

Technique & Etiquette

There are codes of behaviour that are somewhat unspoken yet understood in the cycling community. If you are a new rider or your riding is done mostly solo, you may be unaware of this protocol. To avoid embarrassment, it's a good idea to know the rules of the game before stepping out onto the field.

There is a lot of enjoyment to be had from cycling in a bunch - but to reap the full benefits and keep everyone happy you need to make sure you are aware of the etiquette and language of group riding.

Safety is the number one priority when riding solo or with a group. Behaving predictably is the best way to make this a reality. When other road users can anticipate your next move, you go a long way toward ensuring everyone's safety.

Bunch riding has its own etiquette and language. To the uninitiated the latter may seem like random hand signals, frantic elbow waving and indecipherable grunts, but once mastered, it is your passport to acceptance in any group of riders the world over.

Once you know the rules, signals and terminology of group riding you can seamlessly blend into any pack, whether it's a fast-rolling bunch in a sportive, on a local club run or even a collection of commuters you happen to pick up on the way home from work. Being aware of how to behave and communicate with riders around you will make the whole bunch experience safer, faster and more fun.

The problem with unwritten rules is that they can take years to learn - particularly if no one ever spells them out to you. While some are obvious and can be picked up easily, the subtlety of group ride etiquette can be confusing.

Blarney Cycling Club is a friendly club willingly offering good coaching advice and welcomes all levels of cyclist from the competitive to the touring cyclists.

The Four Fundamental Rules of Group Riding

1. Sitting on a wheel - this is a valuable lesson, its here where you get the most protection of windbreak. If there is a rider on your wheel then you have an obligation not to leave any gap open with the rider in front of you, immortal sin of cycling if you do.
2. Don't be a lazybones - once you get a bit stronger you are obliged to get off the back of the bunch and make your way to the front and do your bit. Not going through messes up the rhythm of the group. Missing turns and cruising at the back all day is a quick way to lose other riders' respect.
3. Relaying verbal information - It's important that you let everyone behind know what's coming up. Those at the back won't be able to see, so are relying on you to give them adequate warning and keep them safe. Try not to shout too frequently or unnecessarily. Important things to tell the group are when you are stopping, (otherwise you risk a pile-up), that a car is coming head-on with little space so riders need to single out, that there is a car trying to overtake from the rear, and that you are approaching a tight turn or gravel on a turn. "Car up" - is a car coming from behind the group and "Car down" - is one heading towards you.
4. Brakes - The biggest hazard in group riding is people stopping quickly and unexpectedly. More accidents and mass pile-ups are caused by people panicking and grabbing a handful of brake than anything else. If you stop suddenly, the person behind is just going to run into you, and a collision is likely to bring down other riders as well. If something happens in front, look for ways to avoid it while maintaining speed and shouting back a warning, rather than simply slamming on the anchors.