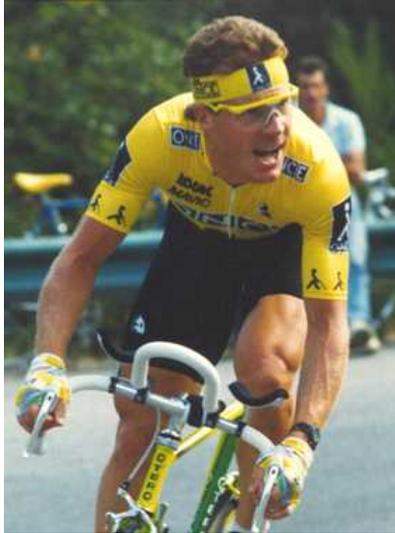


Bunch Skills for Cyclists

By Olympian and Tour de France cyclist Stephen Hodge

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Riding in a group is one of the most enjoyable ways to cycle. It provides excellent motivation to maintain a regular cycling schedule and the ability to carry on a conversation while riding your bike next to another person is such a positive that many riders spend years simply joining the bunch rides in their area. Others want to develop their cycling further and join a club so they can also compete in races or organised events.

Riding in a bunch requires skill on a bike and knowledge of how a bunch works to ensure a safe and cohesive group ride. While information such as these tips can give a few pointers to help you become more aware of the issues and techniques required, it is no substitute for the assistance of experienced riders and coaches from a club who can explain things on the road.

For more information on the clubs in your area or State see the web sites of organisations such as the Cycling Promotion Fund and Cycling Australia (Links section at the end of these tips).

WHY A BUNCH?

A bunch can travel much faster than an individual cyclist because above 30kph wind is the biggest resistance factor, and any cyclist behind the front rider/s in a bunch use a lot less energy. The following riders are effectively shielded until they take their turn at the front, maintain the speed for a time and then move backwards smoothly to recover for their next turn.

A bunch is also called a **pace line** when the riders change at the front continuously. Smooth pace lines are exciting to ride in and generally occur in a race when the riders want to maintain a high average speed.

Responsible riding by the bunch also has the capacity to greatly increase the image and acceptance by other vehicles of cyclists as legitimate road users, and counter the growing tendency by legislators to consider reducing access for bicycles to our road system. This is unfortunate when one considers that increasing cycling could actually be part of the solution to increase the level of physical activity in the community and reduce traffic congestion, obesity, stress levels and pollution!

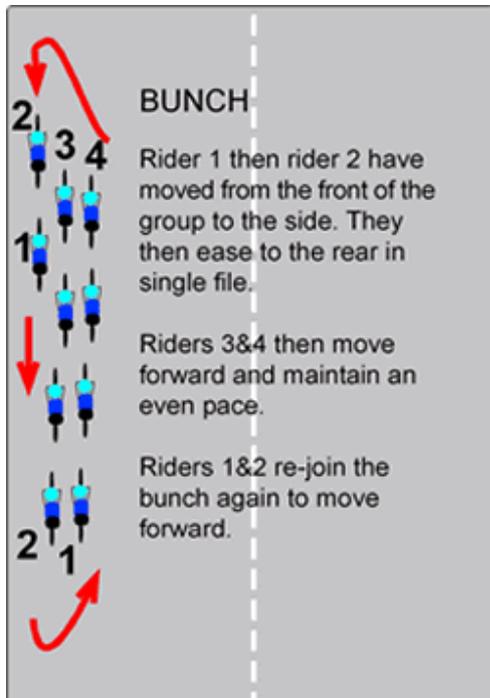
HOW DOES A BUNCH WORK?

The key feature of bunches and pace lines is that they are smooth. All riders maintain need to maintain their line and speed, and those that may not be so strong may choose to stay in the rear part of the group rather than coming through to take a turn at the front. A bunch ride is not the place to display your power and ability with sudden changes in pace or direction. If a gap forms in the group and you are strong enough to close it, it should be done gradually and smoothly. That way you take everyone else along for the ride! With so many riders riding in close proximity, unexpected changes in direction or speed can be dangerous and cause a fall.

A bunch is a group of riders in pairs, a **pace line** is a single line of riders moving up one side to the front and returning to the rear on the other. The decision to ride single or double depends on the number of riders and the prevailing road and traffic conditions. The national road rules state that you are allowed to

ride two abreast but a single line may be better in traffic. Common sense should prevail in the interests of everyone's safety.

Generally, the faster a group of riders is travelling the harder it is to maintain your speed when on the front, and the riders will make their turns shorter. In general, the principles for changing the lead riders of a double pace line are as follows.



Changing at the front of a bunch:

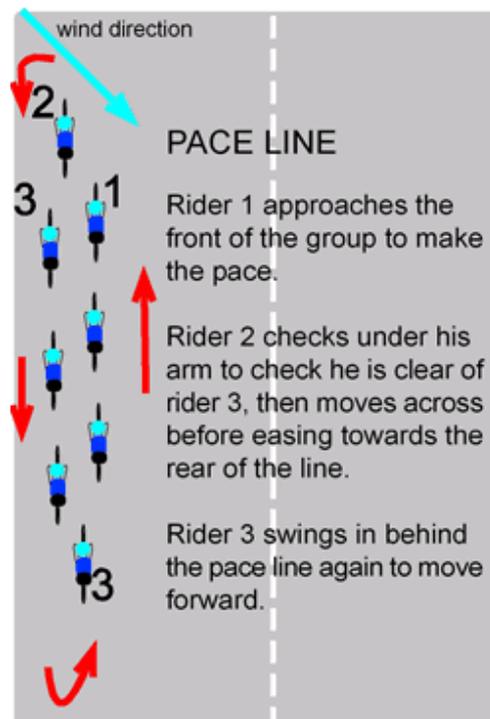
- The two front riders first signal their intention to change with each other, check that the traffic conditions will allow them to move to the rear, and that the following riders are not overlapping wheels with them. This rearwards check also alerts the others that a change is being considered.
- Those two riders then move smoothly to the side of the road in single file without slowing and when they are there, they slow gently to allow the next riders to continue to lead the group past them at a constant speed.
- Once at the back of the group they re-integrate into the last two positions.

Single pace line:

The same steps are followed by a single line of riders. The only difference being that moving to the front of the group happens continuously. The lead rider generally pulls off to the side the wind is coming from, allowing the riders approaching the front some shelter.

Turn time:

Different groups will choose to change the lead on a more or less frequent basis. A pace line can turn continuously or turns can be several minutes or more. Generally a time of between one and four minutes allows time to establish a good rhythm, and is the right time frame (ie. not too long) to maintain an even speed.



WHAT SHOULD RIDERS DO?

Starting out:

Before joining a bunch ride make sure you are comfortable riding close beside another rider without wobbling, are able to ride a very straight line even when having a drink from your bottle, can ride with one hand or sitting up to observe traffic coming from behind. It is very important to be comfortable in close proximity to other riders.

Anticipate:

Sudden movements create problems for everyone around you. Practice keeping an eye on conditions ahead of you. Don't look down at rear wheel in front of you, but use their back of the rider as your target while regularly glancing 3-5 riders ahead, and also up the road to see problems before they occur.

Safety zone:

Maintain a small area directly in front of yourself as a safety zone in the event that there is a need to brake quickly. This allows an extra instant to react if needed. Riding directly behind the rider in front of you keeps the group compact on the road, but allow a half to one metre space in front of you as a safety margin. Alternately, if the group is irregular, place yourself in between the two riders in front of you and half a metre back.

Signal hazards:

The riders behind you often cannot see the obstacles in front of the group. The lead riders have the responsibility to alert following riders of potholes, glass, fallen branches, debris and slower riders that may cause a fall or necessitate a change of direction by the bunch. This is done by calling out "hole" or similar, or by clearly pointing to the obstacle. If the group has to change course for a parked car or a slower rider, a sideways hand and arm wave can be used to direct riders away from the obstacle. The hazard should continue to be pointed out by the riders progressively down the group; this ensures that all have a chance to take evasive action. It is not necessary to point every irregularity out, only those things that are potentially a hazard for the riders.

The last riders should advise the group of approaching traffic by calling out "car back!" or similar, and signal any other traffic activity that affects the bunch.

Signal traffic lights and stop signs:

The front riders of a pace line also have the responsibility of guiding the group through traffic lights and stop signs. Remember that you must also consider the following riders when deciding whether you can make it through amber lights. If you must stop at lights clearly call out "stopping" or similar to alert following riders. A hand signal that can be seen from behind is also a good strategy. If some but not all of the group are caught at a red light, ease up to allow them to ride back to the group once the light changes to green again.

Help the less experienced:

The local bunch ride is often the first introduction that a new rider will have to the sport and the fun of group or club rides. If their skills need some development, suggest they contact the local cycling club to find out about skills training and give them some tips along the way. Make it a positive and welcoming experience for them. The more riders who enjoy cycling, the more cycling will grow. This in turn provides greater safety for riders and acceptance of cycling in the community as well as building a stronger base for the future of cycling.

If you are new to bunch riding, don't be afraid to let the other riders know, and you should get a better reception if at first you appear a bit 'wobbly'.

WHAT SHOULD THE BUNCH DO?

First and foremost, **obey the law!**

Stop at red lights and at other appropriate times. Running lights runs the risk of accident and serious injury, you may be lucky and get through without incident, but the riders following you may believe it is safe to do so without having the benefit of the field of view you have.

Also, it is not in anyone's interests contributing to aggression on our roads, so let's be safe together!

Good bunches also look after their riders by:

- stopping to help fix small mechanical problems and punctures quickly, so that inexperienced riders are not left behind to fend for themselves,
- regrouping after hills or other difficulties to keep everyone together,
- waiting for the others if the group gets split up by a changing traffic light,
- helping the less experienced riders with tips and a helping hand when needed,
- working as a group. For example, the front riders calculate actions for the group as a whole to ride safely not just themselves, and the tail end riders should assist the group negotiate lane changes by acting as the rear turn indicators and signalling when the road is clear of traffic.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS:

- obey the law,
- check out what is happening around and ahead of yourself, don't look at the wheel in front - only the back of the rider & beyond,
- if you are leading the group, act responsibly for the sake of all the riders behind you, not just yourself,
- keep your braking, changing direction and other movements progressive,
- signal hazards to the other riders of your group,
- place yourself to maintain a safety run-out directly in front,
- welcome new members to the bunch,
- look after everyone in it by stopping to assist with mechanicals and incidents, and
- when in front, remember you have the responsibility of guiding the whole group who are following along behind you.

LINKS:

Cycling Promotion Fund cyclingpromotion.com.au | Cycling Australia cycling.org.au | Bicycle Federation of Australia bfa.asn.au

- To find out more about the Fund and its work or to get more information about cycling visit www.rideabike.com.au.
- Information brochures and fact sheets on cycling by the CPF site can be found [here](#).
- State-based contacts for all cycling organisations can be found [here](#).

DISCLAIMER

Every attempt has been made to ensure that details are accurate at the time of printing, however things can change quickly and we urge you to check the validity of the information yourself.



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