

Bike Safety Tips

Rule #1 - Be Predictable

This may be the most important rule. It involves every aspect of riding from changing positions in the group to following the traffic rules. You might say that all the other rules support this one.

Smooth, predictable riding isn't just a matter of style... It's Survival!

Have you ever been on a ride where the group stops at an intersection and people scatter all over the lane? Some going through on the wrong side of the road, others turning left from the right side, some running the stop sign and others stopping?

It's confusing and also irritating to drivers of vehicles as they approach a situation where cyclists are going in all different directions or just blowing through! Groups should maintain integrity when approaching intersections. Obey the traffic laws.

Rule #2 - Don't Overlap Wheels

This habit will get you in real trouble. Some do it from lack of concentration, others may just not know better, but sooner or later you'll crash. Don't do it!

Rule #3 - Be Steady

This includes speed and line. If the person behind you fails to adhere to Rule #2, you will contribute to a crash if you drift around all over the road. When everyone is working for the group, maintain a steady speed as you go to the front.

Ever notice how easy it is to ride behind some folks? If you take note of their riding style you'll probably notice they don't yo-yo around in the pack. They are rock steady. When they are leading, they ride a straight line and their speed will be constant with the conditions.

Riding steady doesn't necessarily mean speed. It means steady pressure on the pedals... uphill or downhill, headwind or tailwind. When you are following someone like this, life is good! When they are following, they don't make sudden moves and they know how to control their spacing by using their body position instead of using the brakes.

Sudden braking will set off general alarms from everyone in the rear and make you very unpopular. If you do use the brakes, feather the front brake only and keep pedaling against the resistance. This allows you to moderate your speed without disturbing trailing riders.

Rule #4 - Announce Hazards

When you are in the lead, you are responsible for the safety of everyone behind you. You will become unpopular very quickly if people behind you keep bouncing off of potholes and running over rocks that you fail to point out. You also need to be very vocal when approaching intersections, slowing, stopping, or turning. Vocally warning the group that

you are slowing for a turn will keep them out of your seat pack and upright to ride another day. Riders in the pack should relay these warnings to the rear. When you are following, announce oncoming traffic from the rear. In this case, others should relay this info toward the front.

Rule #5 - Signal

Signaling lets everyone (vehicles and riders) know your intentions. Remember Rule#1? This makes you predictable. Also, it's a good idea to make eye contact with oncoming traffic at intersections. Most cyclists use their right arms to signal a right turn, although technically incorrect (in some states), this is the most widely accepted signal and easiest to understand.

Rule #6 - Don't Fixate

If you are staring at something (i.e., the wheel in front of you), you'll hit it! When you walk in a crowd, you don't stare at the back of the person in front of you, so you shouldn't ride like that either. Learn to be comfortable looking around or through the riders ahead of you. This will allow you to see things that are developing in front of the group. With a little practice you will be able to "sense" how far you are off the wheel in front of you.

Rule #7 - Stay off the Aerobars

The best scenario is to always use your road bike for group rides unless doing a specific TT practice. If you do not have a road bike, this shouldn't require much discussion. One exception, when you are on the front pulling you can get away with it, but never, never, never when you are following a wheel. Triathletes are typically more comfortable on the bars, but sooner or later, if you're steering with your elbows instead of your hands in a group, you will add new meaning to the term "lunch on the road". Plus, it really tics off those behind you when you go down in a pack!

Rule #8 – Don't Leave Stragglers

If you get separated at intersections, as a matter of courtesy, the lead group should soft pedal until the rest have rejoined. Also, as a courtesy to those who may not be able to stay with the group, the pack should wait at certain points along the route to regroup, especially at turn points and if the stragglers don't know the route. No one should be left alone. Remember this is a group ride!

Rule #9 - Know Your Limitations

If you're not strong enough or too tired to take a turn at the front, stay near the back and let the stronger cyclists pull in front of you instead of making them go to the back of the line. This will keep them from having to pass you when you create a gap. Also, don't pull at the front faster and longer than you have energy to get back in at the rear. Testosterone and ego is a volatile mix. Plus, it can get you dropped in a heartbeat.

Rule #10 - Change Positions Correctly

A common beginner faux pas is to stop pedaling just before pulling off the front. This creates an accordion effect toward the rear. Keep a steady pressure on the pedals until

you have cleared the front. After pulling off, soft pedal and let the group pull through. As the last couple riders are passing through, begin to apply more pressure to smoothly take your position at the rear. If you don't time it correctly, you'll create a gap and have to sprint to get back on.

Rule #11 - Climbing

Ever been behind someone when they stood up climbing up hill and all of a sudden you were all over them? If you need to stand, shift up a gear to compensate for the slower cadence and stand up smoothly keeping a steady pressure on the pedals. This will keep you from moving backward relative to the rider behind you. Apply the opposite technique when changing to a sitting position. Downshift and keep a steady pressure on the pedals to avoid abrupt changes in speed.

Rule #12 - Descending

The leader must overcome a much greater wind resistance as the speed increases. If you are leading, continue pedaling. If you don't, everyone behind you will be riding up your rear wheel. Riders to the rear will accelerate faster downhill as drafting becomes more effective. If you are following, back off a couple of bike lengths to compensate for the greater affects of drafting. If you are closing on the rider in front, sit up and let the wind slow you or use light braking to maintain spacing, but in both cases you should keep pedaling against the resistance. Keeping your legs moving not only makes it easier to keep the spacing, but also helps avoid leg cramps as it gets rid of the acid build up from the previous climb.

Rule #13 - Relax

This one is really important! It will allow you to be smooth and responsive. If you have tense arms and get bumped from the side, the shock will go directly to the front wheel and you will swerve and possibly crash. Plus, if you are tense, you are using energy you need to pedal your bike and keep up with the group. RELAX!

Rule #14 - Closing a Gap/Slowing Down

Don't make erratic movements, no sudden speed changes, close gaps gradually, no sharp braking. If you are getting to close to the rider ahead, soft pedal, sit up higher to catch more wind, move over slightly to catch more wind, feather your breaks a bit. Avoid coasting as this creates major accordion effect in the group and this causes accelerations and breaking eventually.

Rule #15 - Leading the Pack

It is important than when you are pulling that you know where you are going. Make decisions with the safety of the entire group in mind. Do not accelerate or decelerate unless appropriate.

Additional Safety Notes

Move completely off the roadway when waiting for groups, fixing flats or stopping. Do not congregate on the roads.

Yield to horses, runners, and pedestrians.

Let someone know if you are getting dropped. If you are keeping tabs on yourself you will know it before it happens! Drop off with someone else if you know you are going to blow soon.

Leave No Trace – do not discard wrappers on the trail!

Do Not Half Wheel – riding slightly ahead of instead of along side of when riding side by side. This is very annoying to other riders. Settle on a pressure and maintain it.

Only Ride Two Abreast – stay to the right and be courteous to traffic.