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Group Cycling Etiquette

Riding with a group can be a lot of fun. It can be rewarding and challenging but can also pose hazards that may jeopardize the safety of the riders in the group. The codes of cycling behavior are critical in ensuring safety and enjoyment for all participants in a group ride. Often times, previous solo riders or new riders join a group without knowing the rules which can jeopardize the whole group. Careless riders are dangerous to the group. For the safety of all, get familiar with rules and apply them immediately. Also, know or get familiar with the course so you can predict turns and pace your efforts.

Before you ride in a group, make sure that you have control of your bike. That means being able to come out of your pedals at a moment's notice and being able to ride your bike on the white lines on the edge of the road. This shows that you have good balance and are able to ride within a confined space such as in a group situation. Know your ability and respect your limitations. Allow more space between you and the rider in front of you if you feel unsure and keep your hands, at least your ride hand (rear) brakes touching the brake lever at all times. Learn how to hop safely or go over objects on the road with your bicycle so that you can avoid a potential crash or damage to your bike when you are confined in a group situation or approach an obstacle you can't get around. It is OK to ride with riders who have "aero" handlebars as long as they don't use them during the ride, unless they have lots of experience, as this type of handlebars allow for less control when steering with the forearms.

Be predictable so the riders behind you can anticipate your next move. Be consistent and don't ride erratically, signal your next move, point-out road hazards and maintain a steady pace (most times). Furthermore, all riders should respect all traffic signs and when at an intersection, if you are making a left turn in front of a car, try to make contact with the car drivers making sure they acknowledge your presence and allow you to proceed.

Be aware of your surrounding at all times. This means not only the front but also the sides and who is behind you. Listen for the car traffic behind you. This means no radios or MP3 players while riding in groups. When leading the group, take the conservative approach and never lead into potential danger. Remember, as the front person, you have the best view of the road in front of you. That does not mean the rider in the back of the group has no role. Yes, he/she does as they should warn of approaching cars. All riders should establish a line of drive which should stay as far as possible away from sand and gravel, parked cars, and grates and at the same time staying away from road traffic on the left and allow faster riders to surpass on the left.

In all group rides, there should be frequent communication. The leader should point out potential hazards such as holes, glass, and sand by simply pointing at it as soon as he/she is made aware giving enough time for the riders behind them to adjust his/her course. Remember that when you draft closely, it is difficult to see the road ahead of you and therefore the lead rider should establish the first line of communication which is passed on to riders following behind. There are many hand signals that keep riders and groups safe. Be familiar with them. See the list below.

Every competitive rider (whether amateur or professional) will improve his/her overall performance while riding in groups that pushes his/her abilities. Expect to ride several miles per hour faster than if you were solo on the same course. However, before embarking on such a training ride, make sure that you can at least ride the average speed (which is often at least 2-4 mph above your solo ride average) if you correctly draft. The group speed will sometimes break out into a sprint over bridges or certain parts of the courses and will return to an average speed afterward. This allows the strong riders to release stored energy and practice their breakaway skills.

Common courtesy and discipline among riders is essential. Show up 15-30 minutes before you scheduled ride time to go through basic safety checks on your bike, pump your tires, warm-up and stretch as well as getting familiar with you co-riders (it is much safer when you address someone by name on the road). After all, we can take advantage of the training and health benefits of riding as well as the social. Talking while in a group ride should be left to ensuring group safety. It is not the time to socialize. Every

rider should have a spare tube, tire levers and pump and more importantly know how to use them correctly. If you don't know how, ask someone who does or myself and I will teach you. Every rider should wear a well-fitting helmet free of cracks. In Florida, we must not forget sunscreen. Also, in your repair kit bag, store emergency contact names and numbers along with your name, address, any medical conditions or allergies. In case of an emergency your fellow riders will be grateful. In general, the group does not stop for anyone's flats or mishaps unless it's a medical emergency.

Most importantly enjoy the ride and take the time to send a smile or wave to oncoming cyclist. After all we are a fairly rare breed and only we can understand our passion for the bicycle.

Pace lines and Drafting (definitions and descriptions)

1. Drafting:

- Allows riders to follow behind one another to take advantage of less wind resistance
- Only draft behind riders you can trust and with the same abilities as you.
- Communicate with the rider in front of you that you are on their wheel. Keep a distance of at least 1 foot and as much as 2 feet depending on your experience and overall group experience. Obviously professionals ride closer as close as 6 inches but most of us don't fall in that category.
- Drafting creates very little room for error and can cause a chain reaction of accidents among riders.

2. Pace line

- Is a group of riders that use each other to draft and where the front rider dictates the pace.
- The front rider is the first to point out hazards in the road and the last one notifies the group of oncoming traffic.
- Avoid stooping your spin as the rider behind may think you are about to use your breaks. It is best to continue spinning even if your not generating any power ("spin in the air") when you feel that you are going to fast for the person in front of you.

3. Rotation

- In general, each rider takes turns leading the group into the wind. The time the leader spends in the front of the group is more for the stronger riders and less for the weaker riders
- To move out of the front position, seamlessly drift to the left making sure you don't cut in front of oncoming traffic (look over your left shoulder) and move to the back of the line.
- FYI: a double rotation pace line also exist in more experienced groups. Be aware and get familiar with this type of rotation before you start your ride.

4. Signals

- Leader should point out all road hazards through gesturing (pointing at the hazard) and verbally while the last rider should voice "Car back" when cars are approaching.
- Other hand signs and verbal communication to be familiar with include:
 1. "Clear" or "Wow"- when the leader approaches an intersection.
 2. Left hand down to the side palm facing the rider behind you to signal slowing or stopping.
 3. Left arm up in the air with elbow at 90 degrees signals a right turn or simply pointing in the appropriate direction for a left or right turn.
 4. If the group is creating a gap among riders, a rider may want to fill the gap and will signal by pointing with his finger his intention.
 5. While both hands are still on the handlebars, a flick of the elbow from the leader signals that he /she is ready for the next rider to take the lead. A right elbow flick signals the next leader to overtake him on his right as he gradually drifts to the left.

5. Dangers

- When there is obvious danger, create more space between you and the rider in front of you on busy roads. Do not draft at this time. Continue drafting after the danger has subsided.
- Do not spit while drafting as this could end up on the rider behind you.

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8/10/2009

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