

# Road Bike Safety and Etiquette

Making your cycling trips more predictable

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### *Disclaimer*

Stuff happens when you ride a bike. People can and do get hurt. A book can't protect you from an accident or guarantee you will never be in an accident.

The information is intended to help people get started in the right direction for bike safety while riding in a group (also known as a pack or a peloton). This is not an exhaustive list of road cycling safety tips as the world is dynamic and people come up with new ways to be reckless.

These tips should allow you to see some errors that you may not have been aware of before. This should enable you to be proactive and inform the offending riders of what needs to be corrected and why before their actions contribute to an accident.

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## **Ride Etiquette COVID-19 Protocols**

All activities will conform with then current guidelines issued by the OCA.

Participation in ride activities will require pre-registration.

All participants in Oakville Cycling Club (OCC) rides will be required to complete and pass a health screening on the day of the activity. The questions in the screening tool have been defined by the Ontario Ministry of Health:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/screening/customer/>

Screening must be completed prior to start of each ride to provide the Ride Leader proof of completion and passing.

All OCC ride activities will employ 2m physical distancing rules where practical and require the wearing of face masks whenever 2m cannot be maintained and athletes are not actively engaged in physical activity.

OCC members are responsible for maintaining their own equipment to limit risk of exposure between participants.

Ride leaders are encouraged to carry disposable gloves, wipes, and hand sanitizer should they need to assist another participant.

## Who should read this?

This document is intended for the up and coming novice cycling enthusiast who rides, or wants to ride, in a group of riders, also known as the pack, or peloton. The pros know this stuff, or should.

## About me

I have been a road cyclist since 1990. My objectives in cycling are to get fit and have fun doing it. I start every ride with the intention of coming home in one piece so I can be with my family and participate fully in the work force.

I consider myself an enthusiast road rider. I love to go fast on my bike. I love to climb, even though I am built more like a running back than a climber. I have pretty strong bike handling skills, but I am not an expert and have never raced. I will not ride no handed, as much as I think it looks so great when the pros are doing it while descending at 60 kilometres per hour.

I have climbed the Pyrenees, which includes descending them, which, in my opinion is harder than climbing them. I ride in the pouring rain, freezing temperatures, the scorching heat and every thing in between.

I have ridden a few centuries (100 mile rides) and more, but time constraints and family obligations keep most of my rides around 2 hours.

## Why do we need cycling etiquette?

Basically we need guidelines to provide order so that people will be safer.

Cycling is a great sport. It is even better when enjoyed with others. However, when you mix people, speed and egos, trouble can be just up the road.

Road riding is fast. You are with others who may or may not be skilled in riding at speed with other riders. You are on a road where dogs, cars, people, horses, rabbits, etcetera can seemingly come out of nowhere. When you obey the rules, and expect the unexpected, you increase the possibility you will come home with no pieces of flesh missing, ready to ride another day and head back to work. Your safe journey being completed.

Ride leaders need to control the pack so everyone can have a safer ride. Almost nothing is more frustrating than a messed up road ride. The beauty of the ride is gone. You are chasing your so called group or your splinter group is being chased by other riders. Tempers can flare. Not a pleasant way to spend your time.

On the other hand, a smooth running pack is a joy to ride in. A good ride leader and experienced riders are needed to maintain a good steady rhythm. You can learn the rules of the pack in order to increase everyone's safe enjoyment of a sport you can enjoy all of your life.

## Do....

1. **Think safety first**
  - a. The main point is to come home in one piece
  - b. You can always train to get better
  - c. It is hard to train if you are sporting a cast or are otherwise off your bike for weeks on end
2. **Wear a helmet at all times**
  - a. Make sure it fits properly and is secured
    - i. it can't do its job if it doesn't fit
  - b. I have seen people on road bikes without helmets and I always wonder why they take such risks
  - c. In a wipe out, you can't control how you fall. Any one who says they can has either never wiped out nor been around bikes long enough to see a wipe out
3. **Wearing cycling gloves**
  - a. Rashes on your hands are nasty and take a long time to heal
  - b. Gloves also cushion your hands against road vibration and take pressure off various nerves in your hands making for a enjoyable ride
4. **Learn to ride your bike**
  - a. It sounds simple, but many people don't know what their bike is capable of, nor they as riders
  - b. Be able to ride your bike in a straight line
    - i. Practice riding the white lines on the side of the road
    - ii. Only do this when they are dry and they are clear of road debris
      1. Wet road lines are slippery and can easily cause your tires to loose contact with the road and cause you to fall
      2. Road debris can cause you to suddenly swerve, or if you don't swerve, it may bump you off your bike
    - iii. Be sure you are not too far to the right of the road as the edge may be in rough condition, again causing you to loose control of your bike
  - c. Try some bunny hops over a water bottle
    - i. Comes in handy for hopping small and not so small road hazards like pot holes, rocks
  - d. Practice circling, stopping and riding figure 8's around cones, in a parking lot
    - i. Start with a big figure 8 at slow speed
    - ii. As your confidence grows, you can make your figure 8's smaller and tighter and increase your speed
  - e. Learn to corner
    - i. Cornering is an advanced topic and I can only tell you to continue doing your figure eights
    - ii. Talk to more experienced riders in your group about cornering
5. **Ensure your bike is professionally fitted to you**
  - a. A proper fit will allow you to be most efficient on the bike.
  - b. An improper bike fit can cause physical problems and you will never feel comfortable on the bike
  - c. A good bike shop will have people trained in bike fittings. It is time well spent as you will enjoy the bike more and be getting the most out of your time on the bike.

- d. One fellow who used to ride with us bought an expensive bike because the price was right. Unfortunately, the bike was the wrong size for him. He was stretched out so far over his handle bars that he couldn't get the bike to ride in a straight line if we paid him to. Every pedal stroke took his bike from one side to the other.

**6. Ride within your limits**

- a. If you are used to riding at 30 kph (kilometres per hour) by yourself, you may not be comfortable at 40 kph in a pack
- b. Step out of the pack if you are uncomfortable
  - i. Let the riders around you know you are stepping out by talking to them
  - ii. Look back to make sure it is safe
  - iii. Pull out and go to the back of the pack
  - iv. Drop off 2 meters (6 feet) or so and work like a dog to maintain pace with the pack
    - 1. You will soon get comfortable at a faster pace and you will have some respect from the other pack members because you know your limitations
    - 2. You will also increase your fitness as you work to keep up to the pack
- c. Better to be in one piece than to be the cause of an accident and risk being banished from the club

**7. Elect a ride leader for the start of each ride**

- a. Or set some one up as the leader for the season
- b. It is a skill to control a pack, not everyone can, or should do it
  - i. A lot of people don't want the responsibility
- c. People will also not listen to just anyone so that person either needs authority from the organization or force of character to control the pack
- d. People perform best when the expectations are set up front
- e. Determine what you are going to do for that ride
  - i. Easy ride, long distance, hard ride short distance, or whatever...
- f. Let people know the rules of the club
  - i. i.e. This list and others that you have
- g. It may take 15 minutes or more the first time and at the start of the year, but it is time well spent to be safe on the road
- h. When there is a new face in the pack, speak to the rider to find out how experienced they are and what their comfort level is
  - i. Keep an eye on the 'newbie' as you can tell more in 2 minutes of watching them ride than what the person has told you
  - ii. You also want to speak to them to show you are sociable and open to new members

**8. As the ride leader**

- a. Be vocal about safety
  - i. If people don't know they are doing something that could cause an accident, how are they ever going to learn?
  - ii. This should not be lectures that go on and on, but short, clear messages (i.e. you are riding too far to the left, pull it to the right because you are pushing the other riders into the stream of traffic)
- b. Have other experienced riders give instruction if they are comfortable doing that

- c. You do not need to stop the ride at every incident, but talk to the offender and then to the group at the next break, end of the ride or bring it up before the next ride
  - i. The goal is safety

**9. Determine what is and is not acceptable in your club**

- a. You may not know what is unsafe until you see it, but when you do, find an opportune moment and talk to the group about it
- b. As time goes on, you can see what does and does not work

**10. Have your bike in top mechanical condition**

- a. I had one rider in front of me going up a hill. I noticed he had a tire – not a tube – a tire – in his jersey pocket. Next thing I knew this guy’s bike started to wobble and he was slowing fast. I was following closely and had to quickly swerve to avoid a collision. He yelled that he had a flat. We all waited at the top of the hill. He pulled out the tire and started to change the tire and the tube. When questioned, he said he wanted to get every last mile from the tire. I road off with a few others and left him changing his tire.
  - i. Not only did he slow the pack down for their cherished Saturday morning ride, he created an incident in which the riders following him may have gone down
- b. If your bike continually throws the chain when shifting, get it fixed.
  - i. We had a serious accident when one fellow lost his chain at about 50 kph. He looked down at the chain and immediately swerved 5 feet to his left. He over corrected and immediately swerved to his right and he went down. Another rider was seriously injured when he could not avoid riding over the bouncing bike.
  - ii. The key to this accident is that the rider who lost his chain, should have just stayed in the pace line and should never have looked down.
    - 1. As soon as he looked down, he lost his visual reference points, which caused him to swerve out.
    - 2. He would be going fast as he was in the draft and would not be losing much speed so there was no need for him to leave the pace line.
    - 3. To replace his chain, he should have tried to move from his big ring to his small ring without looking down. You can sense if your chain is on or not, there is no need for visual verification.
- c. Carry a working patch kit, working spare tube, pump (or CO2 cartridges) and bike tool
  - i. Know how to use them so that people will not have to wait 10 minutes for a tire change
    - 1. practice changing a tube
  - ii. When I say a ‘working spare tube’, one rider in our group flattened and pulled out his tube. The valve was rusted shut! I threw him one of my tubes. Then his pump did not work. If he was on his own, he would have been stranded as we were way out in the country on a seldom travelled road.

**11. Be predictable to cars**

- a. Ride a straight line - no weaving down the road
- b. Stay to the right - no taking up the whole lane
- c. Signal your turns



- d. Obey traffic signals
  - i. In many places, the “Idaho stop” rule is in effect. This allows cyclists to maintain some of their momentum and not have to start from a dead stop each time they come to a stop sign. Essentially, you slow down at the intersection and if there is no traffic (pedestrians, cars or other vehicles) you roll through the intersection
  - ii. One of the worst things you can do as a cyclist is to blow through a stop sign as a group, without even slowing down. Not only is this dangerous, but this kind of reckless behaviour gives all cyclists a bad name. A friend of mine said ‘All cyclists are invisible to traffic until they do something wrong.’ Let’s be civil on the road and build bridges with motorists and pedestrians.

**12. Control your bike at all times**

- a. Be predictable
- b. No horseplay in the pack

**13. Avoid sudden movements of your bike from side to side** (ie to avoid a rock or pothole)

- a. You are more likely to go down from the swerve than from running through the pothole
  - i. Learn to ‘bunny hop’ your bike
    - 1. 4 inches up or so is good (a water bottle thickness)
    - 2. Even less is required to get you over most potholes
- b. Sudden movements scare the daylights out of the person behind you
  - i. The person behind cannot see what is on the road
  - ii. You only have to be behind a person once when there is a major swerve to see what I mean

**14. Your position on the road**

- a. Keep to the right of the middle of your lane
  - i. but not so far right that you are riding in the gutter or the edge of the road with no room to maneuver if it is required
- b. Ride two abreast
  - i. It is legal in most states and provinces
    - 1. As long as you are not impeding traffic, in general the police will not give you a ticket for riding two abreast
    - 2. If your group is on a rural road riding two abreast and traffic is light, the cars need to yield way to you. If you are in a lane, you have legal right to the lane.
  - ii. check this out for the whole scoop:
    - 1. <http://www.magma.ca/~ocbc/2abreast.html>
  - iii. or the shorter scoop:
    - 1. <http://velonews.com/news/fea/12452.0.html>
  - iv. Do not exceed 2 abreast, unless you are having riders move through the pack. riding more than 2 abreast is not safe. When riders are moving through the peloton (they are dropping back because they have finished their ‘pull’), this is a temporary measure and experienced riders do not move off the lead of the pack until it is safe for them to ‘drop back’.
- c. “2 up” may actually be safer than riding single file because:
  - i. you take up less distance on the road so that cars do not need to pass 14 cyclists, only 7 in length

- ii. the car needs to pull out a bit further, which gives you a bigger ‘cushion’ when they do pass
  - d. Ride straight lines (i.e. no rider should have their bike ‘wiggling’ down the road’)
    - i. if your riders can’t ride straight, have them go to a mall parking lot and ride the lines – or I ride the white lines at the shoulder of the road (don’t ride the yellow line!)
      - 1. NOTE: Stay off all painted lines when wet – they become slick and can cause you to lose control of your bike.
  - e. Ride about a foot apart, or closer
    - i. It may be unnerving at first but you will be able to easily do this once you develop the skills in yourself and the confidence in your fellow riders
- 15. **If you are new to a pace-line** (also known as a peloton or pack)
  - a. Talk to the ride leader and let him or her know your skill level
  - b. The group should spend time with you to make you feel comfortable
    - i. If they don’t then maybe they aren’t the group for you
  - c. Listen to the ride leader, you will probably be paired up with an experienced rider so you can learn what to do and what not to do
  - d. Once you get to the front, do your pull
  - e. Keep the same effort, which means the same pace
    - i. do not accelerate
    - ii. do not slow down
    - iii. it will be harder at the front as you no longer have a rider acting as a windshield for you
    - iv. your pull will be determined by your fitness level, an approximate distance (ie one concession, 5 hydro poles), or a time (30 seconds, 5 minutes)
- 16. **If your pull is not long, or you are not comfortable pulling at that pace,**
  - a. Always go to the front of the pace-line and drop off when it is safe to do so
    - i. Keep pedalling
    - ii. Look for cars
    - iii. Signal for the next rider to pull through
    - iv. Pull off safely
  - b. Always pull through, keep the rider rotation going so that the rhythm of the ride can be maintained
- 17. **Let the pack go if you cannot keep pace**
  - a. You can do strange things with your bike and cause an accident if you are out of your comfort zone
  - b. Let someone know that you are dropping out
  - c. An organized group will have a plan and communicate the plan for what to do if you get dropped
    - i. They may wait for you at the next intersection where there is a turn
    - ii. They may wait at the local watering hole
    - iii. They may wait at the next stop sign
- 18. **Pull off the front of the pack BEFORE you get tired**
  - a. This is not the Tour de France or even your local club race, we are here for the enjoyment of cycling

- b. If you are bagged at the front before you pull off, you will lose speed, the pack will lose speed and people will start to ‘accordion’ behind you
  - i. Cyclists dislike “accordioning” with a passion
    - 1. This is where the tail end of the pack gets further behind and must expend a fair amount of energy to accelerate to catch up to the riders at the front
  - ii. It makes for a choppy and dangerous ride
  - iii. People love a smooth, controlled, consistent pace
    - 1. It is easier on them mentally and physically
    - 2. Mentally it is easier as they don’t need to worry about sprinting to catch the pack and they feel that they are with a group of experienced riders.
    - 3. Physically because they don’t need to sprint to catch the group after dropping back. Sprinting takes up more energy than riding at a constant pace.
- c. This is doubly important just before the base of a hill
  - i. When you have ‘no gas’, people will pass you on both sides and curse you as they pass
  - ii. You may feel uncomfortable with riders passing you on both sides, but above all, hold your line!
    - 1. Do not swerve to get out of the line you are in because everyone has already picked a line around you
    - 2. Swerving at this time will cause an accident
  - iii. You have ‘blown up’ and you cannot catch the pack even at the top of the hill (they won’t be in much mood for waiting when you have messed up the ride rhythm)
  - iv. You might as well save your gas for the climb by dropping off before the climb

**19. Stay in the wheel ‘track’ of the rider in front of you**

- a. People tend to drift to one side or the other to see down the road better
  - i. If you drift across the road, you will take up the lane – which is not safe
- b. Look over the shoulder of the rider in front of you
- c. Don’t look at their rear wheel because you always hit what you look at
- d. Staying in line keeps the pack aerodynamics and keeps the pack tight

**20. With practice, you will eventually feel comfortable riding within a few inches of the wheel in front of you**

- a. This makes for better dynamics
- b. But stay alert – stuff happens

**21. When you are leading the pack and it is time to pull off:**

- a. While pedalling, look over your shoulder (I am assuming you are riding two up and you are the outside rider (rider on the left)) to ensure that there are no cars coming
- b. Continue pedalling, take your right hand off your handle bar and make a circular motion for the next riders to pull through
- c. Steer to the outside
- d. Decrease the pressure on your pedals ever so slightly so you don’t drop off the pace like a stone and need to chase back like a demon

- e. Now you are dropping back through the pack, when you get to the last rider and your front wheel is even with his back wheel, put pressure back on the pedals and you will come in nicely behind his wheel
- 22. Aero-bars are not to be ridden in while in the pack**
- a. You don't have as much control as you lose the leverage when your hands are narrower in on your bars
  - b. Your hands are further away from the brakes
  - c. Some groups don't allow aero-bars in their pack rides at all
- 23. Pedal through corners**
- a. By coasting, you will cause 'accordianing' at the back of the pack
    - i. Did I mention people hate 'accordianing'?
    - ii. Smooth, steady, even pace is what we are after
- 24. If you are leading as you come through a corner, wait for others once you have gone through the corner**
- a. Nothing is more frustrating than to be at the back of the pack and then have to chase the pack down once they have rounded the corner
    - i. Another wonder of 'accordianing'
- 25. Use your hand signals and / or verbally communicate to signal the following**
- a. Train tracks
    - i. Hand behind back, index and middle finger moving back and forth, other fingers are clasped
  - b. Walker / car or other large object parked on side of road
    - i. Usually right arm being waved from shoulder, from front to back (think front crawl swim stroke, but from handlebar height)
    - ii. You can call the other riders what the obstacle is, such as 'parked car', 'walker', 'horse' etc.
  - c. Stopping
    - i. Clenched hand behind back
    - ii. No need to call out to other riders that you are stopping. They will have noticed the pace slowing and the hand signals.
  - d. Left turn
    - i. Left arm straight to the left
  - e. Right turn
    - i. Right arm straight to the right or
    - ii. Left arm straight out, bent up at elbow
  - f. Going straight
    - i. Forward arm motion, similar to the Atlanta Braves 'tomahawk chop' hand movement
  - g. Uneven / gravel surface
    - i. Hand down, fingers open, move hand back and forth
  - h. Pot holes
    - i. Point directly at them and call them if they are large
- 26. At intersections**
- a. Slow down or stop as the conditions dictate
  - b. If no cars are coming and it is safe to cross, yell 'clear'
  - c. If cars are coming and it is unsafe to cross, yell 'car'
- 27. If a car is approaching from the rear yell 'car back'**

- a. Lets the riders up front know the car is coming and they should tighten up the line if it has become sloppy
28. **If you are climbing a hill or your line has become sloppy and a car approaches, yell 'car up'**
- a. Let's the riders know to tighten up the line
29. **Respect your fellow riders**
- a. We are out for some enjoyment and recreation, not to listen to some off-colour jokes
  - b. Watch your language. Even if no one says anything, it is degrading to be around bad language.
30. **Horses on the road**
- a. Slow down, talk to the horse rider - 'Good morning' or 'lovely day' is all you need to start the conversation
  - b. Horses are scared of bikes and they make bolt
  - c. The last thing you need is 2,000 pounds of muscle running wildly down the road endangering people, cars and itself
31. **Keep your hands on the hoods or in the drops while in the pack**
- a. If you ride with your hands up near the stem you decrease the control on your handlebars.
  - b. Your hands are further away from the brakes, increasing your reaction time, if you need to grab them quickly.
32. **Do continually emphasize safety.**
- a. We want to ensure that the pace-line is safe for us and is safe for other users of the road.
  - b. Do share the road
33. **Be courteous to others**
- a. We all need to share the road with trucks, cars, motorcycles, walkers, joggers, horses and other cyclists
  - b. We have all been involved in altercations with car drivers who think they own the road
    - i. Don't give them the satisfaction of seeing you lose your cool
    - ii. Instead, report them to the police. Take down their license plate, the description of the driver, the time and what happened.

## Don't....

1. **Don't be afraid to tell riders they cannot ride with you**
  - a. If they are unsafe, they are unsafe to themselves and to all the riders in the club as well as other users of the road
  - b. Tell them:
    - i. Why they are being banished
    - ii. What they need to do to prove they are allowed back in the club
    - iii. How long they will be 'gone' for
    - iv. They can be banished again
  - c. This also applies to riders of mechanically unsafe bikes
  - d. A short story: A guy was ahead of me in the pace line when we were climbing a hill. I saw he had a spare tire in his back pocket, which I thought was really unusual. Next thing I knew, he was all over the road and I was taking evasive actions! His tire had blown! He knew his tire was thread bare when he left home. He had just wanted to get the last mile out of it. In the meantime, he had almost caused an accident and the entire pack had to wait while he changed a tire and a tube. He was banished from the club shortly after.
2. **Don't stop pedalling on a hill**
  - a. You want to have people cursing you? Stop pedalling on a hill and you will cause them pain as they try to maneuver around you, having to shift to an easier gear and avoid getting knocked off their bikes from behind.
  - b. If you are one of the slower hill climbers,
    - i. Stay to the right (no one should be passing you on the right if you are at the right edge of the road)
    - ii. Stay within your zone all the way to the top of the hill
    - iii. If your buddies ride off without you, you will know where they will wait for you as your ride leader has already told them where to wait and for you to meet them
      1. right?
      2. right.
3. **Don't drink or eat when you are at the front of the pack**
  - a. Wait until you pull off the front
  - b. You are at the front to do your pull
  - c. Do practice riding with one hand and grabbing your water bottle, drinking and replacing it
    - i. Sounds simple, try it in a fast moving pace line with a wheel 3 inches in front of you, a rider to your one side, less than 1 foot away and with more riders behind you
  - d. Make sure you continue to pedal as you reach down to pick up your bottle and when you reach down to put your bottle away
    - i. When you stop pedalling, even for a pedal stroke or two, you lose touch with the wheel in front of you, causing the whole pack to slow down
  - e. Ideally, wait until the pack slows down for an intersection or stop light to grab your drink and snack if you can
    - i. But don't put off refuelling if you need it
4. **Don't fool around with your bike while at the front of the pack**

- a. If you have a mechanical issue, call out that you are pulling out of the pace line, make sure it is safe to pull out, then pull out
  - b. I once saw a person look down at their chain, which has come off the chain ring, swing out into traffic and then over correct and cause a serious accident. We were doing about 50 kph (30 mph) and the results were not pleasant. Ambulances were called and people's carbon fibre bikes literally exploding.
5. **Don't leave people out on the country roads alone if they have no idea where they are going or if their bike is broken**
- a. Just not nice
  - b. This especially applies if the person is not feeling well. Especially among us older riders. Who knows what physical ailment is lurking around the corner.
6. **Don't cross wheels in the pack**
- a. If you are behind someone, your wheel should be behind their wheel, definitely not up along side of the wheel by even a few inches
  - b. If the front rider needs to move quickly and the wheels touch, the rear rider is going down
7. **Don't stop emphasizing safety**
- a. Don't be afraid to talk out
  - b. Keep our roads safe!

## Make this document better

If you have more ‘Do’s’ and ‘Don’ts’ please send them to me and I will add them to the list if they are appropriate. I will have a list of content contributors at the end of the document.

If you have any constructive comments, please send them to: [RNarejko@gmail.com](mailto:RNarejko@gmail.com)

If you have any good cycling stories, I would love to hear them. Please send them to: [RNarejko@gmail.com](mailto:RNarejko@gmail.com)

## Acknowledgments

1. Daryl L: Oakville Cycling Club
  - a. For his friendship and instruction over the past 5 years and his dedication to the sport of cycling
2. Susan B: Muskoka Cycling Club
  - a. For a timely note to me when I was thinking about this same topic and giving me the impetus to jot these thoughts down