safety, but as part of a larger group, your behavior or actions affect the safety of others.
3. **Hold your line.** This means swerving as little as possible. If you need to move left or right, do so gradually after checking the area for other riders and pointing out your move to make your fellow riders aware of your intentions. If you notice that someone is swerving, he's probably tired or inexperienced. Stay away from him!
4. **Maintain the Pace.** "Yo-Yoing" is an affect that is caused by riders not paying attention to the pace and can lead to serious problems. When rotating through on a pace-line and taking the lead, make sure to maintain the group's pace. Too fast, and gaps are created. Too slow, and wheels overlap, tires touch, and down goes not one, but several riders! Unless you're participating in a race training group ride, the goal is a consistent pace that everyone is capable (not necessarily comfortable) of riding.
5. **Don't overlap wheels.** Overlapping is putting your front wheel next to someone's rear wheel. This is asking for trouble, because if they move, they'll bump your front wheel knocking you down. Try to always be behind the bike(s) in front unless you're passing.

6. **Crossing Railroad Tracks.** Cross perpendicular or at 90 degrees to the RR Tracks with your weight more towards the rear tire. Also, increase the space between you and the rider in front of you to allow more room in case of problems.
7. **Don't look back!** Looking back causes even skilled riders to swerve, which can cause a crash. If you must look back, soft peddle momentarily to provide a little extra space between you and rider in front, and move slightly to one side or the other of the pace-line. Glance quickly and try to use your peripheral vision.
8. **Focus on the rider(s) ahead.** Don't make the common mistake of focusing on the back wheel in front of you. Look up at the shoulders of the riders ahead and occasionally look at the road ahead and the riders up front so you can see what's going on and be prepared for sudden changes.
9. **Standing-up.** Everyone's bottom eventually gets tired and sore, so naturally you need to stand-up while peddling to allow circulation to return to your bottom side. When this moment arrives, shift to your largest chain-ring and smallest (hardest) rear wheel gear, soft peddle just long enough to increase the gap to the bike in front of you slightly, and then stand-up. Peddling while standing in your hardest gears allows you to be more stable and not bouncing and swerving all around.
10. **Don't brake unless absolutely necessary.** If you must brake, do so lightly to scrub off a little speed. You can also slow down by sitting upright and catching more wind in your chest.
11. **Warn others of hazards.** Keep on the lookout for things that could cause problems and shout out a warning or point out the hazard.
12. **Pass carefully.** Sometimes you'll see the riders ahead starting to accelerate and you'll want to jump up to them. Be careful! Make sure you're not going to get cut off or cut someone else off. Usually, a moment's hesitation is all it takes to make the move safely.
13. **If you get tired, move to the rear.** Fatigue causes dangerous riding, so it's safer to go to the back of the group than to be in the middle of the action. Don't just swerve and slow, though! Tell those around you that you're dropping back so it's a safe move.
14. **Relax!** Use a relaxed grip on the handlebars, keep your shoulders down (not up against your neck) and bring your elbows down and in so that they're slightly bent. These steps will help you stay relaxed, which allows quicker reaction time and prevents tension in the neck and shoulders that can lead to fatigue and sloppy riding.

Join The Fun!

Group rides can be immensely rewarding. You get a great workout, cover more distance than you would alone and get to hang out with friends. You might even stop for coffee and conversation. So what are you waiting for? Get out there and join the gang!