

Group Riding Tips

Paceline and Drafting

Drafting

- Following closely behind another rider cuts down on wind resistance
- Only draft off of someone whose riding style or experience you trust

Paceline

- A group of riders drafting off of each other is a paceline; the leader dictates pace
- Front rider must communicate obstacles to riders behind; last rider watches traffic
- Pay close attention to those ahead and behind; be able to react safely and quickly

Rotation

- Riders in a pace line take turns 'pulling' the group along through the wind
- To move from the front, check traffic, pull out to the left and move to the back
- The second rider is now the leader and provides draft for allotted time or distance

Signals

- Lead rider must signal debris and hazards in roadway as well as stops and turns
- Point in direction of hazard and announce 'grate' or 'gravel' for other riders
- Rear rider is responsible for signaling intentions to following traffic

Dangers

- Do not draft on high traffic roads or roads with frequent intersection
- There is very little room for error when riding very close to others
- Crashing in a paceline has a domino effect, which may knock down riders behind you

"Pace Busting"

- When taking the lead in a paceline do not surge or pick up the overall pace. Maintain the same speed as when drafting. As you take over you will naturally have to put out more effort. Learn to finesse your effort in order to maintain a smooth transition as you take over.
- If you are tired, make your turn at the front as short as possible. No one has to prove anything at the front.
- Check the speed on your computer when you are next in line. Keep that speed when you take over.

Spacing / Distance

- Keep a constant distance to the rider ahead and adjust your speed by feathering your brakes as you continue to pedal. Maintain steady-as-she-goes, predictable, smooth pace.

- Close any gaps gradually and gracefully. Jumping to close a gap and then slowing down creates a yo-yo effect that adversely affects the entire group. Doing this all day will wear you out and get you yelled at by the cyclists behind you. Ride smoothly. Ride predictably.

At the Front

- When at the front of the group, pedal smoothly at all times, even down hills. You will need to keep pedaling on the down hills so that the bikes in back of you do not have to brake in order to avoid riding up your rear wheel.
- When at the front of the paceline and it is time to pull off, maintain the same steady pace (don't slow), check for traffic behind you, and then inform the group, "PULLING OFF." Then, still maintaining speed, decisively move to the side and when clear of the paceline slide gently to the back of the line to pull in behind the last bike.
- Stay at the front only for as long as you're directed, shorter if you are feeling tired.
- When a rider has pulled off and approaches the back of the group the last rider should call "LAST" so that the rider coming back won't overshoot the group and have to chase to get back on.

Surviving a Strong Group

- Riding in a group where the others are slightly stronger than you can be a good way to build fitness and learn how to go faster. Just be sure to follow these suggestions:
 - Most important is not to ride beyond your ability. You'll eventually be so taxed that your bike handling skills will suffer. This makes you a danger both to yourself and others.
 - A good guideline is if you're struggling so hard to keep up, that you haven't been able to drink from your water bottle, the group may be beyond your skills.

Be familiar with group riding skills and etiquette.

- Use drafting to your advantage.
- If the group is riding in a paceline, make your turn at the front of the group very short.
- Don't feel obligated to stay there for two minutes just because the previous riders in front did that.
- If you don't feel up to even a short pull in the front, try recovering in the back of the group. Just be sure you let the riders who are rotating back know what you're doing. Open up a gap to let them pull in front of you, and say, "Go ahead, I'm just sitting in". As you get to the back of the line, begin to increase your speed gradually so you won't need to sprint to get in the draft of the last rider.

Hills

- Hills are often the spot where a rider will be dropped by the group
- One strategy is to try to be toward the front of the group at the bottom of the hill. While other riders will pass you on the way up the hill, you may still be in contact with the group at the top of the hill, or close enough to catch up.

Dropping

- If you get dropped don't feel discouraged
- Call out that you are dropping. Let people know your intentions
- In the beginning you might only be able to keep up with a faster group for 20 or 30 minutes. But making that effort will improve your fitness, and over time you'll be able to hang on longer
- If you get dropped don't feel discouraged
- If you get dropped you don't necessarily have to finish the ride alone – slow down, drink, recover, and give the riders in the group behind you a chance to catch up.