

# Ride Skills

## Tips and Etiquette

**Riding tips to help stay on your bike and enjoy.**

### **1. SHARING THE ROAD**

- **Respect other road users**
- **Obey the road rules**, including traffic signals.
- **Be prepared for the unexpected** – 100% alert, 100% of the time
- **Be courteous** and anticipate mistakes (we all make them)
- **Be predictable** - always indicate your intentions with your voice and hand signals.  
Relay the signal from the front to the tail of the bunch.
- **Ride safe** – be aware of road conditions. Communicate hazards to others.
- **Stayed queued** at lights and intersections, rather than rolling up the side of stopped traffic.

## 2. SIGNALS

### Voice calls and hand signals

Bunch riding means ALL members of the bunch need to make calls. Calls need to be passed by ALL riders through the bunch, so that a call from the back makes it to the front and vice versa.

Voice Call	Hand signal	Meaning
'call'	arm straight up in the air	Wanting to change lanes. Signalled by lead rider until a call of 'wait' or 'over' is made from last rider on the right
'wait'		It is <b>not</b> safe to change lanes.
'over'		It is safe to change lanes. It is <b>not safe</b> until all vehicles have passed <b>all</b> riders at the front of the bunch. ('over 1' followed by 'over 2' used when multiple lanes changing is required.) <b><i>The rider calling 'over' should be safely in the lane before calling the bunch over.</i></b>
'hold the lane'		When you want the bunch to stay in the lane they are in and not move left.
'single up'		The bunch needs to change from 2 abreast to single file.
'Pair up'		It is safe for the bunch to go back to 2 abreast riding.
'stopping'		When the bunch needs to come to a stop.
'slowing'		made (preferably before it happens) when the group changes speed.
'rolling'		Used when traffic lights change to amber and <b>lead riders</b> make call that the <b>entire</b> bunch can make it through safely. ( <i>see other use below</i> )
'clear'		Made when turning corners or through roundabouts to signal it is safe. (Also 'clear left' and 'clear right')
'hole'	pointing towards the hole coming	A dangerous hole in the road is approaching. Made by the first rider and passed through the bunch by <b>all</b> riders. (Includes 'left' 'right' and 'middle'). <b><i>This is not for every tiny bump in the road.</i></b>
'rubbish'	pointing towards the obstruction coming	A dangerous obstruction is on the road and approaching. Made by the first rider and passed through the bunch by <b>all</b> riders.

	Left arm bent and placed behind back	The bunch is approaching and passing an object that may need you to move off your line to avoid. E.g., a parked car.
'door'		passing a car with potential occupant set to open or has opened door.

'car up'		On a narrow street a car coming the other way presents a potential risk so stay tight to the left.
'car back'		A car is behind the bunch wanting to pass or A car is overtaking the bunch
'turning left'	left arm out	Bunch will be turning if road is clear, be alert. (Also 'turning right')
'steady'		Used when riders on the front are pushing too much and breaking the bunch up.
'ease up'		Used when a rider or number of riders are dropped from a bunch. The front riders reduce speed such that those dropped can regroup. The goldilocks principle applies. Not too much, not too little, just right.
'group at the top'		On a climb the front rider will crest the top and find a safe spot to pull over for the entire bunch until all members have finished the climb.
'all on?'		Made from the <b>front</b> riders to ask if the bunch has regrouped.
'all on!'		Made from the <b>back</b> to signify that the bunch is back together.
'mechanical'		Problem with a rider which means the group needs to stop. (Use this for all issues including punctures as puncture is sometimes confused with 'bunch up'.)
'rolling'	with bent arm and finger twirl	Also used when the riders at the front of the bunch change, to provide for a fresh rider at the front. Right front moves into front left position. Do not surge.
'bunch up'		Used to get people to group near a quick changing set of lights
'changing'		Used by front riders when stopped at traffic lights to signal 'lights are about to go green so get ready we are about to move off'

## When Pace lining

'paceline'		Bunch begins paceline effort. Steady and smooth movements. (Movement is from right lane to left lane on the front)
'yes'		Used by the front left rider to signal that it is clear for the right rider to come in front
'last wheel'		Used by last rider on right to indicate to the rider on the left they will need to move across. <i>Note: Riders still need to check it is all clear to come across.</i>

## 3. CORNERING

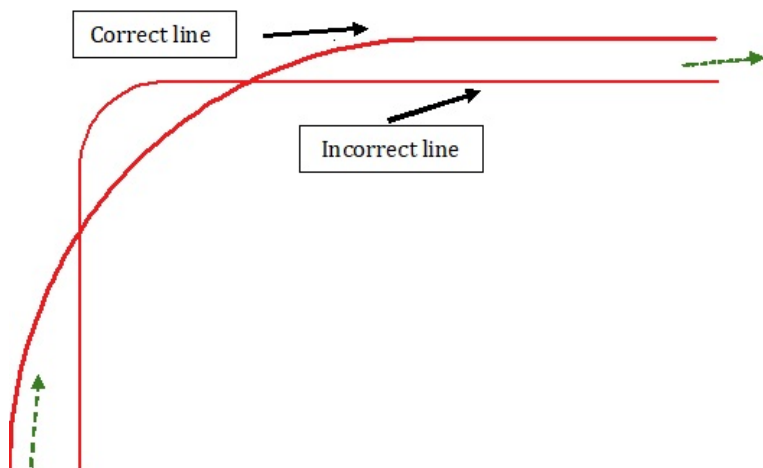
### THE LINE

This is the line you take through the corner. (See diagram). You need to flatten the line as much as possible, which depends on how much space there is. Often, it's a car's width.

It is useful to visualize an imaginary line on the road.

YOU GO WHERE YOU LOOK – THE BIKE GOES WHERE YOUR EYE GO.

WHEN YOU SEE AN OBSTACLE FOCUS ON YOUR LINE NOT THE OBSTACLE.



### BRAKING

The second point to remember is 'braking'. Never brake in a corner as you risk losing control of your traction.

Brake before a corner. Get into the habit of being at the correct speed before you reach the corner.

### EXITING

Keep your line in mind as your bike returns to upright. To maintain your general average speed, pedal out of the saddle straight away. This is a necessity for racing cyclists who race criteriums regularly. However, to do this too early can flip the bike.

### BODY POSITION

The lower your centre of gravity, the better you can corner. Keep your body down and back over the rear wheel. Push down on the inside on the handlebar rather than turn it. Lean into the corner and keep the inside pedal up. Keep your weight on the outside pedal.

Obviously, oil on the road and things like sand and loose gravel on the corner will influence your cornering. Always scan the road and make quick decisions for the prevailing conditions. Be prepared to change your line at the last minute. If you do not know the road, then do not ride the corners to your limit. Knowing the corners well will enable you to push it

# 4. BUNCH RIDING ETIQUETTE

## riding in a double file

**ACCELERATING:** Accelerating away from lights and across lanes should be done in steady manner, so that other cyclists are not dropped.

**BRAKING:** Give warning when you are braking, by voice and hand signals. When stopping do so gently without slamming the brakes on.

**CORNERING:** Give your partner plenty of room in the corner and keep level with them. Corner at a safe speed so that everyone behind can keep up and hold your wheel. If you find that you are continually 'losing wheels' then it is time to do some cornering practice. (See next article on Cornering)

**DOWNHILL:** If you are at the front of the bunch, keep pedaling down gentle gradients. If you don't everyone else will be putting on their brakes.

**HALF WHEELING:** Half-wheeling is when one rider always is not level with the rider beside. This puts the whole bunch out. Keep your handlebars level with the handlebars of the rider next to you, rather than your front wheel level with theirs.

**SITTING ON:** Keep reasonably close to the cyclist in front of you and again keep level with your partner. If too much of a gap is left the bunch is always playing 'catch up'. Keep your head and eyes up. Don't watch the gap between bikes. Scanning ahead will give you early warning of changes.

**UPHILL:** In some bunches everyone splits up and goes up at their own pace while other bunches try and stay together. If you feel like dropping off, pull off quickly so that others don't get caught behind you. When climbing a hill and deciding to get out of the saddle do so from the top of your stroke as so to not lose any momentum. Otherwise, the wheel slows momentarily and can hit the wheel of the cyclist behind.

# More Detail

## 1Formation

The bunch is one vehicle

**Double file.** Riders should pair in a double file if road conditions allow. You should not sit directly on the wheel of the rider in front. Try to maintain about a 30cm distance off the rear tyre and ride slightly off to the side of the rider in front. Newer riders may need to leave a larger gap, up to one and a half wheels behind.

The reason you offset slightly from the wheel in front is for better vision down the line and to allow more time to react to problems. If single file is called to allow a car or truck to pass, the rider on the right slots in behind his partner on the left.

Use one whole lane and ride side by side, even with your partner, slightly offset by a tyre width off the wheel in front.

**Single file** – on narrow or busy roads may be necessary for safety to allow other vehicles to pass the bunch.

## 2Sitting on the wheel

You should focus on the rider in front, and scan ahead. By focusing on the person, you will be more aware of what is happening in the bunch. It won't take you long to judge the distance between you and the rider in front.

## 3Position on the road

Cyclists have clearly defined rights that allow riders to occupy a full lane, ride in pair formation and have the same responsibilities as motorists.

It is dangerous to ride to the far left of a lane. This exposes you to greater danger from cars trying to squeeze past. A car must give you a full metre when passing. When possible, give parked cars – with or without an occupant – a one metre clearance. Ride a metre out from the gutter to avoid glass and rubbish.

Riding too close to the gutter also can create problems for riders.

Slipping off the roadway into the gutter can bring you down as you try to get back over the lip of the gutter. Great skill is required to hop out of the gutter. If you find yourself in this position, slow down and stay in the gutter until it flattens out; then exit at an angle.

## 4The front of the bunch

### THE LEAD RIDERS

The two riders on the front have a huge responsibility. They must set the pace, call all road obstacles and warn the bunch of any traffic changes.

When approaching a new set of lights, the lead riders have sole responsibility in making the call. It will either be lights, stopping or rolling. Remember that the bunch is one vehicle so if the bunch is committed to roll, then don't make decisions in the middle of the bunch to suddenly stop. This will cause heavy braking towards the back of the bunch.

If the lights are turning orange on approach, the lead riders must be aware of the size of the bunch and make the appropriate call. It is better to be more cautious than gung-ho!

When entering a roundabout or an intersection the lead riders must call **clear** or car coming. All calls should be relayed down the line.

## 5 Inside the bunch

**MAINTAIN YOUR SEPARATION** far enough from the rider in front to avoid any risk of touching wheels (an almost certain crash for the rear rider who touches if it happens) but stay close enough to stay in the wind shadow of the rider in front

- less than half a wheel diameter separation for experienced riders, up to 1.5-wheel diameters for newer, less confident riders.

Watch the rider in front – not just their back wheel – it's easier to maintain your separation that way and there is valuable knowledge for you to be learned from those in front of you

Warn those behind (and in front) of hazards coming their way. ALWAYS point to and/or describe shortly (but loudly) holes, broken glass, or anything likely to endanger those behind you – they may not be able to see the danger and at pack speeds you come on them quickly. Typical calls are hole (left/centre/right); glass, car (back/right/left/front). Once warned those behind need to watch for the item called and look for the path that clears the problem – Do not look at the problem or you will travel there!

## 6 The back of the bunch

### THE BACK MARKERS

The riders on the back also have a huge responsibility, particularly the rider on the right hand (outside) side. This person must call the bunch across lanes or warn of trucks, cars etc that are approaching when on narrow and/or single lane roads.

When crossing over lanes the call is either wait or over. It is important that the instruction is relayed up the line and when crossing over the bunch moves as one and does not fragment. The rider on the outside rear must maintain a distinct hand signal until the manoeuvre is completed.

On a narrow single lane road, the last rider must warn of cars behind. A call of car back is a simple call to understand.

Only call over when passing vehicle has passed all riders not just back markers.

# 7 Moving through the bunch

## ROLLING OVER – ROTATING

### Rotating Single Pace Line

The lead rider indicates by a flick of the elbow to pull out of the line to the left and slowly rolls to the back of the line.

This leaves the second rider now in first place to do his or her turn at the front and repeats the process for up to a kilometre depending on prevailing conditions.

It is important that the new lead rider maintains the tempo of the bunch and does not push too hard or slow down and this will have an adverse effect on the bunch.

### Rotating Double Pace Line

The lead riders should not attempt to stay on the front for too long; one kilometre is plenty. (Or as short as you want especially if you are tired or riding into strong headwind) This gives everyone a chance to go to the front. If you feel that you are not fit enough or strong enough to do a turn, go to the front, advise your partner and both immediately roll off. Do not suddenly pull out of the line prior to getting to the front - this only leaves gaps.

The rotate / roll-over procedure is simple. FCBUG uses the “chaingang” method, where every rider in the bunch moves position, similar to a slow paceline.

The two front riders make a signal with their hands to indicate that they’ll rotate. The rider on the right moves ahead slightly, and moves to the left side, in front of his previous teammate. The rider who was behind him on the right side moves forward to take the lead position on the right side.

At the rear of the bunch, the rider on the left moves across to the right side of the bunch.

## 8 Pace line

An advanced technique when riding conditions allow the pace usually picks up and a pace line forms in more advanced bunches. The formation is similar to a chain, where the rolling off the front occurs at speed by the lead rider.

The way the rider rolls off is usually dependent upon the direction of the wind. (But generally, to the Left) Keep the speed constant, do not slow down as you roll off; wait until you are well clear. In the case of a head or tail wind rolling off to the left towards the gutter is generally the best way.

The rider rolling off immediately starts soft-peddalling dropping speed.

**The rider coming through does not pick up speed. Surging through by the lead rider only strings the field out making it hard for those moving back down the line to move back on to the forward moving line.**

Riders in the slower pace line must stay on the wheel. Do not stop pedaling. This causes huge gaps in the line and can drop riders off the back.

If you cannot do a turn, stay out of the pace line. Too many times weaker riders position themselves 4th or 5th wheel and do not come to the front. This is infuriating to those wanting to keep the line moving.

Those riders not able or wanting to join the pace line should stay slightly off the back of the line containing the riders coming off the front, in the left line in single file, thus not confusing the paceline which may think someone on the right may be coming through. You will get good cover here, and you won't disrupt the riders in the pace line.

## 9Bunch Riding Summary

*Always* warn the riders behind of hazards.

*Always* check intersections/roundabouts for traffic.

*Don't* use aero bars, 'bunny hop' or leave gaps.

*Don't* abandon a puncture victim until they can cope.

*Don't* brake suddenly, it surprises the rider behind and you could end up wearing them.

*Don't* half wheel your partner; keep your handlebars even.

*Don't* surge, it causes gaps.

If changing the route, *warn* the bunch well ahead. If on the front, *warn* of traffic head.

If last rider, *warn* of traffic behind.

*Listen* for shouts and watch for hand signals.

*Maintain* your pace and your separation.

*Merge* right rider behind left if single file called.

*Ride* side by side and use up one whole lane when safe to do so.

Take inevitable changes with a *smile*.

*Watch* the rider in front, not just their back wheel.

Lastly, *be tolerant, responsible and supportive*.

## 5. COMMON REASONS FOR ACCIDENTS

The Problem	A Possible Solution
Lapse in concentration	To help you stay alert at all times when riding in a bunch, carry enough food and liquids so you don't get hungry or dehydrated.
Lack of bike control	Don't freewheel if you are forced onto grass or gravel, keep pedalling to keep control of your bike. Brake when you have control of your bike.
Lack of proper communication	Talk if you must, but watch what is happening within the bunch. up ahead of you. Listen for calls and always pass them down the line.
Lack of proper bike and equipment maintenance	Attach your pump securely with tape/Velcro. Check your bottle cage for fit, and bend it back if needed, so bottles stay put.
Choking the handlebars leading to poor control	Learn to ride your bike without your hands. Steering with your hips rather than choking your handlebars will give you better control.
Lack of bike skills such as the ability to 'bunny hop'	<b>Skilled riders should be aware of less experienced riders in the bunch and not 'bunny hop' an obstacle.</b>
Rolling back into the riders behind as you get out of the saddle up an incline	Keep pedalling as you get out of the saddle. Making sure you are at the top of the pedal stroke and keep the pressure on the pedal.
Sudden panic braking in the middle of the bunch	To slow without braking, sit up to increase wind resistance, pedal softer or pull slightly out of the line. If you must slow down yell, slowing loudly to warn others.
Getting caught in the gutter leading to falls as you exit.	Wait until the gutter flattens out, and then exit at an angle.

## 6. ROAD HAZARDS

Cycling is a unique sport because its arena is the open road. That's the same place frequented by traffic, potholes, snarling dogs and absentminded drivers and pedestrians.

But - inattention and poor technique can put us on the pavement as fast as any hazard. Use these tips and you'll be less likely to take a tumble.

Always ride with your head up. While cruising along, it's tempting to stare at the whirling pattern of the front spokes or fixate on your cycle computer's numbers. A momentary downward glance that lasts just a second too long can mean riding into a problem that could easily have been avoided.

The excessive focus on smooth and rhythmic pedaling can have a hypnotic effect. Daydreaming cyclists have crashed into the back of parked cars, wandered far into the traffic lane or blithely ridden off the road. Keep your head in the game.

Keep your bike in top mechanical condition. Repair or replace faulty parts sooner rather than later. It's a loser's game to try "just one more ride" with worn brake pads, a frayed cable, or tires with a threadbare tread or bulging sidewall.

Your first line of defence is a bike with all parts in good working order.

### Punctures

It's every rider's fate to flat. But it's relatively easy to limit the frequency.

Choose your line with care. The best way to avoid punctures is also the easiest: Steer around broken glass, road rubble and potholes.

Use tires with a Kevlar belt under the tread. Inspect the tread after every ride for embedded debris.

Remember, most punctures are caused by something sticking to the tread and working through during numerous wheel revolutions. Replace tires before they become so thin that they're virtually defenceless against pointy things.

Check inflation pressure every couple of days. Tubes are slightly porous and may lose several pounds of pressure each day. Soft tires slow you down, corner poorly, wear fast, and don't protect your rims against metal-bending impacts.

### Potholes

Hitting potholes can bend your rims beyond repair. If deep enough, it will send you over the handlebar when you bury the front wheel and the bike suddenly stops. Here's a primer on pothole evasion.

**Note where potholes lurk** on your normal training routes. Plan your line well in advance to avoid them. Don't expect the road to be in the same condition every day. Potholes have a habit of sprouting up out of nowhere, especially in the winter and early spring due to the daily freeze/thaw cycle.

Treat potholes like glass. Ride around them, first checking behind for traffic.

Be mindful of riding partners when you change your line. Newly minted potholes present a double hazard—the chasm itself, and the chunks of shattered pavement around it. If the pothole doesn't bend your wheel, the

sharp bits of rubble might puncture your tyre. Give these highway craters a wide berth.

## Railroad Tracks

Unlike most dangers, tracks can't be ridden around. You can suffer an instant crash if your tyres slip on the shiny steel rails. Ride with extreme caution and follow these safety tips.

**Slow down!** Tracks are rough, and even if you don't crash you could get a pinch flat. This happens when you ride into something abrupt, like a rail, and it pinches the tube between the tire and rim, slicing two little holes in the tube.

Rise slightly off the saddle. Have equal weight on your hands and feet. Let the bike chatter beneath you. Use your flexed arms and legs as shock absorbers. Cross tracks at a right angle. If the rails are diagonal to the road and you cross them at an angle, your front wheel can be twisted out from under you. A perpendicular passage is essential in the rain. Wet metal tracks are incredibly slippery. The slightest imbalance or abrupt move can send you sprawling.

Jump if you're confident. Racers who need to cross tracks at maximum speed will jump them. They use the same technique that works for potholes, but with more speed and lift because they must clear two rails. Coming down too early means the rear wheel will hit the second rail, guaranteeing a ruined rim or a pinch flat. In most cases, jumping isn't worth the danger. It's better to slow down, square up, and creep across.

## Slippery Spots

**Painted lines.** These can be slippery, especially the wide markings for pedestrian crossings at intersections. The paint fills in the asphalt's texture, producing a surface that's uncertain when dry and deadly when wet. The danger is worse when the paint is new.

**Dry oil slicks.** These may be nearly invisible, but you can spot them as darker streaks on a grey pavement. Be really careful in corners. You aren't safe if you ride through oil on the straights. The greased tread might slip in a corner just ahead.

**Wet oil slicks.** If it rains, a small oily patch can grow until it covers the whole lane. Be on the lookout for the tell-tale multi-coloured water. There's no pot of gold at the end of this rainbow, only a black-and-blue meeting with the pavement.

**Wet metal.** If it's been raining and you come upon anything metal in the road (manhole cover, steel-deck bridge, road-repair plate), it's as treacherous as riding on ice. Cross it with the bike absolutely upright. Even a slight lean can cause the wheels to slip. Smart riders walk their bikes across wet steel bridges.

**Wet leaves.** Be very careful in the fall, or you will. Even if the road is dry, there can be moisture trapped between leaves littering the pavement.

When you see leaves in a corner, slow down and round the bend with your bike upright, not angled.