BICYCLE GROUP RIDES

Gran Fondos, shop rides and charity rides are just three of the most common ways that cyclists can learn how to enjoy sharing the roads in a group. Speeds vary from relaxed touring to a spirited, racing-level paceline. In well run events, the event organizers/staff evaluate participant skill, teach and use consistent verbal and hand signals, and control the front and rear of the pack.

Pre-event

Before a pedal is turned the leader of the ride must verify that the planned course is appropriate to the abilities of the attendees. It can be in the form of posting information about distance, elevation gain and average pace so that riders can decide if it is within their abilities. The organizer may also ask questions or observe the riders in a controlled environment (such as a parking lot) to get an understanding of the level of rider skill and fitness. If the planned course is deemed too challenging for some riders, the organizer should suggest they try a less ambitious ride or join a beginner-level group. The organizer can also modify the planned route to suit the abilities of the least experienced riders in the group.

‘Down the line’ communications

A paceline is a rider formation in which all cyclists form a single-file line in the road and ride quite close to the rider in front of them (often 1 foot or less). In close proximity such as this, all riders behind the leader benefit from the aerodynamic effects of the head rider blocking the wind. A drawback of this practice is limited sight distance. Oncoming traffic, traffic signals, turns, pedestrians, potholes and debris all require prior notice. This notice is achieved through verbal and hand signals that are passed ‘down the line’ starting with the lead rider. These signals must be established before the ride begins and must be employed uniformly by all participants.

Lead and Trailing Guides

In many group rides the best practice is to have two riders familiar with the course and of sufficient skill level to control the pack from the front and the rear. The leader can set the pace, keep watch for road hazards, and lead the group through the route so that others do not have to navigate. The rear must be manned as well so that no riders are lost, mechanical breakdowns can be announced, and the group stopped if there are any safety concerns.

Rider Responsibility

Riders share in the responsibility for safety for themselves and others. As participants in a group ride event, riders are responsible for following directions from their guides and the rules of the event. They are also responsible for communicating any health or equipment issues they may be experiencing to event coordinators so they can be properly addressed.

Safety: Before, During and After

Riding a bicycle is a great form of recreation, transportation and exercise. Riding in a group is a way to go faster than possible as an individual, learn new skills and even train for competition. For the sake of all participants in a group ride, the event organizer and the riders have responsibilities for safety, before, during and after the ride. A lack of proper planning, training, communication, or supervision can result in serious consequences for the riders in the group and other road users.

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