



Cycling Etiquette

Guide to Friendly Riding

Let's start with the rules of the road. The Texas laws state in regards to bikes:

Texas Drivers Handbook: Texas Department of Public Safety (Chapter 13, #5): Bicyclists are required to ride as far right in the lane as possible only when the lane can be safely shared by a car and a bicycle, side by side, even then, there are certain conditions that allow a bicyclist to take the full lane, such as:

1. The person is overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction.
2. The person is preparing for a left turn at an intersection or onto a private road or driveway.
3. There are unsafe conditions on the roadway such as fixed or moving objects, parked or moving vehicles, pedestrians, animals, potholes, or debris.
4. The lane is of substandard width making it unsafe for a car and a bicycle to safely share the lane side by side. When this is the case, it is best for the cyclist to take the full lane whether riding single file or two abreast.

Texas Bicycle Driver Rules: Texas Department of Public Safety:

1. Always ride as near to the right side of the road as possible and in the same direction as motor vehicles.
2. Warn other traffic when stopping or turning by giving required hand signals with the left hand and arm.
3. Be careful when passing parked vehicles or vehicles traveling in the same direction.
4. Not more than two bicycles may be driven side by side. (It is safer to ride single file.)
5. Do not ride double except on bicycles built for two persons.
6. Ride only upon the bicycle's regular seat.
7. Do not hitch to motor vehicles or streetcars.
8. Do not carry packages that will prevent keeping at least one hand on handlebars.
9. Always be alert for traffic from all directions.
10. Before leaving a driveway, alley, or when crossing a street or road, STOP, look both ways and wait for motor vehicles and pedestrians to pass.
11. Let pedestrians go first at street crossings and on sidewalks.
12. Get off the street or road and STOP when you hear the sirens of emergency vehicles.
13. Do not race with others on a Public Street or road.
14. Do not play riding games in the street or roadway.
15. Always keep your bicycle in good condition. Every bicycle shall have:
 - a. Brakes that will skid the braked wheels on dry, level, clean pavement.
 - b. When used at nighttime, the bicycle must have a white light on the front, which can be seen at least 500 feet.
 - c. When used at nighttime, the bicycle may have a red taillight when can be seen at least 500 feet and must have a red reflector visible for 300 feet.
16. Wear your "crash helmet". A bike helmet could save your life. It did mine.
17. It is suggested that the parents or owners drivers' license number be engraved on the bicycle frame. The serial number should be recorded to assist in finding stolen bicycles.
EXAMPLE: TX 00000000

Group Riding Safety & Etiquette

Cycling with a group is both a great way to improve fitness and practice bike handling skills. The most important thing to remember on a bike is safety and when you add a group of riders that you do not know, it compounds the problem with what the other riders will do in a situation. It is best to ride with a known group of riders, but that is almost impossible in a large ride. The following are some safe group riding Etiquette guidelines.

1. Safety is the first priority. ALWAYS wear a helmet, any time you are on the bike, have the strap connected. Strap should be snug around your chin and helmet should be sitting forward on your head (you should be able to see the edge of it when you are in your aero position).
2. Do not overlap your front wheel with the back wheel of the rider in front of you. This is the number one reason for falls in a group rides.
3. Communicate with the ride members whenever you (the lack of communication is the number two reason for falls in group rides):
 - a. Intend to leave the group (for any reason);
 - b. Have a mechanical problem (flat tire, chain drop, broken cleat, etc.);
Signal and shout it out. Other riders will go around you if they know you are in trouble. Get off the road to the right.
 - i. Call out cars or pedestrians, especially on narrow or winding roads. Use "CAR UP, CAR BACK, CAR RIGHT, PEDESTRIANS RIGHT" you get the idea.
 - ii. Call out any rough road or objects in the road that might cause a problem for cyclists. Riders at the front of the group are responsible for ensuring that riders behind them are aware of road conditions. Short commands like "HOLE!" or "WATCH THAT!" or "GRAVEL!" are usually the most clear. When possible, point to the obstacle or road condition. Pass on any warnings you hear you so that the whole group ride gets the message. You are the eyes and ears of the riders behind you commands like "CAR UP" or "CAR BACK" or "RUNNER UP", etc. If you are in the back of the pack your job is to call out "CAR BACK".
4. Maintain your position unless it is safe to change it. Every rider is responsible to monitor her/his own position. Look beyond the rider in front of you. Do not focus on any particular point. Be aware of hazards as they are pointed out by riders ahead. Use wind resistance or lightly feathered braking to slightly reduce speed (avoid grabbing breaks). When tired, exercise heightened vigilance.
5. Always ride in as straight a line as possible and avoid making any sudden moves. Call out "SLOWING" if you are coming to a stop or slowing down for any reason. Signal before making any turns and always glance quickly behind you to make sure other riders and cars are not in your way. When going around a curve hold your line.
6. Courteously wait or pedal slowly, after passing through a stop sign/light or climbing a hill, to allow everyone to re-group. Riders "chasing" to catch up are often tempted to unsafely pass through an intersection or take other risks. Waiting promotes safe riding. Too many times cyclists going up a hill ascend at different speeds, be sure to not cross into the oncoming lane of traffic. This is particularly dangerous with vehicles traveling at a high rate of speed and no visibility beyond the crest of the hill.
7. What to do when a driver yields right of way and waves a group of riders through. This situation is always going to be a judgment call. It may be OK to go through if it's a 4-way stop and there are no other cars in sight besides the one waving you through, but:
8. The busier the intersection, the less likely it is that it is going to be safe to go ahead and ride through. The very most important thing in this situation is that riders communicate with each other about what the group should do. If there are two riders in the front and one of them goes ahead and rides through, while the other one shakes their

head and waves at the car to go ahead, this is going to cause confusion both for the driver and for the riders behind - a very unsafe situation!

9. Bicycles are "vehicles" and are governed by the Rules of the Road. Ride two abreast unless traffic or road conditions require single-file riding (or local ordinance requires it). If cars are attempting to pass, then ride single-file. Hence, if you hear a rider call "CAR BACK" move to the right in single-file, do not stay next to the yellow line. We call those line huggers. I am sure you know who I am talking about. If a wide shoulder is adjacent to a highway (Hwy 359), ride only on the shoulder. Riding in the traffic lane of a posted 65-mph two-lane highway demonstrates poor judgment and impedes the flow of traffic. Riding four abreast on a narrow road up a blind hill or around a blind curve demonstrates an absence of judgment and completely impedes the flow of traffic.
10. Whether you are stopping because of mechanical problems or to regroup with your companions, move well off the road so you don't interfere with traffic. When you start up again, each cyclist should look for and yield to traffic.
11. When passing through an intersection, some cyclist's say, "Clear" if there is no cross-traffic. This is a dangerous practice that should be abandoned. It encourages riders to follow the leader, letting others do their thinking for them. Each cyclist is responsible for verifying that the way is indeed clear.
12. Be sure your bike is in perfect running order before going on a ride. Make sure you have a SPARE TUBE, PUMP, TIRE LEVERS and know how to change your own flat.
13. Have enough food (energy bars and gels work well) and drink (a replacement drink such as Accelerade or Gatorade works well on longer rides, but bring along a bottle of plain water as well). Drink at least one large water bottle per hour.
14. Ride with the flow of traffic and always stay as far to the right as is safe. Always ride in a single file line unless the bike lane is clearly wide enough for a double pace line.
15. Do not go into aerobars when riding in a group, even if you are at the very front of the group. Riders have most control on the hoods (tops of the handlebars with fingers touching the brakes). Make sure your hands can touch the breaks without moving them when riding in a group.
16. Be courteous to other riders and share the road. Ride to the right and pass on the left. Be sure to call out "PASSING ON YOUR LEFT" to let the other rider know you are there.
17. Come to a complete stop at all stop signs and red lights. If you are stopped at a red light, wait until the light changes to green before proceeding, even if it seems clear or safe to go against the light.
18. Know the route your group is riding. Listen carefully when the ride leader explains the route, especially if the area is new or unknown to you. Take a map, if provided.
19. As much as possible, keep the group riding together. If you are just a bit behind the group, work a little harder to catch up and get back in the draft. If you are just slightly ahead of the group, drop your pace a bit so that you fall back towards the group.
20. At the start of the ride, listen to the objectives of the ride and planned pacing, as described by the ride leader. Respect the plan by riding at the appropriate pace at the appropriate time, so that the group stays cohesive. Most rides begin with a more mellow warm-up segment. Be sure to stay with or behind the group leader during this segment even if you consider the pace too easy. At many rides the congestions at the beginning is considerable so take your time to get spread out. It may take a mile or two, be patient.

More Basic Group Riding Etiquette

1. Come to the ride prepared.
2. If the ride is scheduled to leave at 7:00 AM or 8:00 AM arrive early so the group does not have to wait while you get ready. (In cold weather this is especially important.)

3. Carry a spare tube (or 2), a mini-tool kit including patches, an inflation device, identification and money. Bring food and drink.
4. Be predictable. Ride in a straight line. Avoid sudden actions. Keep head up and stay alert at all times.
5. Keep Pedaling! Whenever a rider stops pedaling, they slow down (unless going downhill). This affects riders around them. Also, they lose “dynamic balance.” Learn to soft pedal where necessary.
6. Drafting reduces energy expenditure from 15% to 25% depending on weather conditions, size of the group, speed and rider skill. Learn to draft safely. If you don’t want to draft, your group riding experience will be limited.
Pace line riding observes conventions. (See below)
7. Ride at the group pace. Do not surge when assuming the lead. You know the type, you have been riding at 18mph and someone drops off the lead the next rider goes 21 mph. The poor guy that just got done pulling has to work extra hard to keep up. Not Good! Ride at a consistent pace.
8. Do not let gaps occur and repair them when they do.
9. Double and single pace lines behave differently. Ask if you don’t know.
10. If you do not want to take pulls, learn how to “ride the caboose.” When the lead rider comes back tell him or her you can not pull, drop back and he or she will go in front of you.

Formation for Pacelines:

They should quickly form into tight single file or double file formation, according to traffic conditions or upon the advice of an ‘ad hoc’ leader. The default formation is always double file, but if conditions are unsafe for this, single file is used. Very often, the first few miles of the ride will be single file until they get out of town.

Double Paceline:

Double Pace Line begins with riders in double file formation. Ride side by side with your front wheel in line with your partner’s. Try not to pull ahead. Check your computer to ensure you are maintaining the group’s speed when you are at the front. Otherwise, follow the rider in front of you, but with a slight offset to provide extra braking distance in case of emergency. Ideally, your front wheel should be a few inches behind the back wheel of the person in front of you. Increase that distance according to your skill-level and comfort, the skill-level of the person you are following and the skill-level of the group as a whole. You will also want to increase that distance a little to account for rough road conditions, higher speeds during descents or any other time you need more visibility or maneuvering space. Do not make any sudden changes in speed or direction! Remember, other riders are very close behind or next to you, and they depend on your consistency. Always have your hands close to your brakes so that you can react quickly in an emergency; that is, on the drops or hoods only; NEVER on the top of the bars or on the aero bars even if you are in the front.

Rotating:

The 2 riders at the front of the double pace line do the brunt of the work into the wind. The following riders make about 30% less effort, yet ride at the same speed. It benefits the group as a whole to rotate the leaders off the front once in a while and replace them with a fresh pair. The amount of time a pair will spend on the front depends on how fast the pace is, how strong the wind is and how strong that particular pair is. It could be 30 seconds up to 15 minutes. In any case, the leaders go to the back of the pace line when they have had enough. You should drop off before you get tired. Both go together. They look forward and behind to see that there is any traffic coming. Then they make a small hand signal to show they are about to break formation. The rider on the left moves to the left and the rider on the right moves to the right. They must then pedal a little softer so that their speed drops slightly relative to the rest of the

group. The second pair, still side by side, moves between them and to the front, without changing pace. It will now feel harder for them because they are riding into the wind but the miles/hr should remain the same. The pair that has rotated off the front will eventually arrive at the back of the pace line. The last rider should state "LAST" this prepares them to start picking up the speed and pull into position at the back of the pace line.

Other Types of Pacelines:

Double pace line is the default formation for many groups on the road, it is the preferred formation for fast and slow touring and most training rides. There are 3 exceptions.

1. When traffic is heavy, simply ride in single file, as described above.
2. When a fast-paced training ride is required, the formation usually develops into Single Pace Line (Racing Pace Line). This is a more advanced technique that is taught at some clinics and on some rides.
3. Echelon is the 3rd formation. It too is advanced but should not be used on most training rides. It should only be used when either the road is closed (as in an official race with marshals) or when you are absolutely sure there will be no traffic. It is a racing pace line used when there are strong cross-winds. It is recommend that if you have not tried these techniques yet, or if it has been a while since you were skilled at them, then you should attend a safety clinic where it is offered. They require practice to become proficient.

Written by Jay Dittmar in Houston, TX.

