

GROUP RIDING TIPS

- Group riding is all about trust and responsibility.
- Each member of the group is individually responsible for the safety of the whole group.
- Obey the rules of the road and follow the Highway Code

Before we begin, please don't think these guidelines only apply to 'serious' cyclists and 'racers'. Good roadcraft can be practised by riders of all fitness levels and will enhance any group ride.

Roadcraft: Riding side-by-side

Positioning and spacing

The kerbside rider shouldn't be riding in the gutter. The surface is often bad and because it's not swept by passing traffic, it's full of rubbish to give you punctures. Somewhere around ½ to 1 m out is fine, leaving you room if you need to avoid rocks, potholes etc. The wear mark in the tarmac left by traffic can be a good place.

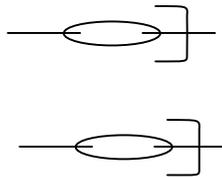
Your partner (I will always refer to the cyclists making up this side-by-side pair as partners; it helps to emphasise the co-operation that group riding needs.) should leave about one handlebar's width between you. This might feel uncomfortably close at first but it is quite safe. Both riders have plenty of room to wobble and you won't be taking up the whole road. There certainly shouldn't be enough space for a third rider to fit easily into the gap.

Look ahead. If there's a patch of broken road or other hazard ahead, move to the side a little, if you can, to give the other rider more room to avoid it.

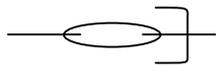
Half-Wheeling

Half-wheeling is riding with your bars significantly ahead of your partner's, perhaps in an attempt to encourage them to speed up a bit. Don't do it. It's bad form. Persistent intentional half-wheeling is aggressive and antisocial. It is the responsibility of the leading rider to slow down, not the other rider to speed up. Please note that you are expected to make an effort to keep up with the speed of the group. This applies more on training rides than on social ones.

GOOD:



BAD:



OR



Try to keep this good form everywhere, up hills and round corners alike.

Roadcraft: Group Riding

If you can ride tidily in a pair, you're half-way to riding tidily in a group.

General Points

Hold the 'bars. Keep your hands holding on to the handlebars. If you just rest your hands on the hoods or tops they might slip off if you hit a pothole.

At speed, it's better to ride on the hoods or drops to cover your brakes. Tops are fine when climbing. The exception to this is when you're on the front as you are less likely to need to brake quickly.

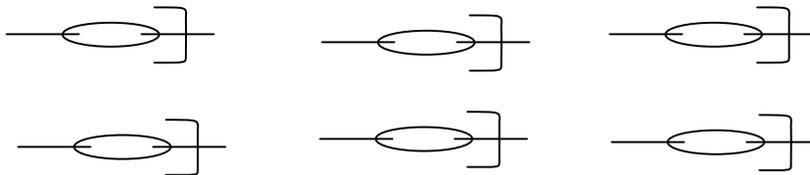
Tri-bars have no place in a group ride as they reduce control.

Be smooth and predictable. Don't make sudden moves: braking, accelerating or from side to side.

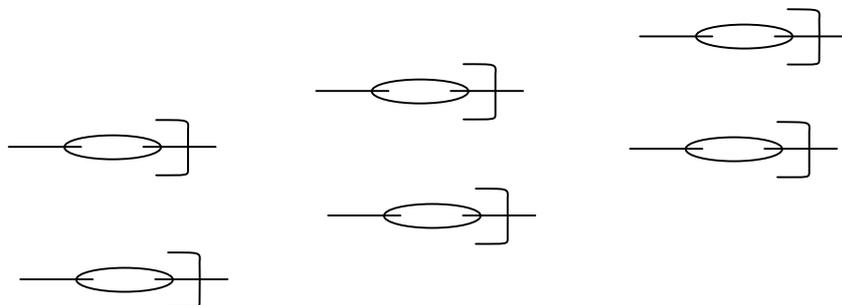
Follow the Wheels

You should ride directly behind the cyclist in front, more-or-less, only a few cm to either side. You do not need to see the road ahead, the leading rider is doing that for you. If you, as the inside rider, sit out in the road, between the pair in front, you are pushing your partner out into the traffic and putting them in danger. All it takes is a couple of riders to stop following wheels and the group takes on that typical 'all over the road' appearance. This is not classy.

GOOD:



BAD:

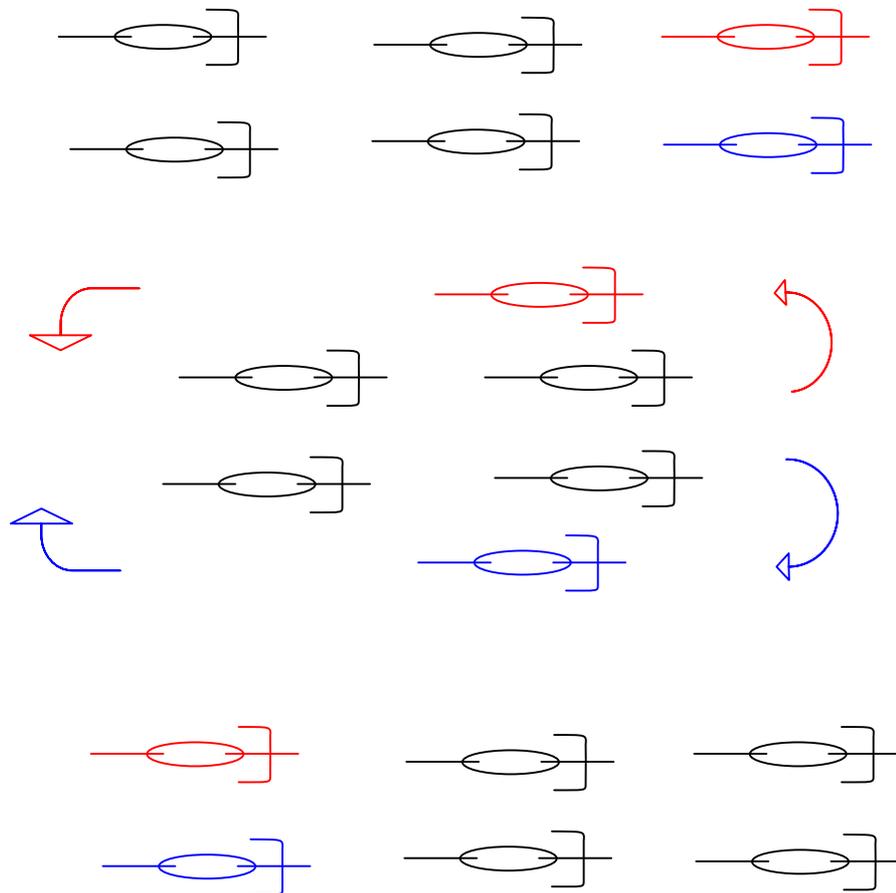


How closely should you follow a wheel? The answer depends on your experience and how much you trust the wheel in front. One bike length is a good place to start, reducing as you get more confident. It is easier to maintain this spacing if everyone rides smoothly. Make accelerations gentle and brake as little and as lightly as possible. Often you can slow down enough by not pedalling and sitting up to increase wind resistance.

Taking Your Turn

By riding in a group you benefit from the shelter of your companions but sometimes it's your turn to provide that shelter. When you find yourself on the front, just keep riding. Don't speed up. You are now the eyes of the group so be alert for hazards such as parked cars, damaged road surfaces and oncoming traffic. Move smoothly around hazards and if the riders behind follow your wheel, they'll avoid them too.

When you've done your bit, first agree with your partner when you will finish then simply pull off slowly and smoothly to your side and slow down a little. The riders behind just keep going at the same pace and you drift backwards, rejoining at the rear of the group. The length of your turn depends on your fitness. It's bad form to get almost to the front of the group and then not do a turn at all, so if you are struggling with the speed of the group, tell your partner that you'll just do a short turn, even a few seconds, then peel off together. Equally, if you're one of the stronger riders, don't sit on the front all day. Do a couple of minutes, say, then let someone else have a go.



Easy.

If you really don't want to take a turn, perhaps because you're ill, bonked or just hanging on for dear life anyway, sit near the back of the group and let riders who have peeled off the front rejoin ahead of you.

Gaps

Group rides don't have gaps in them. If one does open up, accelerate slowly to close it. Don't speed up suddenly as if you have to race across. You certainly shouldn't have to brake to match the group's speed once you have closed the gap.

Hazards and Hand Signals

Leading riders have a duty to protect following riders from approaching hazards. Broken road surfaces should be dealt with by steering to avoid them, well in advance. At the same time, indicate with a wave of the hand or a downward point which side the hazard is on. Yelling 'hole' doesn't help very much unless it is impossible to avoid, e.g., a damaged surface that extends across the carriageway. You must never swerve around an obstacle at the last minute as this gives following riders no chance.

If you need to move the whole group to the side, to avoid a parked car for example, then point behind your back towards the direction you need to move. Left hand to point to the right, right hand to point to the left.

To keep the noise and waving to a minimum and so as not to confuse people, only point out obstacles that are worth pointing out. Drain covers, patches and small cracks aren't worth the effort as they aren't dangerous. Save your effort for potholes, sunken drain covers and so on; anything that could damage a bike or cyclist behind you.

Last Word

These rules are purely and simply to make group rides safe. If you are a beginner, they may not be familiar to you but if you concentrate, they will soon become second nature. They are easy to learn because they are so obviously helpful to making group rides safer and less stressful. You will also be able to fit straight in to any group ride, anywhere.

Once you've mastered the basic group riding etiquette as described here, it will be straightforward to develop more advanced skills like chain ganging, pacelines, echelons and so on. More importantly, you'll look good when you're doing it!