

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 peleton (French word for an organised group of riders) is that as an organised group you can ride further and faster than individual riders or non-organised group.

You will expend up to 30 per cent less energy by riding sheltered in a bunch, as riders in front of you overcome the wind resistance. By taking turns at the front, all riders can share the effort and longer distances can be covered.

However, bunch riding can also be a huge pain especially if people in the group don't understand the rules or don't do their fair share of the work. Everyone needs to know these rules for the safety of all riders.

Below are some tips for bunch riding

Below explains what to do why riding in a large group or Peleton however from time to time you maybe 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, however the same rules apply.

Be predictable with all actions

Avoid sudden braking and changes of direction and always try to maintain a steady straight line. Remember that there are riders following closely behind. To slow down, gradually move out into the wind and slot back into position in the bunch when you have less speed. By putting your hands on the hoods on your brakes you can "sit up" this will allow your body to slow you down by utilizing the wind resistance.

Brake carefully

Ride safely and try to stay off the brakes. If you are inexperienced or a little nervous about riding to close to the wheel in front of you, stay at the back of the group, gain confidence and practice your bunch riding skills.

When the pace eases, don't brake suddenly, instead ride to the side of the wheel in front and ease the pedalling 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.

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), the pair separates and moves to each side (left and right or the right side if your riding at the front alone), allowing the riders behind to come through to the front. To get to the back of the peleton, stop pedalling 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.

Be smooth with turns at the front of the group

Avoid rushing forward (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.

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.

Choosing when to come off the front

You and your partner need to do some planning when you get on the front so that when you roll through you come off at a place where the road is wide enough for the group to be four-wide for a short time. With some planning, it is often possible to come off the front a few hundred metres earlier or later to avoid a dangerous situation and avoid unnecessarily upsetting motorists.

Always retire to the back of the bunch

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 and accidents happen down the back of the bunch as well.

Pedal downhill

Pedal downhill when at the front of the bunch as cyclists behind you will not want to ride with their brakes on consistently.

Point out obstacles

Point out obstacles such as parked cars, loose gravel, broken glass, holes, rocks or debris on the road, 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.

Hold your wheel

An appropriate gap between your front wheel and the person in front is around 50cm. Keep your hands close to the brakes in case of 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.

Don't leave gaps when following wheels

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. Each time you leave a gap you are forcing yourself to ride alone to bridge it. Also, riders behind you will 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 less windbreak than everyone else will).

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.

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.

Riding up hill

Many riders, even the experienced ones, freewheel 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. Many riders often lose their momentum when rising out of the saddle on a hill which can cause a sudden deceleration. Following the wheel in front too closely when climbing may result in you falling.

Look ahead

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, red lights etc, and be ready.

Obey the road rules

Especially at traffic lights - if you are on the front, and the lights turn orange, they will definitely be red by the time the back of the bunch goes through the intersection. You will endanger the lives of others if you run it.

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 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. Using aero bars means that your hands are away from the brakes. Aero bars are for time trial use only.