



Group Riding Techniques

For club rides and other rides on public roads there are two basic group formations which are "single file" or "two abreast". The appropriate formation at any time depends on factors including the road layout, traffic conditions, the size of the group, and the experience of the riders.

In all group rides the main individual skill required is following a wheel, sometimes known as holding a wheel or drafting, whereby riding closely behind another cyclist provides shelter from the wind, saving energy and making riding easier. A cyclist riding closely behind another can save significant amounts of energy which is especially useful on long or faster rides. By taking turns to ride at the front of the group the workload is shared and the whole group benefits from easier riding or being able to maintain a quicker pace.

Holding a wheel

In order to get the maximum benefit from riding behind other riders it is necessary to ride closely behind them whilst still being able to ride safely and react to changing road conditions and the movements of other riders in the group. While experienced riders may ride just a few inches behind each other beginners should allow a larger gap whilst developing the technique

Ideally the technique should be practiced in a small group with other riders who have some experience. By riding with their front wheel about 12 to 18 inches behind the rear wheel of another rider beginners get used to the distance between the bikes and with practice do not need to keep looking at the wheel they are following. Important points to bear in mind whilst learning or using the technique include:

All riders should be looking where they are going and rely mainly on peripheral vision and experience to judge the distance between wheels.

All riders are responsible for anticipating traffic, other cyclists and changes that may affect the group.

All riders should pass on communications and warn the group of things that may affect the group e.g. pot holes, parked cars etc.

All riders should avoid sudden movements and sudden braking.

Looking ahead at about shoulder height is better than looking down.

When following a wheel the front wheel should normally be slightly offset to the outside of the wheel being followed which allows a little extra room for error.

More space should be allowed for inexperienced riders.

More space should be allowed on descents.

More space should be allowed on steep climbs.

More space should be allowed on wet or slippery surfaces.

More space should be allowed in heavy traffic.

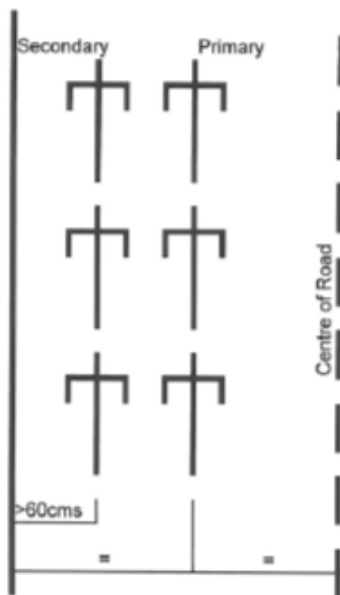
The distance between wheels can be as little as a few inches but should normally be larger when inexperienced riders are involved, when riding on wet or slippery surfaces, when descending and when climbing steep hills. In some cases such as wet descents the space between riders can be several complete bike lengths.

Please Do Not 'Half Wheel' it is very dangerous to your and the rest of the Group

Single file group formation

Single file formations are generally used by small groups and where the group wishes to allow other vehicles the opportunity to overtake. In order to share the benefits of group riding the rider on the front moves to the back of the group allowing a fresh rider to take a turn at the front. This change is made, when traffic and road conditions are suitable, by the front rider checking over his shoulder, indicating that he is about to pull out by a flick of the outside elbow, pulling to the outside of the group and easing off to allow the rest of the group to pass on the inside before joining the rear of the line. An experienced rider will adjust their speed as they get near to the rear of the line so that they do not need to accelerate hard to rejoin the line.

Two abreast group formation



Also known as riding in twos, in pairs or side by side this is the most common way to cycle in groups. It offers advantages including sociability, high visibility and keeping the group compact. The standard formation is that two files of riders ride beside each other with the distance between the two files being about a shoulder's width. For more experienced groups the files may be closer together or for less experienced groups they may ride a little further apart. To share the benefits of riding in a group there are various methods of riders changing position to take turns at the front of the group, the most common being "Through and Off".

Through and off

Also known as bit and bit, through and off, involves the rider at one side on the front riding to a point just ahead of the person beside them and then carefully pulling across in front of them and easing slightly to drop back to a position beside a new front rider.

This can be done in two ways;

1. A change is made at intervals which might range from a few seconds to several minutes.
2. The changes are made in a continual fashion such that one line is moving at a constantly faster pace than the other and as soon as a rider in the faster file reaches the front and clears the rider beside them the move across and relax to the pace of the slower file rather than staying alongside the new leader. This style is often known as "chain-gang" and should be characterised

by continuous and smooth changes. This style of riding tends to be used in training and racing situations where it enables the group to travel very quickly over long distances.

The direction of the change can be either where the front rider moves from the inside to the outside (preferred) or in the opposite direction dependant on the direction of the prevailing wind and the experience of the riders. For less experienced riders it is best to become comfortable with the technique with the front rider always moving to the outside before attempting to change in the other direction. More experienced riders will often use the wind direction to determine the direction of the changes with the faster moving file being the one on the sheltered side.

A variation of this technique, known as echelons, where the two lines are staggered diagonally across the road is used in crosswind situations but is not allowed on open public roads and is normally only used in racing situations. Except when riding in official race events it is not permissible to cycle more than two abreast on open public roads.

Note: it is normal, and sensible, to briefly stop changing and maintain a formation whilst negotiating complex road layouts, roundabouts, when stopping and starting, at traffic lights, or in heavier traffic conditions. The group leader often stays at the front of the group in such situations until conditions are suitable to resume changing.

Changing in Twos

In a more leisurely group it may be appropriate for the riders to stay in pairs for long stretches and for both of the front riders to finish their turn and rejoin the rear of the group at the same time. This is done by the outside front rider, having checked traffic conditions, using a flick of the outside elbow and a verbal communication pulling out to allow space for the group to pass by on the inside. At the same time the inside front rider gives a signal and moves a little to the inside to allow the group to pass. As both riders ease off the group is allowed to pass between them and those riders then rejoin the rear of the group.

Switching to Single File

When a group needs to ride in single file a verbal command "single" is passed through the group. All riders ease off a little allowing bike sized spaces to open between them, and the riders in the outside file ease into the gaps between riders in the inside file. All riders should ensure that the gaps are sufficiently large before moving.

Switching to Two Abreast

When conditions allow the group will reform into a double file, often without a specific instruction being given. The rider at the front of the group, having checked traffic conditions, makes an indication and moves to the outside and the second rider will move to the inside of that rider. The riders in the group follow those actions so that two files are formed side by side.

Communication in road cycling groups

There are many verbal and visual communications used within road cycling groups and there are variations between regions and between groups and clubs. Where a rider might ride with different groups, or when taking part in large group events it is helpful to understand a standard set of communications.

All verbal communications need to be simple and clear with little room for confusion which could compromise the safety of the group (for example the words "go" and "no" sound very similar when shouted).

Verbal communications are generally repeated to relay them through the group so that all riders can hear (e.g. a warning of a vehicle approaching from behind will be given by a rider at the back of the group and repeated by those in front until the whole of the group is aware).

Visual and verbal communications are often used together to be sure that the information is understood (for example pointing out a hole and giving a verbal warning at the same time).

The list below, whilst not exhaustive, covers most of the communications needed in group rides to ensure that the group can proceed efficiently and safely.

Verbal Communication	Meaning	Comment
Car Back	Vehicle approaching the group from behind	Shout passed from rear to front of group
Car Front	Vehicle approaching the group from ahead	Shout passed from front to rear of group
Out	Move out from the edge of the road	e.g. to avoid a hazard such as a slower cyclist or pedestrian
Keep in / In	Hold position; not moving out into the road	e.g. to avoid a hazard in the middle of the road or allow a faster vehicle to pass safely
Inside / On your left	The rider is about to pass on your left hand side	Not normally used on open roads except
Outside / On your right	The rider is about to pass on your right hand side	
Easy / Steady	The group is slowing down to a more relaxed pace	This can be used when approaching a hazard or when waiting for riders behind to re-join the group.
Stopping	The group is stopping	This command is given early so that stopping can be controlled and safe
Single / Single out	Move into a single file	Riders allow gaps to form so that those in the right hand file can merge into the left
Hole	Pointing out a hole in the road	Normally accompanied by a visual signal to point out the hazard
Left / Going left	The group is about to turn left	May be accompanied by a normal left turn hand signal
Right / Going right	The group is about to turn right	May be accompanied by a normal right turn hand signal
Puncture	A rider has punctured	Often accompanied by a raised arm indicating to other riders to leave space for

		the affected rider and be ready to stop if necessary
Thank you		To thank someone who has assisted the smooth passage of the group e.g. a motorist who has waited patiently before overtaking
Pointing finger hand towards road surface	Hole or hazard on the road surface	Normally accompanied by a verbal signal to point out the hazard e.g. "hole", "glass" or "ice"
Arm pointing across rider's back to the right	Move out from the edge of the road to avoid a hazard	Often accompanied by a verbal signal "Out". e.g. to avoid a hazard such as a slower cyclist or pedestrian
Arm pointing across rider's back to the left	Move in from the centre of the road to avoid a hazard	Often accompanied by a verbal signal "Keep in". e.g. to avoid a hazard in the middle of the road or allow a faster vehicle to pass safely
One hand raised in the air	The rider has a problem such as a puncture and is slowing down	Often accompanied by a verbal signal such as "Puncture" allowing other riders to leave space for the affected rider and be ready to stop if necessary
Arm extended to the left	Turning left	Often accompanied by a verbal "left" or "going left"
Arm extended to the right	Turning right	Often accompanied by the verbal "right" or "going right"
Elbow flicked outwards	The rider wants the next rider in line to move to the front	Used when a group are taking turns to ride at the front
Wave with palm facing forwards	Thank you	Rarely used by some groups but fosters good relations, can be accompanied by verbal thanks