

## Riding in groups - A guide to safe bike riding

Riding bicycles in groups can be a very satisfying, rewarding and safe experience. It can also be a dangerous experience. When riding a bike, you are operating in a multi variable world where the dynamics are constantly changing. Rider positions change, traffic conditions change, the road surface changes, the road direction changes, topography changes, the weather changes, and additional variables constantly come into and out of your immediate environment. While riding in a group, the safety of everyone in the group is dependent on everyone in the group riding safely and a single mis-step by one rider can endanger the whole group. When things go wrong in a group ride, they go very wrong very quickly and there is very little time to react. So knowing how to ride safely in groups can go a long way to keeping the riders safe. Whether the group is 2 people or 20, the same principles apply. After many miles on bikes, and observing many safe and unsafe riders and riding conditions, I am putting on paper my observations, recommendations and guidelines for safely riding in groups. These are only guidelines. Ultimately, every rider is responsible for riding safely and constantly being vigilant of the situation around them. Although many of these points seem like common sense, still they warrant inclusion in this list. As a point of reference, in this context a leading rider is anyone ahead of you and a following rider is anyone behind you.

1. **Be aware of your surroundings**, both the other riders and the greater world in which you're riding.
2. **Expect the unexpected.**
3. **Look for dangerous situations** that could be developing.
4. **Use a rear view mirror.** Sunglass mounted or helmet mounted mirrors, in my opinion, are far better than mirrors mounted in the end of road style handlebars. Handlebar mounted mirrors require that you look down to see behind yourself, making you take your eyes off the road ahead while you are doing it. Sunglasses or helmet mounted mirrors are lightweight and versatile. They move with your head and with the momentary flick of your eye you can see what's happening behind, while still maintaining visual contact with the road and riders ahead. I have ridden with over 40,000 other riders in my life time. I have been hit from behind 6 times by two riders; 3 times from one rider and 3 times by another. Both use handlebar mounted mirrors.
5. **Pay attention to what is going on around you**, what road markings are saying, traffic signals, the presence of other riders, and the presence of cars.
6. Visibility in a group is limited, so each rider needs to **be on the look out for all the other riders**. The leading riders can not see behind themselves because there are other riders in their line of view. Riders in the rear have limited forward visibility because of the riders ahead of them. Riders in the middle can not see forward or backward. Call out any hazards in the roadway so the following riders can avoid them. Call out when traffic is approaching from the rear so the riders ahead of you will be aware of it. Point to and call out glass or other hazards on the road that could pose a danger to other riders.
7. **Follow far enough back from other riders that you can stop** if the rider ahead does something unexpected. You will have to gauge this distance according to your speed, but a good rule is to maintain a 2 second interval.
8. Other riders will do unexpected things so it is incumbent on you to **make sure you are alert and prepared** to take evasive action if another rider does do something unexpected.

Unexpected actions can result from a whole host of things, like a dog running into the roadway, a rider trying to avoid a pot hole, a sudden puncture flat, an insect flying into a riders eye or ear, a car that veers too close to a rider. The possibilities are almost endless, but you need to be alert to the possibilities and keep enough distance so you can react before colliding with another rider.

9. **Signal turns in advance** so the other riders know what you are going to do and they can adjust their course and speed accordingly.
10. When other riders call out “car back” it means that a car is approaching from the rear. You should **make every effort to move toward the right side of the road** and give the car ample room to pass.
11. When a rider calls out “riders up” it means that your group is overtaking another group of riders and will probably pass them. You need to **move toward the left** to provide clearance for the riders being overtaken. This same principle applies when your group is approaching a runner, a walker, a person on horseback or any other obstruction in the roadway.
12. **Passing** another rider or group of riders should **always be done on the left** side of the rider being passed. Call out to the rider being over taken and announce “on your left”. This lets the rider know you are approaching and lets him take appropriate actions.
13. **Do not ride between a leading rider and the curb side** of the roadway. You do not want to ‘overlap’ the leading rider’s rear wheel on the ‘inside’. If the leading rider experiences an unexpected situation, his/her normal reaction is to move toward the curb. If you have your front wheel poked in there, the lead rider will hit you and potentially take both of you down.
14. **Stay on your own side of the road.** DO NOT ride in opposing lanes of traffic. DO NOT cross the “Yellow Line of Death”. Its there for a reason.
15. **Be smooth, consistent and predicable** in your riding style. Avoid sudden starts, sudden turns, and sudden stops. These abrupt actions can distract other riders and cause accidents.
16. **When passing another rider, give them plenty of room** before you pull back in front of them.
17. **Watch the road ahead for pot holes** or other potential bike damaging hazards and avoid them.
18. **Pace Lines should be left to the experts.** Drafting in another rider’s slipstream is an effective way to reduce wind resistance. It is also a dangerous practice and can lead to serious accidents and injury. Drafting and pace lines provide the riders with significantly reduced visibility and reaction time. A tiny mistake can put the whole group in the ditch.
19. A typical bike and rider weighs somewhere between 125 and 250 pounds. Their body is usually covered in Spandex or other cloth material. Spandex offers little in the way of abrasion or impact resistance. A small car on the other hand weighs at least 1,800 pounds and is covered in steel. Extensive research into the subject has proven that the bike and rider will ALWAYS lose an encounter with a car. ALWAYS. It is not enough to be right, you have to be safe. **Give cars the greatest possible respect**, even when they are in the wrong, because challenging a car will end poorly for the bike and rider.
20. **When changing lanes** in a group of riders, **point to the spot** you are going to move into before you move over. Again let the other riders know what you are planning before you do it.

21. **On descents** specifically, and passing in general, **pass on the other riders left**, pass on the straight-a-ways, not in the curves. The curves are the most dangerous part and a collision there would be painful for all involved.
22. **Be careful after a car or truck passes.** Many vehicles pull trailers, and you may not see them or know they are there. Don't pull back out after being passed by a vehicle until you make sure the road is clear.
23. **Be aware of the wind.** A strong crosswind can blow you off course and into other riders. This is especially true when riding from a protected area, behind trees for example, into an open area beside a field. The trees protect you from the effects of the wind, but as soon as you become exposed to the wind it can cause you to swerve. This is more pronounced on bikes with bladed spokes.
24. **If you need to stop** separate from the group, for instance to attend to a flat tire, first **signal your intention** to slow down and then indicate that you are pulling over. Some times you may need to move toward the center of the road to disengage yourself from the group before you are clear to pull over to the right. Once stopped, move completely off the road onto the shoulder. If you remain in the roadway, you are exposed the being hit by other bikes or vehicles.
25. **When you blow your nose, be courteous** to any riders following you.