



BUNCH RIDING RULES AND ETIQUETTE

A CYCLIST'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO
SAFE AND EFFICIENT BUNCH RIDING.

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Riding in a group is one of the main attractions for all cyclists. It provides excellent motivation to maintain a regular cycling schedule, and the ability to carry on a conversation while riding your bike next to another person is such a positive that many riders spend years simply joining the bunch rides in their area without ever joining a club or competing in a race or organised Event.

Riding in a bunch does, however, require sufficient skill on a bike and knowledge of how a bunch works to ensure a safe and cohesive group ride. While information such as these tips can give a few pointers to help you become more aware of some of the issues and techniques required, it is no substitute for the assistance of experienced riders and coaches from a club who can explain things on the road.

WHY A BUNCH?

A bunch can travel much faster than an individual cyclist because above 30kph wind is the most significant resistance factor, and only the front rider/s in a bunch are in it. All the following riders are effectively shielded until they take their turn at the front, maintain the speed for a time and then move backwards smoothly to recover for the next turn.

A bunch is also called a **paceline** when the riders change at the front continuously. Smooth pace lines are a buzz to ride in and generally occur in a race when the riders want to maintain a high average speed.

Responsible riding by the bunch also can greatly increase the image and acceptance by other vehicles of cyclists as legitimate road users and counter a growing tendency by legislators to consider reducing access for bicycles to our road system. Funny when one considers that increasing bicycle usage could be part of the solution to increase the level of physical activity in the community and reduce traffic congestion, obesity, stress levels and pollution!

HOW DOES A BUNCH WORK?

The key feature of bunches and pacelines is that they are smooth. All riders maintain even lines and speed, and those that may not be so strong may choose to stay in the rear part of the group rather than coming through to take a turn at the front. A bunch ride is not the place to display your power and ability with sudden changes in pace or direction. If a gap forms in the group and you are strong enough to close it, it should be done gradually and smoothly. That way, you take everyone else along for the ride! With so many riders riding in close proximity, unexpected changes in direction or speed can be dangerous.

A bunch is a group of riders in pairs; a **paceline** is a single line of riders moving up one side to the front and returning to the rear on the other. The decision to ride single or double depends on the number of riders and the prevailing road and traffic conditions. The national road rules of Australia state that you are allowed to ride two abreast, but common sense should prevail in the interests of safety.

Check your local road rules for cycling to ensure that you are allowed to ride two abreast.

Generally, the faster a paceline is riding, the harder it is to maintain a steady speed at the front, and the riders will make their turns shorter. In general, the principles for changing the lead riders of a double paceline are:

The two front riders first signal their intention to change to their partner, check that the traffic conditions will allow them to move to the rear and that the following riders are not overlapping wheels with them. This rearwards check also alerts the others that a change is being considered. Those two riders then move smoothly to the side of the road in single file without slowing, and when they are there, they then slow gently to allow

the next riders to continue to lead the group past them while maintaining a constant speed.

Once at the back of the group, they re-integrate into the last two positions.

Single paceline: The same steps are followed by a single line of riders. The only difference is that moving to the front of the group happens continuously. The lead rider generally pulls off to the side the wind is coming from, allowing the riders approaching the front some shelter.

Turn time: different groups will choose to change the lead on a more or less frequent basis. A paceline can turn continuously, or turns can be several minutes or more. Generally, a time of between one and four minutes allows time to establish a good cadence and rhythm and is the right time frame (i.e. not too long) to maintain an even speed.

WHAT SHOULD THE BUNCH DO?

First and foremost, obey the law.

Stop at red lights and at other appropriate times. Running lights runs the risk of accident and serious injury, you may be lucky and get through without incident, but the riders following you may believe it is safe to do so without having the benefit of the field of view you have.

Also, it is no fun being abused by motorists on the road, so let's not give them a reason to do it.

Good bunches also look after their riders by:
 stopping to help fix minor mechanical problems and punctures quickly so that inexperienced riders are not left behind to fend for themselves,
 regrouping after hills or other difficulties to keep everyone together,

waiting for the others if the group gets split up by a changing traffic light, helping the less experienced riders with tips and a helping hand when needed, working as a group. For example, the front riders calculate actions for the group to ride safely, not just themselves, and the tail end riders should assist the group in negotiating lane changes by acting as the rear turn indicators and signalling when the road is clear of traffic.

WHAT SHOULD RIDERS DO?

Starting out: Before joining a bunch ride, make sure you are comfortable riding close beside another rider without wobbling, are able to ride a very straight line even when having a drink from your bottle, can ride with one hand or sitting up to observe traffic coming from behind. It is very important to be comfortable close to other riders.

Be predictable with all actions

Avoid sudden braking and changes of direction. Try to maintain a steady straight line. Remember that there are riders following closely behind. To slow down, gradually move out into the wind and slot back into position in the bunch. By putting your hands on the hoods of your brakes, you can "sit up" and put more of your body in the wind to slow down slightly without using your brakes.

Brake carefully

Ride safely and try to stay off the brakes. If you are inexperienced and too nervous to ride close to the wheel in front of you, stay alone at the back and practice. When the pace eases, don't brake suddenly. Instead, ride to the side of the wheel in front and ease the pedalling off, then drop back on the wheel. Practice on the back, and soon you will be able to move up the line with a partner.

Rolling through - swapping off – taking a turn

The most common way to take a turn on the front of the group is for each pair to stay together until they get to the front. After having a turn on the front (generally about the same amount of time as everyone else is taking), the pair separates and moves to each side, allowing the riders behind to come through to the front. To get to the back, stop pedalling for a while to slow down, keep an eye out for the end of the bunch and fall back into line there. It is safer for everyone if you get to the back as quickly as possible as the group is effectively riding four abreast until you and your partner slot in at the back of the bunch.

Be smooth with turns at the front of the group

Avoid surges unless you are trying to break away from the group. Surges cause gaps further back in the bunch, which in turn creates a "rubber band" effect as riders at the back have to continually chase to stay with the bunch. This is particularly evident in larger bunches when cornering or taking off from standing starts at traffic lights where the front of the bunch can be almost at full speed before the back of the bunch is moving.

No half wheeling

When you finally make it to the front, don't 'half wheel'. This means keeping half a wheel in front of your partner. This automatically makes your partner speed up slightly to pull back alongside you. Often half wheelers will also speed up, so the pace of the bunch invariably speeds up as the riders behind try to catch up. This is a very annoying symptom usually of somebody who is a bit nervous and excited. Not wanting the rest of the group to end up being next to each other in their pairs (or not wanting the other guy to think that he's better than you), you speed up to match his pace. But he still needs to be that little bit in front, so he speeds up - again until everyone in the bunch has gone up two or three gears, and 10km/hr and no one is particularly happy. REMEDY - when you are the second wheel, make sure you know the general speed of the bunch. When you go to the front, keep your speed around the same, and keep your wheels and handlebars in line with the person next to you.

CHOOSING WHEN TO COME OFF THE FRONT

You and your partner need to do some planning when you get on the front so that when you roll through, you come off at a place where the road is wide enough for the group to be four-wide for a short time. With some planning, it is often possible to come off the front a few hundred metres earlier or later to avoid a dangerous situation and avoid unnecessarily upsetting motorists.

Always retire to the back of the bunch

If riders push in somewhere in the middle of the bunch rather than retiring to the back after taking a turn, cyclists at the back will not be able to move forward and take a turn of their own. This will make them very cranky, and colourful language may ensue. No one wants to be stuck down the back of the bunch for the entire ride and subjected to the "rubber band" effect. Remember that riding in a bunch is about all riders sharing the workload.

Pedal downhill

Pedal downhill when at the front of the bunch. Cyclists dislike having to ride under brakes.

Point out obstacles

Point out obstacles such as loose gravel, broken glass, holes, rocks or debris on the road, calling out "hole" etc as well as pointing is helpful in case someone is not looking at your hand when you point. It is just as important to pass the message on, not just let those close to the front know. Another obstacle is a parked car; call out "car" and sweep your hand around your back to let people behind know. Point out runners or walkers on bike tracks and slower bikes if you pass someone on the road. When traffic is approaching the lead bunch, the call is "car back", and when a car is approaching the front of the bunch, the call is "car up". These calls are usually voiced when the road narrows, and it's important

to advise the people further up/down the bunch that a car or truck is approaching.

Hold your wheel

An appropriate gap between your front wheel and the person in front is around 50cm. Keep your hands close to the brakes in case of sudden slowing. Sometimes people who are not used to riding in a bunch will feel too nervous at this close range - riding on the right side is generally less nerve-racking for such people as they feel less hemmed in. Watching "through" the wheel in front of you to one or two riders ahead will help you hold a smooth, straight line.

Don't leave gaps when following wheels

Maximise your energy savings by staying close to the rider in front. Cyclists save about 30 per cent of their energy at high speed by following a wheel. Each time you leave a gap, you are forcing yourself to ride alone to bridge it. Also, riders behind you will become annoyed and ride around you. If you are in the bunch and there is no one beside the person in front of you, you should move into that gap (otherwise, you will be getting less windbreak than everyone else will). Conversely, if you are that person and no-one moves into that gap beside you, you should move to the back of the bunch. The next pair to roll off will come back, and one of those riders will fall in beside you.

Don't overlap wheels

A slight direction change or gust of wind could easily cause you to touch wheels with the rider in front, which may result in a fall.

Do not panic if you brush shoulders, hands or bars with another rider. Try to stay relaxed in your upper body to absorb any bumps. This is a part of riding in close bunches and is relatively safe, provided riders do not panic, brake or change direction.

Don't prop

Many riders, even the experienced ones, freewheel momentarily when they first get out of the saddle to go over a rise or a hill. When doing this, the bike is forced backwards. This can cause chaos in a tightly bunched group of riders. The sensation of the rider in front coming back at you is unpleasant and can cause crashes. Try to keep forward pressure on the pedals to avoid this situation when you get out of the saddle.

When cycling hills, avoid following a wheel too closely. Many riders often lose their momentum when rising out of the saddle on a hill which can cause a sudden deceleration. This can often catch a rider who is following too closely, resulting in a fall from a wheel touch.

Look ahead

Do not become obsessed with the rear wheel directly in front of you. Try to focus four or five riders up the line so that any 'problem' will not suddenly affect you. Scan the road ahead for potential problems, red lights etc., and be ready.

Obey the road rules

Especially at traffic lights - if you are on the front, and the lights turn orange, they will definitely be red by the time the back of the bunch goes through the intersection. You will endanger the lives of others if you run it.

Lead in front

Remember, when you are on the front, you are not only responsible for yourself but for everyone in the group. When you are leading the bunch, try to monitor potential problems and give plenty of warning of impending stops or changes of pace. Make sure you know where you are going.

Stay together

When riding with a partner in a line of two's, stay close. Don't ride too far away from your partner because the wheel in front of you intimidates you. The gap you've left between you and your partner is a waste of space, and to a motorist behind, it appears that you are three wide. This is a good way to antagonise motorists.

Use the entire lane

If you are travelling on a multi-lane road, it is permitted and often best practice to actually take the left lane. This effectively means that traffic does not squeeze past but actually changes lanes to pass, giving everyone plenty of room.

Don't use your aero bars in a bunch ride

Never use your aero bars in a bunch ride - not even if you are at the front. Using aero bars means that your hands are away from the brakes. Aero bars are for time trial or non-draft triathlon use only.

Experienced riders should share their knowledge

Experienced riders should point out any mistakes made by less experienced riders. This must be done diplomatically, but it is important to make people aware of unsafe riding and help them learn the right behaviour. Riding in a bunch is about everyone's safety.

Summary of the main points:

- obey the law,
- check out what is happening around and ahead of yourself, don't look at the wheel in front - only the back of the rider & beyond,
- if you are leading the group, act responsibly for the sake of all the riders behind you, not just yourself,
- keep your braking, changing direction, and other movements progressive,
- signal hazards to the other riders of your group,

- place yourself to maintain a safety run-out directly in front,
- welcome new members to the bunch,
- look after everyone in it by stopping to assist with mechanicals and incidents, and
- when in front, remember you are responsible for guiding the whole group who are following along behind you.