

Manukau City Vets Cycling Club

Guidelines for Riding in a Bunch

Revised 31/05/2011

Why ride in a bunch?

Riding in a bunch can be the most enjoyable experience if done correctly. The advantage of riding as a bunch or peloton (French word for an organised group of riders) is that as an organised group you can share the work, to gain greater speed and distance from your ride.

The energy savings can be from 15% to 40% and is about 25% at 34 km/h where the wind is light to moderate and head on. By taking turns at the front, all riders can share the effort of the wind resistance and longer distances can be covered at better speeds.

However, bunch riding can be very dangerous or formidable if people in the group don't understand the rules, and unfair if riders don't do a share of the work.

Everyone needs to know these rules for the safety and welfare of all riders.

Road Code Rules:

In New Zealand the road code clearly states that cyclists may ride no more than two abreast and when overtaking a vehicle they shall be in single file.

This rule obviously does not apply on fully closed road or racing circuits such as car or horse racing tracks sometimes used in the sport.

In semi closed roads (roads which are technically closed but remain open for local residents and businesses) where the event field is preceded by a lead car with warning devices, and followed by a tail car also with adequate warning may be permitted to be more than two abreast, but certainly in these conditions riders should not cross the centre line, or actual centre if there is no painted centre line.

Public organized recreational events such as The Round Taupo Ride tend to adopt this style.

Clearly, in private training, and in informal bunch rides, there is no such leniency, and Road Code requirements apply. No more than two abreast at any time, and often only single file is the most advisable option.

Bunches need to visualise what a motorist is seeing and adjust their riding formation to harmonise to the conditions.

In MCVCC our edict is to keep bunches to less than 15 people and **preferably 12 or less**. This adopts recognition that 6 two abreast or 12 in single file is a no bigger visual

obstacle to drivers than a large vehicle, whereas a single file of 50 riders or 25 two abreast is far more daunting.

An advantage of smaller groups is also that riders are more likely to be of more similar riding skill and speed.

Tips for bunch riding:

The following explains what to do while riding in a large group or Peloton, however from time to time you may be riding in a smaller group which will require you to take your turn leading the group by yourself, not with a partner as described below, where the same etiquette shall apply.

Obey the road rules:

- Definitely at traffic lights - if you are on the front, and the lights turn orange, they will be red by the time the back of the bunch goes through the intersection.
- Definitely at large traffic Islands. You will endanger the lives of others in your peloton if you push the margins at the front.

Be prepared to wait up for any riders held by traffic lights or intersection delays for a re-group.

Race Rules:

Before a race, either in pre-race handout, or at the pre race address the Commissaire (cycling term for a Referee) should announce the bunch riding rules that shall apply in that race.

Be predictable with all actions:

- No Sudden Moves: Do not suddenly turn left, right, speed up or slow down, it is inefficient and dangerous.
- Always try to maintain a steady straight line. Remember that there are riders following closely behind.
- Be Smooth: Riders new to paceline feel the need to show they can keep up. Some work harder and speed up at the front. This is wrong. The front rider relinquishing the lead moves over and then slows down, slightly, usually by sitting up and catching more wind and or easing off the pedaling, not by braking.
- Avoid rushing forward when you are in the lead, (surges) unless you are trying to break away from the group. Surges cause gaps further back in the bunch which affect the riders at the back as they have to continually chase to stay with the bunch. (If you are in desperate need for some effort, it is better to drift off the back of the bunch and use your energy to surge back on to the back which does not disrupt the flow of the bunch.)

- Brake carefully; Ride safely and try to stay off the brakes. If you are inexperienced or a little nervous about riding too close to the wheel in front of you, stay at the back of the group, gain confidence and practice your the skills. When the pace eases, don't brake suddenly, instead ride to the side of the wheel in front and ease the pedaling off, then ease back into position again on the wheel. Practice on the back and soon you will be able to move up the line with a partner.
- Do not panic if you brush shoulders, hands or bars with another rider Try to stay relaxed through your upper body as this helps absorb any bumps. Brushing shoulders, hands or bars with another rider often happens in bunches and is quite safe provided riders do not panic, brake or change direction. Do not turn sideways and look, or move sharply away, keep your eyes to where you wish to be going and keep riding.
- A rider may wish to rest their hand on your shoulder to check behind, if this happens keep your line, keep looking ahead, don't join in a simultaneous look behind. If closeness is a problem to you, a useful drill is to practice with a friend in a car park. Do very large figure of eights side by side, firstly with light and rapid touch by hand to arm and the as confidence grows by alternate riders hands on shoulders, and bumping of bowed forearms, Change sides and directions to become accustomed to closeness on both sides. Do not lean or push off each other as it may cause a loss of control.
- **Give others a turn**, or feeling too pushed to make a contributive turn at the front; In recreational and training groups, all riders are not equal. There are the different genders, ages, degrees of wellness and fitness and degrees of confidence and expertise. The bunch accommodates these differences, and therefore the idea is not to prove how strong or weak you are but rather to learn how to work as a group, ride together, and feel comfortable changing positions. If you are feeling inadequate to give a full turn still rotate to the front but don't linger there, pull aside immediately for the following rider or riders.
- In a race situation on a closed circuit, the riders in the group can reasonably expect a commonness of standard and a reasonably good sharing of the lead.
- **Pull off in a Consistent Direction:** When riding in a group, unless the wind changes, riders relinquish the lead by "pulling off" either to the left or the right. **Whichever way the group is working, pull off the same way.** Anti-clockwise is thought to be the safest way with the peloton protecting the retreating rider, but in Auckland clockwise is often the norm.
- **Echelonning:** Where riders stack out across the road to shelter behind each other from cross winds, is technically legal as the group remains in single file. However it uses a lot of the road and riders should avoid this technique where it is inconsiderate to other Road users.

- A change or rotation because of wind direction, is done by the consensus of the front of the peloton or the peloton leader and clear indications of what is happening should be conveyed to the rest of the peloton.
- **Position on the Road:**
The innermost ride should be about one meter out from the kerb or parked cars. This means the outer rider should not crowd the inner rider in.
- Do not slalom kerb-side obstacles, as this has a pendulum affect to the back of the bunch. Ride a straight line.
- If the front of a bunch is single file the front rider should be about 1.5 metres out to provide better options of shelter for the following rider.
- Indicate when and where Pulling Off from leading: Indicate orally and physically when you are pulling off. Use the chicken wing indicator, by flapping an elbow just before pulling off. Flapping on the opposite side to which you are going to move. In this way any rider echeloned (behind you but stacked to the lee side because of the wind) can see your signal. Some riding groups adopt the pointing of a finger to where they are going, but keeping both hands on the handlebars is the safer option.
- 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 is 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). On an open road one rider would firstly pull off and drop back and then the second rider follows in the same direction. This means that for a period of time riders are three abreast, allowing the riders behind to come through to the front. To get to the back of the peloton, stop pedaling for a while or ease off 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. At the rear of the peloton the existing rearmost rider should call “last rider” to ensure the retreating riders are aware to pick up speed to maintain contact with the bunch. In race conditions this would not apply unless you really need the more tired rider in your bunch, to keep the effective bunch integrity going.
- Far safer and more legal is to shuffle the lead at the next set of traffic lights, or convenient lay-by, or road side car park areas where there are no cars.
- Always retire to the back of the bunch on recreational and open road bunch rides. 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.

Remember that riding in a bunch is about all riders sharing the workload.

- Retreating under large bunch Race Conditions. In large race condition bunches where a rider or riders are wishing to cover any possible breaks, and where those riders have the energy it is unwise to retreat much further back than half way down a field. However this is very much number driven. If a bunch is of 20 or less riders the retreat to the back guideline is reasonable but in larger bunches it would be unwise for strong riders to retreat to the back.
- Any rider wishing to reenter the peloton lines before reaching the back may only do so if firstly they have called and indicated what they wish to do, and secondly the rider behind the desired re-entry point is happy to let the retreating rider in. Often the weaker riders dwell towards the rear of a peloton and are more than happy to let a retreating rider in. But it is not a right.
- **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 along side 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.
- An alternate interpretation of half wheeling is overlapping in echelon style when it is not required and the rider being half-wheeled does not know).
- **Pedal downhill and riding skills;** Pedal downhill when at the front of the bunch as the riders behind you in your shelter will be travelling faster than you and by keeping your speed up it will reduce the need for the other riders to be over braking.
- Try to be in the "right gear" before you get to the lead and avoid changing gears when you are there.
- Conversely keep a watch for pending hills and be aware that the riders first to the hill will be slowed before following riders get there and whilst they still have a good speed up.
- If the wind is particularly strong or in race conditions the peloton may stretch out into single file. Hold your line and hold your gap, be prepared to leap-frog a weaker rider to maintain contact.
- Lean, don't steer on bends.

Position on the Road

In New Zealand the road law is to ride as far as practical to the left, further clarified in the NZTA (New Zealand Transport Agency Cycling skills guidelines edition 3). that cyclists should ride 1 meter out from the kerb

If the left most cyclist is riding the 1 metre out, in open road riding situations, the following rider should not pass on the left hand side. There is danger that the passed rider further will be forced into the road centre to a danger area which the under passing rider is unable to assess. Any irregular passing maneuver should be signaled vocally to the rider being passed.

Riding up hill:

- Many riders, even the experienced ones, free-wheel 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 suddenly losing momentum or even stalling as the rise out of the saddle is undertaken. Following the wheel in front too closely when climbing may result in a fall if it causes wheels to touch.
- In recreational and training rides it is customary to re-group at the summit, and for some pelotons the faster climbers go back to climb again in support of a slower rider.

In Racing, the hills are often where “it all happens” and breaks in the field occur.

Point out obstacles:

Point out obstacles such as parked cars, Pedestrian crossing safe bays, loose gravel, broken glass, holes, rocks or debris on the road, manhole covers, and road-kill, 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 letting those close to the front know.

Don't leave gaps when following wheels of the rider in front:

- 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. An ideal gap between your front wheel and the person in front is around 50cm, but certainly no greater than one metre.
- Keep your hands close to the brakes in case of a 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.

- Each time a gap is created the rider is to ride alone to bridge it. Riders behind you may 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 a lesser wind protection than the others).
- Look ahead, “looking through”. 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, glass, red lights etc, and be ready.
- Use and practice using your peripheral vision. Practice a glance under your arms. Listen.
- Don’t overlap wheels. A slight direction change or gust of wind could easily cause you to touch wheels with the rider in front and fall. If to avoid braking you overshoot give the front rider more width, up to 500 mm.

Lead in front:

Remember when you are on the front, you are not only responsible for yourself but 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.
- Don’t fool with bidons (water bottles) or food when leading; wait until you have pulled off, or at the rear. Make sure you have room around you for an unintentional wobble. Uncontrolled water bottles (bidons) are a large cause of accidents.
- Before you start the ride, make sure your water bottle is held firmly by your bottle cage and be diligent in handling it. Practice getting bottles out and back without looking.
- Don’t undress or get dressed at the front or in the middle of a bunch. Better to do this at the lights or at a voluntary bunch stop when every one can take off their wind jackets etc.

In race conditions any such activity should be well to the side or at the rear of the bunch.

I-Pods and ear pieces: These have no place in road cycling, either in the recreational bunches or during racing. If you desperately need to have one, stay on your wind trainer and do not endanger others on the peloton.

Acrobatics: Balancing in a stationary position whilst held up at traffic lights might feel good and skilful, but really just tells the bunch you are not good at re-cleating in. You will be most unpopular if you domino the rest of the bunch with a failed balance.

Punctures: If you have a puncture, yell out. If you are in the middle of a bunch hold up your hand vertically and hold your line. Let the other riders ride around you or pull up behind. In some bunches, the etiquette is for every one to stop and for other bunches you get left on your own. If every one else stops, it is not a good look to be the sole rider to keep riding off into the distance.

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 unless you are very experienced. Using aero bars means that your hands are away from the brakes. Aero bars are for time trial use only, i.e. on your own, out front or chasing back on from behind.

Yells and Screams: Riders will often yell short commands or advice. These "barks" often seem rude and angry, but usually has no meanness attached. It is just that there is too little time for full sentences and explanations. Do not take yells and screams personally.

Commands and Instructions: Communications differ from bunch to bunch. Everyone in the bunch should be prepared to make most of the common calls.

Glass! Fairly obvious reason

Hole! Fairly obvious reason

Car Back! (truck, boat, another bunch that is passing your bunch). A Car behind which the bunch may not be aware of or for which the trailing riders determine needs additional attention by the bunch.

Car Front! An approaching car, usually called after a "carback" call to let riders know there may be a squeeze going to happen, but could also happen if a rearward rider notes a rider in front may be riding too wide.

Inside! (or Passing left); warning to the rider in front that you have overlapped on their left side, or are passing that rider on the left (under-passing). This would not be used in closed circuit race conditions, but in Public events or open road racing underpassing, except as part of the rotational lapping should not be tried.

Outside! (or passing right); warning the rider about to be passed of your intentions. This would not be used in closed circuit race conditions.

Stopping! Pending red of Traffic lights, car in your way on an intersection, mechanical failure, comfort stop

Puncture! Fairly obvious reason

Door! Occupant of a parked car about to, or who has opened a roadside door.

Tighten up! bunch riding too wide on the road and impeding traffic.

Gestures:

Chicken wing: For indicating you have finished your spell at the front

Pointing: For indicating Road hazard

Left hand pointing across back; To indicate moving out to pass a parked car, a pedestrian, a slower rider, or moving out around a hazard.

Vertical arm in the air. Intention to stop, vertical and up for about 5 seconds so those further in the bunch can see the signal.

Right Thumb up; thanking a considerate motorist. (Rude gestures to other road users are **not** appropriate for the sport of cycling)

Wave through; Use your arm to wave through the bunch if you are slowing or stopping or are unable to keep to the wheel in front.

Road Signals:

All riders should hold their road signal for 3 seconds minimum to indicate to other road users the intention to change direction or stop.

I have drawn alterations from my own experience from 10 years of racing as an A grade Junior and Senior in Wellington in my youth, and 20 years participating in triathlon, coaching triathlon and cycling, 6 years of Secondary School coaching.

I have drawn and use extracts from "Skills and Training for Cyclists" by Arnie Baker MD and from Coach Fred's "Solutions to Road Cycling Challenges Volume 2" by Fred Matheny, and Carmichael Training systems training advice web site. The foremost two are coordinators /editors for the American Roadies web site RBR, and the papers referred to are E Books I have downloaded to assist my knowledge for Coaching which I have integrated together with the original document from Bike NZ and my own knowledge and Manukau Vets edicts.

Allan Bridge

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