

*The following was written by Tino in the Spring of 2011. It is meant as introduction to people who want to mentor the DWC C-Group. HOWEVER, it is great reading for ALL who want to learn how to ride safely in a group!*

*Interested in becoming a DWC Group Ride Leader??? Send us an email!*

*-Spencer*

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## Group Riding 101 by Tino Sonora

Spring 2011

Much of this handout comes from Active.com, god bless them. I have added additional materiel to the original text, which is in italics. My basic points are, which you will see echoed in the articles below, in no particular order are:

1. SAFETY FIRST the DWC C-Group *ride* not a race, everyone should get back safe and concern free;
2. STRONG  $\neq$  GOOD - there are *many* strong riders in the area, for a variety of reasons: some mountain bike, some are triathletes and some have been riding many years. Road/group riding involves a different set of skills however. The close proximity of the riders requires riders to learn *how* to ride in a group and it's not as simple as showing for a ride and going out with a group of people. Like any skill it must be learned and practiced, and there is long list of dos and don'ts (see all the hints below).
3. Communicate with your fellow riders - let them know if you will do something out of the "ordinary"; obstacles in the road; other things that you find noteworthy, so too will the rest of the group;
4. THIS IS NOT A RACE, the C-Group is development ride, a place for riders to learn the skills necessary to ride in a group with confidence and, maybe later, race safely and efficiently in a group; as such it is a NO DROP ride, it's a recruiting tool, do not ride like pros in a sprint, I have seen many near crashes where riders go for a sprint almost hit the front wheel of the rider behind;
5. Keep your eyes forward, there is no need to constantly be looking around, inexperienced riders, tend to do this far more than seasoned riders. Remember, every time your head swivels your bike *will* follow, trust me;
6. What is acceptable in a race is generally not in a club ride; moreover, what is acceptable in a P12 race may not be in a 3 race, etc.
7. RELAX concentrate on relaxing, an instinctual response to riding in close proximity to people is to tense up, relax, your riding will be more fluid and safer;
8. Watch out for each other, be courteous, as a GROUP you are single organism, so:
  - a. Make riders aware of obstacles by pointing them out; if there is plenty of time to adjust do so;

- b. Red lights: Stop at yellow lights, think of your bike as being as long as the group is;
  - c. Individually, don't look at the wheel in front of you, try to “look through” the rider in front of you, look at the shoulder of the rider in front of you;
  - d. Get as close as you feel comfortable, with time, your comfort level riding in close proximity will grow and you will ride closer to each other;
  - e. Try to ride a little to the left or right of the rider, but don't overlap wheels, make sure your front wheel is a couple of inches behind the rear tire of the rider in front;
  - f. If there is a paceline and you have no intention pulling through, stay at the back, or when you reach the front, pull off right away (see “Riding Like a Pro” below to see the proper way to ride pacelines);
  - g. Do not halfwheel;
  - h. Do not attack, it's a no drop ride, not a race
  - i. Do not change speed in paceline, keep the pace steady, constantly braking and accelerating makes everyone behind you do the same, an accordion effect, eventually someone *will* crash;
  - j. When it is your turn to pull through, *do not accelerate*, the rider pulling off slows down so the speed in the pack stays the same;
  - k. Point out major obstacles that may cause someone to crash, small ones should be ignored, it get's to a “boy who cried wolf” situation if every little pebble is pointed out, better still, if the object is seen from distance, make a gradual adjustment to avoid it, don't swerve around it at the last moment.
9. You don't know everything, most riders I know, learn something new every ride they do, as do I. Be open to suggestions and advice from more experienced riders and don't take suggestions as a criticism, everybody wants to get home in one piece.



## Riding in a Paceline Is a Basic Cycling Skill

By Edmund R. Burke, Ph.D.  
Active.com

Why do many cyclists choose to go it alone when riding in club rides or centuries? Many group rides can turn into survival of the fittest, where the novice is quickly sent off the back.

Ideally, a group should contain both novices and experienced riders who don't feel compelled to prove themselves on every ride. The key is riding safely and effectively in a paceline.

Pacelines are either single or double. In a single paceline, everyone lines up behind the first rider, who maintains a constant speed. The rotation occurs when the front rider pulls off to the side and drifts to the back of the line. The next rider then sets the pace. Riders stay on the front from a few seconds to several minutes. This type of paceline has the advantage of requiring less road space.

A double echelon, also known as a rotating paceline, contains two lines of riders side by side, continuously in motion. One line goes slightly faster than the other does. Let's say you're the lead rider in the faster line. You should cross over to the slow line after passing the front wheel of the rider beside you (the front rider in the slower line). Then you drift back with the others in the slow line. When the final position is reached (back of the line), slide onto the back wheel of the last rider in the fast line.

Try a single echelon first. Lead for 20 seconds, then pull off either to the right or left and slide to the back of the line. Stay close enough to bump elbows, then move in behind the last person.

Now try the double paceline. Form two lines, side by side. March up the faster line, pull over, then drop back in the slower line, slow down in the recovery line, do not make the fast line accelerate to get around you, as a rule of thumb, I will soft pedal two full rotations to adjust my speed down. Practice both clockwise and counterclockwise rotation.

Now, practice adjusting to crosswinds. Wind direction determines which way to pull off you always move into a crosswind. This way, the advancing line that is already working harder gets some protection from the wind.

In strong crosswinds, riders become offset like geese flying south for the winter, forming what is known as an echelon. They also overlap wheels, which means a mistake in which wheels touch can take down the whole bunch. Do not overlap wheels, you will see racers in an echelon overlapping wheels in strong crosswinds, however, this is a no-no unless you are an experienced rider riding with other experienced riders. The width of this type of paceline also requires a completely traffic-free road.

Here are some additional tips for becoming a more efficient paceline rider:

- Get used to following closely to the rider in front of you to get the benefit of the draft. You use much less energy following a cyclist than riding out in the wind by yourself. Top riders feel comfortable riding within inches of the wheel in front. In a rotating paceline, stay as close together side-to-side.
- Put weaker riders behind stronger ones. A paceline is a team. It's only as strong as its weakest member is, so help that person.
- Ride smoothly and predictably. Never accelerate or brake quickly. If you are running up on the wheel in front, slow down by moving into the wind slightly. Avoid hitting the brakes.
- Maintain a constant speed when you get to the front by glancing at your cycle computer. The tendency for new riders is to jump and pick up the pace.
- If the rider at the front charges off, let that person go and hold your speed. If you're in a double echelon, move over and fill the hole just created.
- If you're tired, sit out as many turns as necessary at the back. Let riders coming back know that you are resting, and give them space to move in ahead of you.
- As the speed increases, gaps may develop because riders can't hold the wheel ahead or miss the last wheel as they try to get back on the end of the paceline. Strong riders need to fill these gaps in order to preserve the flow, even if it means jumping across and moving back up the line early.
- Reduce your effort up hills because the draft is less. Conversely, accelerate through more quickly on descents so everyone won't stack up from behind.

## 10 Rules to Group Ride Like a Pro

By Simeon Green  
[PezCycling News](#)

There are a series of basic rules to follow in order to ride properly in a group, and yet it is often surprising how few people know these rules.

You might think this doesn't apply to you; after all, you are a Cat. 1 and winner of the Thursday night or Saturday morning World

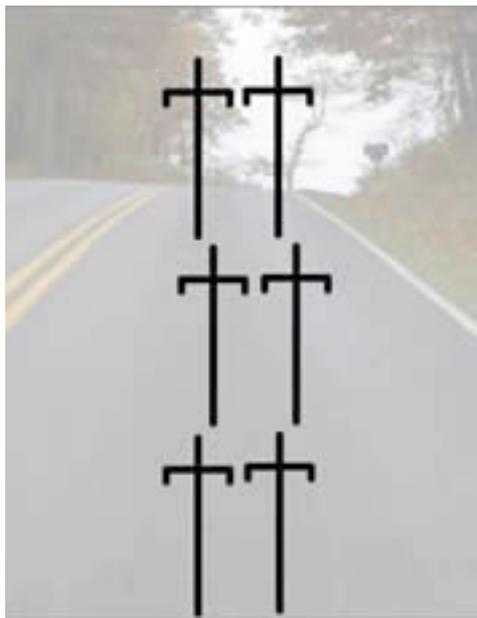
Championships...so like I said, it's amazing how many people don't know how to ride in a group. If you are new to the sport, this will help for your next group ride, if you are old to the sport, this should be a useful recap of what you already know.

## **Rule 1: It's Not a Race**

A group ride is NOT a race. You are not to "attack" off the front or try to show everyone how strong you are. That's what races are for.

## **Rule 2: Bar-to-Bar**

This is probably the most important rule. Whenever riding in a group, you should be riding two by two, side by side (with only a few centimetres between you, you should not be able to fit a bus between you and rider beside you) and be perfectly handlebar to handlebar.

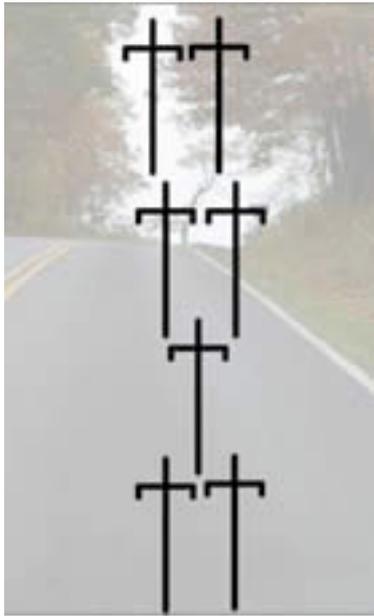


Do not at any time sprint ahead and disrupt the flow. Even if there is a corner coming up, stay side by side and go through the corner like a well-oiled machine. Riding with your bars ahead of the rider beside you is called "half-wheeling" and is a major faux pas.

It's up to you to keep up with the speed of the slower rider next to you. And for goodness sake, please try to keep to the side of the road, there is no need to take over the whole lane and annoy car drivers.

As with everything, there is an exception to the rule. If there is an uneven number of riders in the group and you don't have anyone to ride alongside, you should place yourself in between the two riders ahead of you, with your front wheel between their two rear wheels.

This allows the riders behind you to remain bar to bar and to keep the group tightly together. The riders behind you should ride with their front wheels on either side of your rear wheel. It's not acceptable to sit directly behind the rider ahead of you and leave a gap to your side.



Now, before you spark up and say that riding between the wheels of the riders preceding you is unsafe, let me point out that if everyone is riding bar to bar as they should be, you are guaranteed the space of a handlebar's width within which to move, which should be ample. So even if the two riders ahead of you knock into each other, you should have plenty of space. This is a pretty safe place to be.

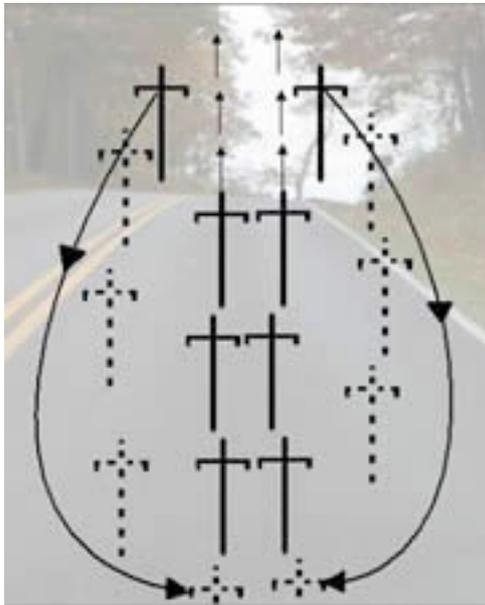
### **Rule 3: Peeling Off**

When you are tired of riding at the front and you feel it is time for you to go to the back, make sure the rider beside you knows you are tired and want to go back. (I would argue that in a club ride pull off before you get tired to preserve your energy – TS) Once you have both established that you are going back, check briefly that there isn't someone overlapping your back wheel, then both riders slowly and gradually move to the outside and let the group come through the middle. Do not suddenly veer off to the side; peel off in a steady and controlled manner.

## Rule 4: Pulling Through

When the two riders ahead of you peel off, it is your job to come through to the front and pull the group along. If you do not want to ride at the front because you are tired or less fit than the rest of the group, it's too late to avoid it now. Once you are in second wheel, you must come through to the front.

Do not speed up, and do not get out of the bar-to-bar formation. Maintaining a steady speed, squeeze through the gap and go to the front (see below). When the two riders ahead of you peel off, don't slow down and look around as if you don't know why on earth they would be pulling off to the sides of the group. Maintain your speed and go straight through without hesitation.



## Rule 5: Too Tired to Go to the Front

If you do not want to go to the front, sit at the back and let the riders coming back from the front of the group slot in ahead of you. It is not acceptable to work your way up to the front of the group and then look around acting lost and confused, slowing down because you don't feel strong enough to be at the front.

If for whatever reason you do find yourself at the front, go through and take what is known as a token pull. You go to the front for a couple seconds, agree with the rider beside you that you are both peeling off, and go to the back.

## Rule 6: Gaps

There should be no gaps in a group ride. As soon as you see a gap, fill it by riding into the space in a steady and controlled

manner. There is no need to sprint into the space and then slam on the brakes, just gradually fill in any gaps as soon as you see them. (Remember, the goal of the paceline is keep the variance of the speeds as low as possible. Every little adjustment made is magnified through the group, potentially bad with relative experienced riders – TS).

## **Rule 7: Moving About in a Group**

If you need to go to the back of the group, or need to move away from the side of road because the road is damaged or obstructed, just steadily move in whatever direction you want to go in. The key to all group riding is to do things gradually and steadily.

Even if there is a rider right next to you as you pull out to the side of the road, if you do it gradually, the other rider will naturally have time to move over with you. If you do anything sudden you will likely cause a crash. This is also very important when peeling off and filling a gap.

## **Rule 8: Obstacles and Hand Signals**

Now, this is a very important rule. I've recently seen in both the U.S. and Australia that people in group rides have gotten into the habit of yelling. I'm not too sure where this habit has come from, so let's set a few records straight.

When you see a hole in the road, it is absolutely NOT acceptable to yell "Hole!" at the top of your voice, then weave around it at the last minute. It is also unacceptable to yell "Slowing!" when you slow down. If you can't see the riders in front of you are slowing down, then maybe you should stick to monopoly on a Sunday afternoon.

All obstacles should be warned of by a simple hand signal. This does not mean pointing at something for five minutes after you have passed it. When you see an obstacle in the road ahead of you, put your hand down and give a signal that lets the riders behind you know in which direction they should go to avoid it. Traditionally a quick wave of the hand will suffice.

If you only see the obstacle at the last minute, ride through it! (I couldn't agree more. If you are at the front you can see and anticipate the obstacle and prepare for it, riders behind you can't see and may go down – better to not have that on your conscience – TS) Better to get a flat than to take down the whole

group. On the subject of obstacles, please only point out those that are worth pointing out.

"What obstacles are worth pointing out?" I hear you cry. That's simple. An obstacle worth pointing out is one that will damage a bike or person behind you. Please don't point out manhole covers unless they are deeply set in the road, and don't point out leaves or small cracks in the road, and certainly don't point out obstacles in the next lane.

## **Rule 9: Yelling**

As I said above, yelling is a big no-no. You don't see the pros riding around Europe on their preseason training camps yelling "Carrrrrrrr...Hole...Gravellllll...Red lightttttt!"

The problem is this: When you are more than two riders behind the person yelling, all you can actually hear is a general "Blurrrrr!" being yelled. So while everyone should be keeping their eyes peeled for general speed changes and obstacles, suddenly the majority of riders are looking around wondering what the obstacle is that has just been yelled out.

No one actually knows if you have just yelled "Hole!" and have not pointed it out, meaning some riders are scanning the ground left, right and center looking for an imaginary hole. Other riders are craning their necks thinking you yelled "Car!", while yet more riders are looking behind them thinking you yelled "George has a flaaat!" Yelling is strictly forbidden!

## **Rule 10: Slowing and Adjusting Speed**

This is probably the biggest crash causer on group rides. For some reason, when someone slows down ahead of them, a lot of riders jump for their brakes and yank the heck out of them, almost skidding and taking everyone down with them.

You should be riding ever-so-slightly to the side of the rider in front of you, so when they slow down you either stop pedalling and start to slightly overlap your front wheel with their rear wheel, or you touch the brakes gradually, once again using the "wheel overlap" as a buffer zone so as not to slow down too suddenly for the riders behind you.

These may seem like a pointless bunch of snotty, European, old-school rules, but they come from very simple principles of general safety for a group ride. So stick to them, and spread the good word to your fellow newcomers to the sport.

For any pro rider worth his salt, these are not even thought of as rules. They are instinctive and are a natural part of riding. This may be why some road riders can come across as rude and arrogant. Ride etiquette is so second nature to them, that in their eyes the only reason anyone would break them would be on purpose. (Also, experienced riders have expectations that have been burned into their brains about how to ride in such and such conditions and expect everyone to ride that way. If you don't meet those expectations be prepared for some "advice". When I was learning to pack ride advice often involved yelling, pushing, jersey pulling, being forced off the road, and deliberately being taken "off the back". TS)

PezCycling News' own resident semi-pro [Simeon Green](#) rides for Bouygues Telecom's feeder team, C.A.Castelsarrasin, in southern France.

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All diagrams courtesy of PezCycling News.

## Basic Skills for Group Riding

By Gale Bernhardt  
For Active.com

You don't have to be a competitive cyclist to enjoy the benefits of group rides. Utilised correctly, regular group sessions can motivate you, improve your fitness and make any ride more enjoyable. However, if you lack the technique or the fitness to ride with a group, the experience can be frustrating and leave you riding alone. In a worst case scenario, lack of skills causes you to crash, perhaps taking others down with you.

To help you get started, let's look at a few group ride basics.

Finding a group for you

When you search for a group to ride with, find out their general policies. Some meet for "no-drop" rides. These rides are NOT races. This means that no rider is left behind and you can count on an experienced rider to stay with you. Inquire if someone in the organisation teaches group riding etiquette.

Another option is to join a drop-in ride. These often begin in the parking lot of a local bike shop, with the pace of the group determined by the individuals or specific goals of the ride. Often, there are designated A, B and C groups to accommodate differences in riding speed.

The third most common choice is a race thinly disguised as a group ride. These are usually the fastest and most aggressive rides available. These rides are for very experienced cyclists and carry catchy names like, "Everyone Gets Dropped", "Ride Till You Puke" and "Wednesday World Championships." You have been officially forewarned just by reading the title.

Your local bike shop is a good place to start if you're looking for a group ride in your area. Most are associated with a club, bike shop or racing team.

#### Basic skills

A few basic skills are needed in order to successfully ride with any group. You must be capable of riding a straight line, controlling your speed, anticipating possible problems and watching the road ahead of you. At the same time, be alert for activity in your peripheral vision.

Hold your line -- If you have watched a professional cycling race, you know that every rider needs to "hold a line." This means that cyclists need to be capable of riding a line parallel with the edge of the road.

Practice this skill by riding 12 to 24 inches to the right of the white shoulder line while trying to keep parallel with that line.

The slipstream -- Some group rides practice staying together as one large mass more or less with little movement among the group.

Other group rides incorporate pace lines or some version thereof into their sessions. In its most basic form, a pace line occurs when one rider pulls a line of other riders behind them. Each person follows the rider in front of them by staying within a few inches to a few feet of their leader's rear wheel. This area of least wind resistance is known as a slipstream.

Staying in the lead rider's slipstream is called drafting. Riders that are in the draft position save upwards of 30 percent of energy compared to the lead rider. If you've ever had a chance to draft, you know that riding 20 miles per hour is significantly easier when you're following rather than leading. The difference is even more pronounced in a head wind.

Control your speed -- The lead rider in a pace line can stay at the front for just a few seconds or for several minutes. When you join a group that is rotating the lead position and it is time for you to lead, resist pouring on the gas to show everyone how strong you are. A pace line is happiest when the pace is steady. Fast accelerations or jerky braking motions disrupt the line and can cause a crash.

Keep eyes and ears open -- The first person in the group can see clear road. Thus, they need to point out road hazards do the rest of the people in the line. Pointing out hazards and verbal communication skills are important. For this reason, **do not use headphones in a group riding situation.**

When you are following someone, avoid getting a visual fixation on their rear wheel. Look several feet ahead, keeping the distance between your front wheel and the rider ahead of you in your peripheral vision. Watch for road hazards as well as motion to either side of the pace line.

Listen for cars approaching from the rear. A rear view mirror mounted on your helmet or glasses can be very helpful when watching for cars. However, it's better to develop your peripheral vision.

Maintain the pedalling motion of the other riders in your peripheral vision. Watch for sudden changes in cadence this usually signals some sort of problem.

Anticipate problems -- If you are riding in windy conditions or it is a hilly course, anticipate changes in the group or peloton. When the peloton changes directions, sometimes the weaker riders are no longer sheltered from the wind and they fall off the pace. The same is true for a hilly course. Riders that can usually stay with the group on flat roads can fall off the pace on a hill.

Get accustomed to watching for signs that a rider is struggling. This includes having difficulty finding the right gear, breathing like a steam engine or constantly looking over their shoulder.

You don't want to be stuck behind a struggling rider if you are feeling strong. Pay attention to the signals so you can manoeuvre yourself into a good position.

### Practice

This column just scratched the surface of group riding skills. Once you master the basics, you should continue to hone your skills. A good resource on mass riding is *Racing Tactics for Cyclists* by Thomas Prehn, even if you are not a competitive cyclist. Remember: in group rides smart riders often have the advantage over strong riders.

Gale Bernhardt was the 2003 USA Triathlon Pan American Games and 2004 USA Triathlon Olympic coach for both the men's and women's teams. Her first Olympic experience was as a personal cycling coach at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Thousands of athletes have had successful training and racing experiences using Gale's pre-built, easy-to-follow training plans.