

Top 5 Tips When Riding In a Group

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On group rides over the years, and while observing riders in other groups, I've noticed some very bad decisions made by cyclists. So, I decided to start off the year with an article that serves as a reminder to us all of things TO DO & NOT TO DO when riding in a group.

Even though most of these bad decisions were made by less experienced riders, we can all stand to be reminded of safe practices when riding our bicycles. Be especially aware when riding within "protected" bike paths since these will also trap you and prevent you from avoiding collisions with other cyclists.

Of course, these examples are only the tip of the iceberg. Feel free to share your thoughts and ideas in the Comments.

1) Look Up and Pay Attention

This past weekend's weather was exceptionally nice and brought out hundreds of cyclists. The bad news is that I saw way too many cyclists looking straight down at the ground (or their computer), seemingly unaware of approaching groups and upcoming obstacles.

Every one of these cyclists weaved left and right, veering into the opposing lane where our lead person would have to slow then yell "HEY," followed by a loud "MOVE OVER" and "PAY ATTENTION."

Looking up and looking where you are going is even more critical if riders are trapped inside a bike path with barriers on each side. There are several of these near where I live. Several years ago, Cal Trans added miles of K-rails (or Jersey Barriers) protecting cyclists from the cars. The downside is that it does not protect cyclists from other cyclists, pedestrians, dog walkers, joggers running 4 abreast, new mothers pushing their double-wide strollers, etc. So, when you are on your bike, LOOK UP so you can see what is coming at you – and where you are headed.

2) Scan the Road

This ties in with No. 1, and without keeping your head up, there's no possible way you can do this. Using your peripheral vision, be aware of what's on each side of you, as well as what obstacles are in the road.

Road obstacles can be anything from pedestrians to animals, poles, rocks, gravel, raised curbs at roundabouts or anything that can potentially take you down. Quick decisions about the best course of action when coming upon any road obstacle is key.

Especially as you are approaching an "organic" obstacle (a person walking their dog, a loose pet, a squirrel in the road), consider what you expect the obstacle to do, and plan accordingly. Does it seem like the loose dog will lunge at you? Is the person walking their dog paying attention to their surroundings? Do they see you?

Again, only by keeping your head up and attentively scanning the road and your surroundings can you be prepared to deal with what's to come. And, since this article is focused on group riding, let's not forget the importance of sharing the information about obstacles, etc.

3) Point Out (or Yell Out) Obstacles or Threats

So, what usually happens on a group ride when there is an obstacle in the road? In my experience, all too often no one points anything out. Even within an experienced group, it's inconsistent at best. I've ridden with groups where nobody

pointed anything out anything at all, even large potholes, glass, nails, a tree branch.

It's hard for anyone further back than the first two cyclists at the front to see some obstacles in the road, so, it is their duty to point out, and to YELL out, not just than an obstacle is coming up, but WHAT KIND of an obstacle is coming up (rock, branch, pothole, glass, etc.). The fact is, different types of obstacles are dangerous in different ways, so knowing what you're facing is vital re: the course of action you'll take to avoid it, or deal with it. (Just one example: You can bunnyhop a hole, but not a dog!)

Just as those front riders need to be heard by yelling out the threat, they need to (if it's possible to safely remove a hand from the bar) POINT out the obstacle as well – in a vigorous, decisive gesture (it's the difference between extending your arm fully vs. a brief flick of your index finger).

One last note on this: If the group is big, keep in mind that only the first few riders are going to see and/or hear the initial warning. Riders need to PASS IT ON by repeating the yelled threat all the way to the back of the group.

4) Hold Your Line

Be predictable!

Especially when riding in a group, the last thing you want to do is swerve left to right/right to left, surge forward/backward – really, do anything that a fellow rider does not expect you to do – possibly causing someone else to crash.

In all cases, even when riding alone (because you may have someone tuck in behind you or about to pass you), you want to ride straight down the road and, when turning, keep the same, smooth radius. The last thing you want to do in a group ride is to dive into corners swinging wide when exiting.

Hold your line and ride predictably. Try to achieve the highest honor in a group when they refer to you as a “good wheel to follow.”

5) Don't Overlap Wheels (Protect Your Front Wheel)

The truth is that you alone are responsible for your front wheel. If everyone follows the DO's and DON'Ts above, your group ride should be safe and fun. The point is, everyone most assuredly does NOT always do what they should.

What happens if someone's mind starts to drift? The answer is that their bike starts to drift, too. Often, they slowly move forward, eventually overlapping their front wheel with the rear wheel of the rider in front of them.

If that rider in front moves or swerves quickly, then they will bump into the side of the front wheel, taking it out. The rider behind will end up on the ground, possibly taking out following riders as well. So, pay attention and DON'T overlap wheels.

It's as simple as this: Protect Your Front Wheel!

Summary

Those are my top 5 group riding tips. They may, or may not, correspond to your own top 5. Either way, feel free to add additional thoughts or tips in the Comments.

Coach Rick Schultz is an avid cyclist who trains, races and coaches in Southern California. Rick is an engineer by trade, and in addition to being a coach, he's a bike fitter and prolific product reviewer. He's the author of [Stretching & Core Strengthening for the Cyclist](#) and [Bike Fit 101: Your Toolset for a Great Bike Fit](#) in the RBR eBookstore. Check his product reviews website, www.biketestreviews.com, and his coaching site, www.bikefitnesscoaching.com. Click to read [Rick's full bio](#).