



Safe bunch riding – It’s a team effort and offers many obvious safety features for cyclists, most notably, being seen by other vehicles on the road, as well as by pedestrians.

However, to ride safely in a bunch requires a number of important factors, including appropriate riding experience, fitness, a mechanically sound bike, alertness, consistent riding style and excellent communications through clear and universally understood signals. If these general factors are not followed, the rider is putting him/herself in danger as well as the bunch. A small or simple error in bunch riding can lead to a disastrous outcome.

Break the Cycle’s (BTC) bunch riding etiquette is that the pack is as fast as the slowest rider. That is, we stick together as a focused and supportive unit.

Erratic riding with break-away groups, pressuring the tail-end riders to accelerate can lead to rider fatigue and tired and sloppy riding technique which puts the bunch at risk of an accident.

1. The bunch formation

Riders pair off in 2 x 2 formation. Keep a distance of approximately 1 – 1.2

metres off the rear of and slightly off to the side of the rider in front. (increase that distance approximately three fold in wet weather). Positioned slightly off to the side gives the rider better vision down the line and more time to react to hazards. Don’t sit directly on the wheel of the rider in front.

2. Sitting on the wheel

Focus on the person in front of you. Do not focus on the rear of the wheel. By focusing on the person you will be more aware of what is happening in the bunch.

When you ride a 2 x 2 formation, your goal is to ride evenly with your partner, hub to hub, handlebar to handlebar.

Do not “half-wheel” or overlap wheels, with the rider in front of you. This is extremely risky as you will be positioned in the front rider’s blind spot and any sideways movement by that rider could result in wheel hits and an accident involving any number of riders.

Do not stop pedalling or change wheel position when you drink or eat as this causes a ripple effect through the bunch. This can cause a rear end collision.

When the rider in front of you stands

up, the bike will move back. This can happen any time, however climbing is the most common. If you are about to get out of the saddle, make sure you are at the top of your pedal stroke and have pressure on the pedal. Always allowing enough space between you and the rider in front is a good approach.

3. Position

a) Position: On the road

Riders have clearly defined rights on the road that in simple terms allows riders to occupy a full lane, ride in pair formation and have the same responsibilities as motorists. However, not all motorists are aware of the rights cyclists have. As a cyclist you must take this into consideration and ensure all movements that you make are clear, noticeable and predictable to all of those around you. Erratic or inconsistent cycling puts pressure on drivers of vehicles.

b) Position: On train and tram tracks

Ride over at an angle, ideally perpendicular to the tracks, otherwise your wheel may get caught.

c) Position: On narrow roads

Signal your moves to drivers. Ride solidly to show drivers you are trying to keep with the flow of traffic as best you can. Whilst you may slow traffic, you may gain more respect by

riding fast, within your abilities and maintaining safety.

d) Position: “Pick a Plank” bridges

Australia also has wooden bridges where the planks run lengthwise. You need to position yourself in the bunch prior to arriving at the bridge to be able to stay on the same plank. Keep your line of sight approximately 10m – 20m in front to help maintain balance and stay on the plank. This prevents your wheel getting caught in one of the gaps.

e) Position: Stopping at an intersection

When traffic is stopped at intersections, stop behind the last stationary vehicle as you would in a car. A cycle bunch, especially a BTC peleton (group of cyclists), will cover a greater length than most other vehicles and therefore should move like other vehicles.

f) Position: Overtaking another rider

When passing another rider, pass on the right hand side of the rider. Overtaking on the inside lane is hazardous as the rider needs to be aware of traffic movements on both sides of the bike. Overtake on the right and make sure sufficient room is available to pull into line, without causing the cyclist you have passed to brake suddenly.

g) Position: Riding 2 abreast

Whilst cyclists are fully in their legal rights to ride two abreast, there are times when cyclists should not exercise this right.

Uphill left hand bends are especially dangerous in both single lane and dual lane roads. Get off the road if you need to. Ride single file if NOT safe to ride two abreast.

4. The lead riders

The lead riders take the greatest responsibility for the bunch. They set the pace, they make the calls for road obstacles and warn the bunch of any traffic changes. This is not the time for the social chat and lead riders must not be drafting behind support vehicles.

BUT THEY DO NOT SIGNAL SUPPORT CARS, ONLY THE TEAM LEADER CAN DO THIS.

Obstacles

Lead riders should scan the road ahead for obstacles and other potential risks. The lead rider's eyes must be focused on what lies ahead at all times.

When riding in pair formation and obstacles are identified, the lead rider makes the call. If a hole in the road is identified, the lead rider calls “hole left” (of the left hand lead rider) “hole middle” (of both lead riders) or “hole right” (of the right hand lead rider). This call also applies for all hazards including rocks, glass, sticks, branches and other debris, car doors opening, pedestrians and stray animals that may cause a risk to the bunch.

The opening of car doors by drivers who do not look first can pose a real hazard to cyclists. Lead riders also scan for cars that may have pulled into the curb ahead, to assess whether the threat of an opening car door may prevail. The call of “door” is made and the bunch readies itself to move across from the risk. The call can also help alert a driver to take care when opening the vehicle's door.

It is important to identify what is deemed hazardous to the group. Calling hazards that pose no risk to the bunch is dangerous in itself for example, the hazard is too far to the side to pose a risk to the group, the

hazard is too minor (eg a few leaves, a small amount of light gravel) as the group will start to ignore the lead rider's calls. Later, when a real threat has been identified and signalled, there is the risk that it will be ignored by the bunch.

Traffic lights

When approaching a set of lights the lead riders have responsibility in making the call. It will either be “lights...stopping” or “rolling”. The lead rider may also hold a hand up signaling to stop. Remember that the bunch is one vehicle so if the bunch is committed to roll don't make decisions in the middle of the bunch to suddenly stop. This will cause heavy braking towards the back of the bunch and possible accidents.

Some riding groups call “rolling” from the rear to indicate to the front riders to keep rolling. As the front riders have best view of the traffic signals and call “clear” or “stopping” at intersections, it makes most sense that the front riders continue this communication at traffic lights. BTC lead riders are therefore responsible for making “lights...stopping” or “rolling” calls, with the one vehicle (the group of cyclists) committing to their call.

Roundabouts

When entering a roundabout or turning at an intersection the lead riders must call “clear” or “car left / right” or “stopping”. All calls should be relayed clearly and swiftly down the line so that each cyclist makes the call for the riders directly behind.

Changing lanes

The lead riders also will indicate if riders should move across, e.g., with obstacles on the side of the road, such as parked vehicles or garbage bins. A hand signal behind the back of the lead rider closest to the

obstacle will indicate to riders behind to move over. The signal is passed down the line. When the group needs to change lanes, (e.g. to move across to turn right at an intersection) the lead rider on the side of the lane to move into should raise an arm up, pointing high in the direction of the lane, to signal to the group that a lane change needs to occur. The rear rider will give the call of either "wait" or "over", ensuring that is clear not only for the rear rider to move, but for all riders.

Single File

The lead riders are also responsible for calling "single file" formation when the road narrows, or traffic increases. A raised open hand above the helmet pointing forward and the call "single" indicates to the bunch that single file formation is to occur.

Pace setting

The lead riders should focus on keeping a constant speed that is comfortable for the group. On gentle or rolling inclines, the bunch should stay together, maintaining the speed of the lead riders. When commencing an ascent, the lead riders should accelerate into the hill to avoid the bunch slowing as normally speed would reduce going into a hill. Once at the crest of the hill the lead riders need to keep pedalling for another 100m to let the riders behind complete the hill at the same constant speed. If the lead riders relax at the crest and slow, a "concertina effect" (where the bunch closes in and then expands repeatedly) will result with the following riders having to slow or even brake on an uphill session.

On hills that are steeper or longer, riders may agree to climb at their own pace. If agreed, the bunch will break up for the climb. After the top of the hill, the team leader will nominate

and communicate to support vehicles a safe area to stop and wait for the group to re-bunch.

5. The tailenders

The riders on the back of the line also have a huge responsibility, particularly the rider on the right hand side. This person must call the bunch across a lane or lanes or warn of trucks, cars etc that are approaching the rear of the pack when on narrow and/or single lane roads.

Changing lanes

When crossing over lanes the call from the tailender, after checking to assess the situation, is either "wait" or "over". It is important that the instruction is relayed up the line and when crossing over the bunch moves as one and does not fragment. The rear rider on the right hand side must maintain a distinct hand signal until the maneuver is completed.

Rear traffic

On a narrow or single lane road the last rider must warn of vehicles behind. A call of "car back" is a simple call that all should understand. The same applies for when a cyclist, or bunch, is over-taking our bunch. The last rider must warn other riders by a call of "riders right".

The tailenders need to ensure whenever their sight is off the riders in front that they have assessed the motion is steady and that that they have moved back from the rear wheel of the rider in front of them in case the bunch suddenly slows.

6. Communicating messages down the line

All riders play an important part in bunch riding and clearly relaying communications is paramount. The lead riders can give the best signals possible but unless they are acted

upon by being passed down the line, substantial risks can remain. In bunch riding there can be a tendency for riders in the middle to hear the call and react by avoiding the hazard, but omit to act by passing the call down the line. Sometimes a middle rider may assume the call was loud enough to be heard well behind, but we know the risk of making assumptions. The middle of the bunch must be alert to relay the calls at all times to ensure the entire group's safety.

7. Rotating the lead

The lead riders should not attempt to stay on the front too long. Five kilometres, or fifteen to twenty minutes is plenty. Fatigue is also an important factor to consider for lead riders. They have been concentrating on hazards and risks as well as maintaining the pace. Rotating the lead gives every one a chance to go to the front. If you feel that you are not fit or strong enough to do a turn, go to the front, advise your partner and immediately roll off the lead.

The team will nominate which way they rotate, either clockwise or anti-clockwise. If rotating anti-clockwise the outside rider will push to the front of his inside partner.

8. Wet weather

Wet weather poses many additional hazards. Visibility is reduced for both rider and driver. Road surfaces can become slippery with oil slicks, leaves and other debris.

The incidence of flat tyres increases as road debris sticks to the wet tyres longer than in dry conditions. To reduce the likelihood of accidents:

- Increase the gap between riders
- Your brakes and wheel rims will be wet. Allow for much longer braking distance and time to slow or stop.

Pump your brakes before descending to help clear water build up on the rims and brakes to help improve friction.

- Accelerate slowly to avoid skidding
- Slow down. Do not ride as fast, especially when cornering.
- Deflate front and rear tyre pressure from maximum by approx 20psi to enable more tyre grip on road. You won't go as fast, but that is good.
- Be wary of materials that are slippery in the wet. eg. metal plates, grills
- Be wary of white paint or road paint generally (crossings, lane lines)
- Avoid the centre position of a lane where vehicles drip oil from their sump which in the wet becomes hazardous.
- Check your lights are in working order with new batteries for maximum light strength. Having a second tail light will only benefit

9. Supporting the callers

Give encouragement from time to time to the lead riders, the tail ends and other riders who have been making clear, responsible calls. It offers recognition, encouragement and reinforces to all riders the importance of good signals and calls in bunch riding. Without positive feedback, there can be a tendency for riders to reduce the calls and signals made.

10. Near misses

They will happen. In any workplace, in any social activity, there are risks and there will be some escapes and near misses. Those incidents are important to note with the bunch and discuss at a later stage. Identifying near misses, assessing what could have occurred and giving consideration to how best to avoid such an incident in the future is a simple way to help boost the group's safety. The cliché 'we can learn from our mistakes' is only half of it. Importantly, we can also learn much more from the more frequent 'near mistakes'.

11. Other key reminders for bunch riding

- Be consistent and predictable with your actions. Braking suddenly, swerving and jolting motions increase the risk of accidents
- Do not wear earphones or any apparatus that may reduce normal traffic noise and riders' calls **when bunch riding.** It is imperative that all riders hear for calls and listen out for traffic and other potential hazards. If the group agrees to split for a long hill climb on a low traffic road, the rider may decide to 'wire up' (one ear only) but immediately upon rejoining the bunch, all audio must be switched off.
- At times hand signals cannot be made by the lead riders due to the need to keep both hands on the handle bars (eg rough roads, tight cornering etc) In those cases, the lead rider should always make a clear and loud call.
- Check all attachments to the bike are fastened secure (light fittings, pumps – preferably in the back pocket and gas cylinders, bidons and cages are secure)
- **Obey the road rules and give drivers the respect you also expect.**
- If you brush shoulders, hands or handle bars with a rider, don't panic or make a sudden direction change. Just roll on and make a slight separation.
- If stopping for mechanical repairs, remember to get right off the road
- Ride within your abilities. Don't over-extend in bunch riding.
- Dress for the weather conditions and try to keep your body warm throughout the ride and at breaks

Regardless of how experienced you may be as a cyclist, as a bunch rider, or how fit you are and how well you communicate calls and signals, safe bunch riding relies on a highly responsible team effort.

COLLISION AVOIDANCE AND

ACCIDENT PROCEDURE POINTS

By Martin Pearce

12. Collision avoidance

A rider's ability to safely avoid an unexpected hazard or fallen rider is conditional upon sound bike handling skills and good situational awareness (SA). As riders we should already display a higher level of SA as we are constantly scanning not just the lane ahead but also scan around us for potential hazards, i.e. the car reversing out of the driveway, the unleashed dog running towards the road, the heavy vehicle approaching from behind etc. Good SA as a rider means knowing how you are travelling in relation to other traffic and hazards that have been identified so that when the unexpected does occur, for example a rider(s) goes down in the bunch ahead, you already know what evasive options are available to you.

13. In the event of an accident

a) Self safety

Good SA is essential. Do not race to the side of a fallen rider until the scene has been made safe. Be aware of traffic travelling at high speeds and your own inability to walk/run swiftly in cleats.

b) Support Vehicles

Rear vehicle

The initial action of the rear support vehicle is to make a radio call of "riders down-riders down" and then park the vehicle in a position to best protect the fallen riders. The best orientation of the vehicle is cocked off 45 degrees with the front of the vehicle pointing into the centre of the road thus protecting the scene 'downstream'.

If there are fallen riders lying across more than one lane then the rear support vehicle should park in a position that protects the most offside, i.e. the furthest from the

kerb, fallen rider. By parking 90 degrees from the kerb, you present a wider profile to approaching traffic, forcing that traffic to take a wider berth. It also presents a clearer image that something is wrong and allows traffic to react appropriately. Once again, good SA is required as support vehicle occupants alight from the vehicle.

Front vehicle

The actions of the lead support vehicle will be dependant upon whether the incident occurs on single or dual carriageway. On dual carriageway the lead support vehicle will need to return to fallen riders by the safest possible means and park in a position to further protect the scene. On narrow single carriageway oncoming traffic may present a greater threat and the role of the lead car will be to protect the scene from that direction.

At all other stops, support vehicles need to ensure they are completely

off the road to be out of the way of oncoming traffic. They should also remind cyclists of their position off the road.

Traffic Marshals

In the event of an accident that is on a high speed road or in a position of limited visibility it is essential to post some traffic marshals beyond the corner / over the crest / to signal to approaching traffic. High visibility vests and cones will be available in rear support vehicles.

First Aid

The rear support vehicle will be carrying First Aid equipment. If fallen riders are uninjured or have only minor injuries our priority will be to clear the scene as soon as possible to minimise our risk. Minor first aid will be performed at a safer location. However any seriously injured or dazed/confused rider will not be moved until assessed by the first aid officer or, in serious cases, a paramedic.

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Tour de Cure Limited
20 Park Road
Naremburn NSW 2065 Australia
www.tourdecure.com.au

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