

Windmilers Group Cycling Etiquette and Rules

Group rides and objectives vary. Finding out the group's pace, distance, and goals will ensure that you join a ride that's right for you. Is the ride social or a hammerfest? Is it considered a social ride, training ride, or a blood letting? How far will the group go? What route will the ride follow? Will the ride re-group at certain spots to let stragglers get back on? Are there any rest stops or fluid stops? Answer these questions before the ride so you don't get yourself in over your head. If you are not sure what type of group ride you are getting yourself into, just ask.

Don't Be Late

Many riders have busy schedules and want to get as much riding in as they can. So group rides typically start within minutes of the official starting time. If you're late, you'll miss the ride. Plus if you hold the group up there will be some impatient people and you'll make a bad first impression. If you're driving to the start of the ride then it is a good idea to arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes before the start of the ride so you can get your helmet and cycling shoes. Plus you may need to get your bike reassembled and pump up your tyres.

Communicate

Communication is key to a safe group rides. Road are full of traffic, rocks, signs, pot holes, parked cars, animals, pedestrians, etc. and visibility is limited for cyclist in a pack. It is important to communicate to the riders in the group of potential hazards by shouting out and pointing out hazards.

Warnings you're likely to hear include:

- "Car Back": there's a car approaching from the rear of the group ride
- "Car Up": there's a car approaching from the front of the group ride
- "Car right or left": car is approaching on the left of right of the group ride
- "Rock" or "Pot Hole": there is a hazard in the road
- "Biker up": there is a slower cyclist coming up

General hand signals

- Hand up in the air - Usually signifies that the rider signalling is stopping (e.g. for a puncture) or there is a hazard in the road that the whole group may have to stop for.
- Pointing out holes in the road- This is essential. You must point out drain covers, holes, dead badgers, glass or anything else which may cause harm to a cyclist. Basically if you have to go around it tell the rider behind about it before they hit it.
- Indication directions to riders behind - Whether it is slowing down or turning at junctions, large groups need everyone to indicate for other road users, so let them know what you intend to do.
- Waving for parked cars, horses and pedestrians - When overtaking riders will sometimes wave a hand behind them (like they're wafting away malodorous wind!!) this signifies there is a hazard that means the group will have to move out. They will do this 'waft' in the direction you will need to move. Remember you are expected to do the same so the rider behind you has seen the obstacle.

Ride in two lines

Two parallel lines of riders is the safest and most practical riding formation. All club runs will assume this formation, usually with the ride leader at the front and another experienced rider towards the back. Do not break the line and overtake only on hills or safe places where the road ahead is clear. Contrary to some road users opinion this is legal and it is at the discretion of the riders to single out.

Stay close

The benefits of riding in a group are more than just social. You will cover more ground with less effort in a group, saving around 20% of your energy when sitting in the bunch. So stay close to the rider in front to maximise the slipstream and allow riders around you to also use it to best effect. If you are nervous about hitting the wheel in front, ride 6 inches either side of it and don't stare at the tyre, try to look up, this way you will relax more and see any problems before they arise.

Don't 'switch' suddenly

Hold your line and keep a steady cadence, this is for the rider who may be riding behind and needs to be close and confident that you won't move suddenly or wobble. The riders in front will not stop suddenly without warning so you won't have to make any sudden moves.

Relax

Try to relax your upper body as much as possible. This will help prevent fatigue and also prevent you from making sudden changes in direction. Bend the arms a little and keep your head up.

Don't ride off the front

Depending on the type of group you are riding in, the main principle of group riding is to ride together (either socially or 'through and off'). So attacking off the front is not a good idea, it will usually upset the more experienced riders and generally upset the discipline and pace of the group. Sometimes there will be a long hill or section where there will be some hard riding allowed. Often there may be a sprint for a town sign, but remember to be sensible, this isn't a race and there are riders in the group who may be dropped or start to suffer if you want to do your level 3 effort 30 miles from home.

Tell someone if you have a problem

You may be feeling a bit shy about it but tell the riders around you if you have a puncture or mechanical problem, don't drift to the back and off it without telling anyone. If they drop you on a hill they will wait or send a rider or two back to pace you up to the group so don't worry, they won't abandon you.

Punctures

The group may ride on and then retrace so they keep warm whilst you fix your flat. If you are a slow mechanic ask for help. There will be experienced riders who can fix a flat in a matter of seconds, so don't feel afraid to ask if it will save the group time.

Send the message to the front

If you are riding at the back and a rider is dropped for whatever reason tell the riders in front of you and ask them to shout up to the front. The pace can then be adjusted to suit the problem or the group can stop. Once riders have been left behind, finding them and regrouping can be a pain.

Ride Cautiously and Considerately

Bikes are considered vehicles, just like cars and are required to obey the same traffic laws. Getting a ticket or placing your fellow cyclists in danger is certain to piss someone off. Your actions can place a rider behind you in danger so be careful of your surroundings.

Ride Smart & Be Safe

Group ride dynamics are interesting and ever changing. As the pace and terrain changes the pack stretches and compresses like a rubber band. You have to be alert at all times because rubber band effect of a group ride can cause some very tight quarters and even some occasional crashes.

To be safe it is important to ride smooth, don't over react, avoid hard braking, be alert as to what is going on up the road in the front of the pack, and anticipate what traffic will do.

Inexperienced riders who panic and touch a wheel may crash or cause a crash. You can avoid problems by practicing these simple rules:

1. Stay alert at all times.
2. Hold your line.
3. Don't overlap wheels.
4. Don't look back!
5. Relax!
6. Focus on the rider(s) ahead.
7. Beware of pot holes in the road.
8. Don't brake unless absolutely necessary.
9. Pass carefully.
10. Always move through the pace-line at a steady pace and make sure you are clear of the front rider before pulling off.
11. If you're unsure of yourself, concerned or nervous then stay at the back of the group.

Be Prepared

Always bring a tube, CO2 or a pump and the tools to change a flat. It also a good idea to bring some money on the longer rides because often group rides stop to fuel up. Bringing a mobile phone is also good to have increase something happens and you need to call for help. Keep in mind that not all group rides stop when someone flats, so be prepared to ride alone if you flat.

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