



ROAD GROUP RIDING GUIDELINES

Riding safely in a group (a *peloton*) requires everyone to think and ride as one. Group rides are an opportunity for members to ride together for fun and fitness. Experienced cyclists joining us on Monday Nights are expected to assist newcomers and the super fit should consider the MNRs as recovery/social rides. Inexperienced riders will not find a better opportunity to increase their fitness, bike handling skills and overall confidence.

General Expectations

“No Drop Ride” – no one will be “dropped” from the group. We’ll start the ride and finish the ride together. If needed, we will establish “re-grouping” points prior to the start of each ride. These will be points along the route where we agree to stop and...re-group. Depending on the day and the riders we may agree to split into 2 or more smaller groups.

Controlled pace – the speed of the group will be dictated by the “slowest” rider present (+5% - laziness will not be enabled!). However, ALL riders should arrive with a rudimentary base of cycling fitness. Meaning you are comfortably able to maintain an average pace of 20kph (when riding alone and with out significant head or tail wind) for 60 mins or more. If you are not sure, find out before coming to your first Monday Night Ride. We are happy to help - contact us to arrange a riding date to assess your ride readiness.

Traffic – you certainly don’t need cycling courier experience, but you should be moderately comfortable riding in traffic. We choose routes with lower speed limits and less traffic but eliminating busy, high-speed roads isn’t always possible. Note: As a tight group of riders, we are effectively a single vehicle. As such, we keep our groups limited to 16 riders per group. A group of more than 8 pairs of riders is too long for overtaking vehicles to pass us safely. If we have more than 16 riders, we will split into more than one group on the road.

Drafting – *to ride closely behind another cyclist in order to benefit from the wind resistance provided and move along in the lead rider’s slipstream.* At all times we will be riding closely together in order to benefit from the “draft” of the riders ahead. By doing so the group as a whole will expend 20 – 50% less energy than a solo rider (depends on the size of the group and how well it is working together). Don't worry if you have no experience with drafting – we will teach you. However, everyone must arrive willing to learn, i.e. overcome fear/push your limits/exit your comfort zone.

Ride leader(s) – each of our rides will have at least one ride leader. She’ll be the one giving directions at the beginning of the ride and, if applicable, introducing other leaders in the group. LISTEN to the ride leaders. They control the pace of the group, determine the route and are responsible for the group. They are there to ensure the objectives of Velodonnas group rides are met - being safe, having fun, improving skills and fitness!

Group Ride Rules

#1: It's Not a Race – A group ride is a ride, not a race. We won't be "attacking" off the front or sprinting from the back. Having said this, our ride routes may have a fun sprinting opportunity, and many will take advantage. Everyone waits at the stop sign (or other designated space) for the rest of the group to catch up.

#2: Ride Bar to Bar – Most of the time we will be riding in pairs or a *double paceline* (see diagram). When riding in this formation you must position yourself side by side, handlebar to handlebar. You must match the speed of the rider next to you at all times. Riding with your bars ahead of the rider beside you is called "half wheeling" – a cycling faux-pas, potentially dangerous, always annoying. NO HALF WHEELING.

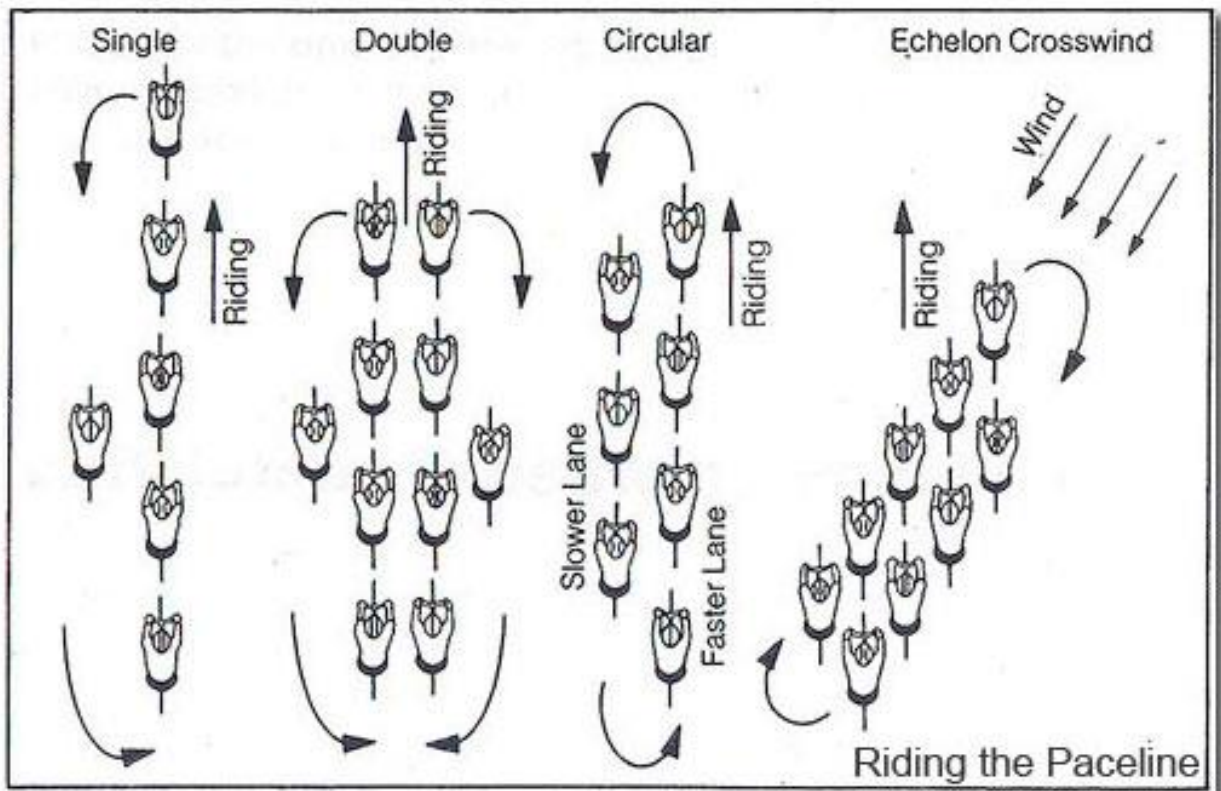
#3: Communicate – When you see an obstacle in the road ahead of you, put your hand down and give a signal that lets the riders behind you know a significant obstacle is forthcoming. Traditionally a quick wave of the hand or point of the finger will suffice. Do not yell into the peloton "HOOOLE" or "RED LIGHT". The problem with yelling is that 90% of the riders will not hear what you have said and will be distracted with wondering what the yelling is all about. Lead riders shall point out significant hazards and steer the group gradually around glass, potholes, pedestrians etc. Critical to a successful group ride is *trusting* that the rider in front of you will not drive their bike into a gaping hole, road crack or sewer grate. If you are riding correctly (directly behind the rider in front of you) then you should trust that whatever they are riding through you can also ride through. If you do find yourself riding through a large hole or a parallel crack in the road (very common here!) *do not panic*, relax, keep your wheel pointed straight ahead and ride it out.

You need not, and should not, point out *every* pothole, crack, oncoming car or small patch of gravel. Leave the warnings for the major obstacles – things that could potentially damage a bike or person behind you. Also, there should be no reason to alert the group of a red light up ahead. If you are about to slow down for whatever reason, use a hand signal – flat hand behind you *before* you slow down. Everyone should be riding "heads up" and paying attention to the traffic and the road, even at the back. Do not assume that you can leave it to the other riders to watch the road ahead. Some people are easily distracted or can't carry on a conversation *and* pay attention to the road etc. Don't be one of those people!

If you need to communicate something to the group, such as a flat, or that the group has been split due to the pace or a red light etc. then tell the rider(s) in front of you who will do the same until the whole group has the message. If you hear a message from the riders behind you, PASS IT ON to the riders in front so that the leaders know what is going on.

FYI: "Car back" means a car is passing from behind; "Car up" means an oncoming car.

#4: Where to look? – Don't fixate on the rear wheel of the bike in front of you. Look around, know what's coming – have "soft eyes". This is easier said than done when you are inexperienced. Practice looking through the front wheel (front axle) of the rider in front of you, widening your field of vision. With experience you will become more and more confident of your peripheral vision and will begin to "sense" where you are, in relation to the riders ahead of you, without staring.



#5: Peeling Off – often we will assume a “social” *double paceline* (see diagram). When you have taken your turn at the front make sure the rider beside you knows you intend to peel off. In a double paceline*, as illustrated above, both riders peel off at the same time. Once you have both established that you are going back, **SHOULDER CHECK!** before moving over. Once you are certain a car is not passing the group at that time (hence the desire for riders in the back to indicate “car back” when appropriate), you should neither veer off suddenly nor take all day to move over – peel off in a deliberate and controlled manner. Giving the riders behind you a signal is ideal – a flick of your elbow tells the riders behind that you are about to peel off. In this scenario, your elbow flick indicates to the riders behind that it’s their turn and you are about to peel off. If you are peeling off to the left, it’s your right elbow that you flick. Don’t point your finger at the ground because that signals an entirely different thing (see #3).

A common beginner faux pas is to stop pedaling or otherwise slow down just before peeling off the front. **DON’T SLOW DOWN.** This creates an accordion effect toward the rear. Simply, shoulder check to ensure it is safe for you to peel off and then do so while keeping steady pressure on the pedals until you have cleared the front. Speeding up a little (a couple of strong pedal strokes) before peeling off is perfectly acceptable (and may be preferable) as it effectively clears your rear wheel from the front wheel behind you before you peel off (ahem, not that ANYONE in the group will be overlapping wheels at ANY time).

After peeling off, “soft pedal” and let the group pass by. As the last couple riders are passing through, begin to apply more pressure to your pedal stroke to match the speed of the group and then smoothly reenter the group, taking your position at the back. If you don’t time your reentry correctly, a gap will occur and you will have to sprint to get back on.

Consider when 2 riders are coming back after their turn at the front, the group will be 4 riders wide across the road. Not ideal in heavy traffic and narrow roads. Here are some things to keep in mind: 1) the front pair should not peel off when a line up of cars are waiting to pass the group safely. Best to wait until the road is clear (i.e shoulder check!); 2) when you do peel off and

head to the back, don't take all day, soft pedal and reenter the back of the group as soon as possible; 3) the whole group needs to keep in mind that the rider(s) peeling off on the curb side of the road need room (i.e don't "gutter" your riding partners).

TIP: For goodness sake, don't exhaust yourself at the front. Peel off *before* you get tired. The group is only as strong as its weakest member so it is in the group's best interest to keep everyone fresh and happy. So what if your turn at the front is only 10 seconds while everyone else seems to pull forever? Let them. Not only *should* the stronger riders take longer pulls they will *want* the training benefit this provides. Don't forget to tell your partner that you're peeling off so you can do so together (if your partner wants to stay at the front, that's ok, a change of riding pairs can occur, just make sure everyone around you is aware of this).

*Keep in mind, the "Double paceline" illustrated above is often referred to as a "social paceline" and the "Circular paceline" illustrated is often called the "double paceline". The circular paceline, as illustrated, is the safest way to group ride on busy, single lane roadways as riders are only 2 wide and never 4 wide across the road.

#6: Pulling Through – When the rider(s) 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 (if applicable). Maintain your speed and go straight through without hesitation. If there is a strong headwind you will notice your speed decrease as you take the lead position. It's important to keep in mind that you will need to increase your *effort* (pressure on your pedals), in relation to the wind, in order to maintain the pace of the ride but do not overcompensate and increase your *speed*.

If you find you do not have the strength to be at the front, then take a "token pull" – ride at the front for a couple of seconds, agree with the rider beside you that you are both peeling off (or not, see above), and go to the back. Once at the back decide whether or not you want to remain in the rotation (take another turn at the front) or if you need to sit at the back for a while (or all day) to recover. Taking token pulls is a good way of increasing your fitness but remember, don't exhaust yourself. It's perfectly acceptable to stay at the back. Just let the riders coming back from the front know that you are "sitting in" and allow them to slot in ahead of you in the group. Create a gap in front of you and when the rider coming back sees it, call out "yup!" or "ok!" to indicate they can fill that gap in front of you.

TIP: Keep in mind that the very back of the group is actually less ideal than the middle of a group. Riders at the back suffer the worst of the accordion effect (often called "yo-yoing") that is sometimes inevitable no matter how conscientious the group. However, it is hard to "sit in" in the middle of the pack when the riders behind you are eager to take turns at the front.

#7: Fill the 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 gaps as you see them. Of course, make certain it is truly a gap. Don't just squeeze in between riders unnecessarily &/or unexpectedly. If a rider in front of you, for whatever reason, leaves the pack and heads to the back, that's a gap that needs filling. If the rider *beside* you leaves the pack and moves to the back, don't move over into their spot, let the rider behind them fill that gap. If no rider comes up to fill that gap, move over and ride directly behind and in between the pair in front of you. This position (behind and in between a pair of riders in front of you), is where you will be when riding in groups with an odd number of riders.

#8: Maneuvering in the Group – The key to all group riding is to do things gradually and steadily. If you need to go to the back of the group or need to avoid some damaged piece of road, just steadily move in whatever direction you need to go. Even if there is a rider right next

to you as you move over, if you do it gradually, the other rider will naturally move over with you. If you do anything sudden you will likely cause a crash.

If you are feeling strong (willing and able to expend more energy) and there is a cross wind you should position yourself on the windward side of the group. This way the “weaker” riders will be sheltered from the wind and able to conserve more energy. Likewise, if you are on the windward side and getting tired let the riders beside and behind you know that you need to switch sides. The rider beside you can then let a gap open in front of them that you can slowly fill while the rider behind you moves up to fill your space. Or, you can move out of your position (ALWAYS shoulder check first), go to the back and position yourself in a more sheltered spot.

Strong cross winds are best battled in an “echelon” formation. However, this is not a safe way for a large group to travel on open roadways (it takes up the whole road). So, we will predominately stick to the “social” double paceline formation. A double paceline that is constantly rotating (see “circular” in diagram) is the best alternative to an echelon in a strong crosswind situation. Familiarize yourself with this rotating paceline so you will know what to do when we decide to ride this way.

TIP: In a cross-wind situation group rotation is dictated by the wind direction, with the “riders coming back” on the windward side. In other words, if the wind is from the left the group rotates counter-clockwise and if the wind is blowing from the right the group rotates clockwise.

TIP: When riding in a circular paceline, there is a constant turnover of the lead rider. This is especially important when riding into a strong headwind. The lead rider will tire quickly, and a constant turnover keeps everyone rested enough to battle the wind for only short periods of time. A common error when overtaking the lead rider (to take your turn at the front of the group) is to overestimate the speed at which you overtake as well as the distance needed to safely move your bike in front of theirs. When you overtake too fast, and move over too late, you create a gap between yourself and them, forcing them to surge ahead to “get on” your wheel. This creates the dreaded accordion effect in the group, putting unnecessary pressure on all riders. When it is your turn, pass the lead rider at a natural pace. Remember, they are weakening from their turn at the front and you have the fresher legs so there is no need to speed up to overtake them. Pass them, then glance down at your elbow to track their front wheel, then smoothly and deliberately move over in front of them to take over the lead. They are expecting you to move over in front of them. So long as you do so smoothly and deliberately, with no dramatic changes in pace, there is little danger of your rear wheel interfering with their front wheel.

#9: Slowing and Adjusting Speed – Many of the riders in our group ride are new to drafting and group riding dynamics which means we spend a lot of time practicing and getting more comfortable riding very close to each other. But not too close, just close enough to benefit from the draft and keep gaps to a minimum.

For those getting comfortable with group riding, consider this TIP: instead of riding precisely behind the wheel in front of you, keep your front wheel slightly to the side. NOT overlapping but just behind and to the side, instead of directly behind, the wheel you are following. This way if the rider in front of you slows down your wheels are unlikely to touch. All you need do is stop pedaling or soft pedal until that rider speeds up again, using this temporary wheel overlap as a buffer zone so as not to slow down too suddenly for the riders behind you (starting that dreaded accordion effect through the group).

Generally speaking, do not brake in the peloton. If you must apply your brakes at any time do so gently, subtly and gradually – it's called “feathering” the brakes. Better ways of slowing your speed is to soft pedal, sit up a little or move slightly to the side and out of the draft for a moment. Excessive braking usually precedes crashing. Maintain a comfortable distance behind the rider in front of you and RELAX.

Also PAY ATTENTION – to the road ahead and to the riders ahead. Don't get caught up in conversation and forget that you are driving a vehicle (with only a thin layer of lycra protecting

you from the asphalt).

Climbing – When you need to get out of the saddle, such as when climbing, your bike will naturally shift backwards as you stand up. This is fine when riding solo but when in a group, with a rider close behind you, be aware. Shift into an appropriate gear and get out of the saddle smoothly while keeping a steady pressure on the pedals. This will keep your bike from shifting backward as you stand up. Apply the opposite technique when changing to a sitting position. Adjust your gear if necessary and keep a steady pressure on the pedals to avoid abrupt changes in speed. TIP: A common courtesy is to alert the rider behind you, with a “flick” of both elbows at once, prior to getting up out of the saddle. The same gesture can be used to alert a following rider to other imminent and unavoidable road surface change such as a speed bump.

Descending – The higher the speed, the more wind resistance. If you are leading on a downhill, KEEP PEDALING and DO NOT SLOW DOWN. If you are in front and start coasting on a downhill, everyone behind you will eat your lunch. Riders to the rear will accelerate faster downhill as drafting becomes more effective at higher speeds. If you are following, back off a couple of bike lengths to compensate for the greater affects of drafting. If you are closing on the rider in front, sit up and let the wind slow you or feather your brakes to maintain spacing, but in both cases you should keep pedaling against the resistance. Keeping your legs moving not only makes it easier to keep the spacing, but also helps the legs get rid of the acid build up from the previous climb. Once on the flat again, go back to the original pace so the riders behind can catch up. A gap may have formed during the descent. That’s OK and it’s a much safer alternative to piling up on top of each other! Finish the descent and resume the speed previously established.

#10: Relax – This one is really important. Staying relaxed, especially in the shoulders and arms, will allow you to be smooth and responsive. If you are stiff and bracing you will be “twitchy” and “all over the road” and you may notice that other riders don’t want to be near you. Anytime you are riding in close proximity of other riders there’s always the chance that you may come into contact. If you have tense arms and get bumped from the side, the shock will go directly to your front wheel and you will swerve, possibly lose control, and possibly cause a crash. If you are relaxed, it’s much easier to absorb the bump without losing control.

A good exercise is to go to a grass field with a friend and ride slowly side by side. Relax your arms and lightly bump each other using your relaxed elbows to absorb the (light) impact. While you’re at it, take turns riding behind one another and touch wheels (gently). You will become familiar with how to safely recover from this type of contact. It may save you, and others, from suffering “road rash” someday.

TIP: We will do these drills in our annual road skills clinic.

Other things to keep in mind:

- No aero bars on group rides – you don’t need to remove them from your bike, just do not use them while riding in a group.
- Obey the rules of the road. As cyclists, we have the right to be on the road, and to take an entire lane if we need to (we don’t always need to). As such we will STOP/put a foot down at each stop sign and red light (obviously). Once safe to proceed, we’ll travel as a group through the intersection. If the group is large and the light is short DO NOT run the red light. The group ahead will wait. If the group is still crossing the road and the light turns yellow, just like a car, make a DECISION and COMMUNICATE to those in the back. STOPPING! or ROLLING! DO NOT just slam on your brakes because the light turns yellow. Everyone MUST be attentive at controlled intersections. It’s OK to extend a green light but don’t run a red light.

- If the group is executing a left hand turn, consider that not all of the group may be able to make the turn as dictated by oncoming traffic. Again, DO NOT take risks, cross in front of oncoming traffic ONLY WHEN SAFE to do so, the group ahead will wait.
- On rural roadways/highways, left hand turns should be initiated by the back of the group. If the group is large, the riders in front are not in the best position to judge the distance between the riders in the back and the traffic coming up from behind. Riders in the back - when the lane is clear, or otherwise safe to move over to the left turning lane, make the call and move over to the left to execute the turn. Call out CLEAR! to the riders ahead. Everyone stay attentive. Alternatively, if the group is coming up on a left hand turn and the traffic does NOT allow us to safely move over to the left turn lane it in time to execute the turn as a vehicle would, then the best alternative is to slow down, pull over and cross the road at the intersection (like a pedestrian would but on the correct side of the road, of course).
- Bring at least 1 spare tube, and a means of pumping air into it, in the event of a puncture. It is ok to not know how to replace a punctured tube, others on the ride will help you. It's not ok to assume others will supply a tube for you. If you don't bring a spare tube then bring a phone so you can call for a ride home!
- Bring enough fluids and fuel to hydrate and energize you for a 2 hour ride. This is especially important in the heat of the summer.
- Be aware and look after each other – if you notice a rider is being dropped or otherwise having difficulty let others know. If you hear “slow down” or “flat” from behind it is your responsibility to relay that to the rider(s) in front of you etc., etc. until everyone has the message (see #3). Social conversation with your fellow cyclists is a good thing and is by no means discouraged but don't let it distract you from a general awareness of the road and the group.
- Keep to the side of the road as much as possible. We only need to use half the driving lane. But remember to allow enough room on the right for riders coming back from the front. When stopping to regroup at intersections, MOVE OFF THE ROAD entirely so that traffic doesn't back up behind our stopped group.

Let's review:

- NO SHOUTING – communicate with hand gestures or relay messages such as “car back” or “flat” to the riders closest to you. Relay that message up the group until it reaches the front.
- PAY ATTENTION – don't ride over debris or through potholes. Point them out AHEAD of time and steer the group around. Are we coming up on a controlled intersection? What's happening in front of you? Keep your wits about you. Especially important on a hard or long ride (or both), don't let fatigue make you dopey.
- NO HARD BRAKING – review #8 above.
- RELAX – don't stare, stay loose but alert, practice “soft eyes”.
- SHOULDER CHECK – don't become a hood ornament.
- MAINTAIN THE PACE – don't speed up when you reach the front (except when going downhill (see #9 Descending)).
- NO HALF WHEELING – match the speed of the rider beside you.
- DON'T OVERLAP WHEELS – something that won't happen when everyone is riding bar to bar and not half wheeling.

QUESTIONS? We love answering them! Don't be shy, there are no stupid questions.