

Basic Tips for Riding in a Group

Cycling with a group has a lot of advantages over riding alone. Not the least of which is can be much more fun. From a safety standpoint, a group is more visible to motorists than a solo rider. The social interaction within the group makes the miles fly by. There is a sense of security in knowing that if you have a problem, there are other riders who will help you out. And the variety of rides created by club members provides opportunities to explore new places. Riding in a group also carries some responsibilities. You need to stay alert, ride predictably, and follow a few basic guidelines. The skills involved are not difficult to learn.

1. Communicate

Let others know your intentions. The biggest problems in group riding are when riders do not communicate with each other. Don't be shy.

If you are slowing, stopping, or turning, signal and/or call it out (signaling is preferred as it's often difficult to hear riders ahead of you). Watch for potholes, storm drains, sand, and other hazards and point them out (NOTE: point out pot holes and other road debris, but do NOT swerve around it if you're in the middle of the group...hold your line)

However, don't expect everything to be pointed out for you—it's often difficult for riders (especially beginners) to take their hands off their handlebars to point out hazards while trying to either ride over the hazard or steer around it. It's also often difficult to see hazards if you're not riding at the front of the group.

If you hear a car approaching from behind, Let the rest of the group know. Shout, "Car back!" If there is a car passing, make every attempt to ride single file.

2. Share the road

Idaho law allows cyclists to ride two abreast on a roadway only if they are not impeding the "normal and reasonable movement of traffic. Cyclists are required to stay to the right. Except in a bicycle lane it is not legal to ride more than two abreast.

Large groups in particular should avoid spreading out across the road. Don't let the "pack mentality" take over. When stopped at a red light, avoid blocking turn lanes.

Exceptions:

1. On narrow sections of road where there is insufficient space for cars to pass safely, cyclists should "take the lane" after making sure it's safe to do so.
2. When passing parked cars, stay at least three feet away to avoid getting "doored."

Control yourself--do not yell rude words or make rude gestures towards cars. They are bigger than you. You will lose the fight. Be nice to fellow road users even if

they aren't. And if people in cars make rude gestures towards you or honk (which is not uncommon of course), we find it is best just to smile and wave.

Do not cross the yellow line. Cars are bigger than you, and you will get squashed. When you cross the yellow line, you cause the accident, not the car. This is also very important in a road race—you will get disqualified for crossing the line yellow line, but more importantly, you can avoid getting hit by a car if you don't cross that line! In addition, many of the "country" roads we ride on aren't painted with yellow lines...be sure to stay as far right as possible, especially since many of these roads have blind hills and corners.

3. Passing another rider

Pass on the left. Check for overtaking traffic, and then call out, "On your left" as you approach the other rider to let him know you're there. Try to pass on a flat, straight section of road. Passing on curves or downhill runs can be dangerous. **When riding in a group, try to match the pace of the other riders and avoid frequent passing.**

4. Turning

When making a right or left turn, **maintain your position within the group.** Don't swerve or pass during the turn. Especially avoid passing on the inside of a right turn. Use hand signals when approaching a turn. When preparing for a left turn, check for overtaking traffic, signal your intent, and move to the left. Be sure the entire group can move to the left at once...if there's approaching traffic, wait until it's safe for the whole group to move over.

5. Be alert

Socializing with the other riders is part of the fun of group riding. But stay tuned in to what's going on around you.

Do not take both hands off of the bars when riding in the pack. Drift to the back to take your jacket off, eat, whatever. If you run over something and lose control of your bike, you will probably go down.

If the group needs to pull over (to look at a map or wait for someone fixing a flat, etc.), be sure to get off the road as far as possible so you're not blocking traffic or turn-lanes (think of it from a driver's perspective).

6. Be cool

If something unexpected happens (like if someone drops a water bottle), **don't slam on your brakes.** That could create a pileup. Keep riding smoothly. The group will usually do a controlled stop a short distance up the road.

7. Hold Your line.

Do not wander into someone else's "ride space." Do not ride all over the road. If you are going to change position, look around before "darting" to your new position. Be predictable! (i.e. don't be a squirrely!).

8. Don't overlap wheels

Never let your front wheel overlap the rear wheel of another rider. If that rider swerves and the wheels touch, you (the rider in back) will almost certainly go down.

Paceline riding is common on some fast-paced rides. If you enjoy that type of riding, and are willing to accept the inherent risk, it is essential that you learn to ride properly in a paceline. This is an advanced skill and is best learned in a small group and at moderate speeds. Always make sure the person you're drafting knows you're there. It is extremely important to communicate when riding in a paceline since the following riders don't have a clear view of the road ahead. Experienced cyclists tend to be wary of sharing a paceline with someone they haven't ridden with before. You will have to earn their confidence by demonstrating that you can ride safely.

9. Aero Bars

"Aero" handlebars that clip onto standard drop-style road bars are popular for solo riding and time trials. However, they are not suitable for group rides for many reasons:

1. They are less stable than ordinary bars
2. The hand position does not permit quick access to the brakes if necessary, and
3. The ability to maneuver quickly is impaired with these bars. For those reasons, they are banned in racing (except time trials), and should not be used on club rides.

10. Follow the law

On group rides, every effort should be made to obey all traffic signs and stoplights. Idaho law makes the rules of the road for cyclists and motorists different. A shorthand way to look at it is that for Idaho cyclists stop signs are yield signs and stop lights are stop signs. The law is a little more complex than that but that is the rule of thumb. **Most motorists do not know the rule are different and many dislike that fact. SO THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE IS--DON'T ASSUME ITS SAFE MAKE SURE ITS SAFE.**

If a rider gets "stuck" behind other riders at a stop sign, stoplight, or busy road crossing, at least one other team member should wait for them. But generally speaking, everyone in the group should be able to cross at once—if it looks like traffic is too close, it's better to wait than to split the group up.

11. Be on time for group rides, which means showing up before the departure time, and bring your own tools (e.g. wrenches) and supplies for fixing a flat tire (e.g. frame pump, tire levers, & extra tube)!