



# Group Riding Guide

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## Introduction

Islington Cycling Club is a friendly and diverse North London cycling club offering cycle sport for all. Our regular club rides are fun, and we have a nobody-gets-left-behind policy. You can find more about our [club values here](#) and our [club rides here](#).

This guide provides practical advice on how to ride safely and efficiently in a group and how to communicate when doing so. It is principally aimed at those who are new to cycling in a group. It should, however, also be of interest to more experienced cyclists as different clubs have different practices in this regard. Naturally, if you have any questions on any of these issues, please ask.

## Basics

- Always follow the [Highway Code](#), this is true even more so when representing the club and wearing club kit.
- Respect other road users
- Be on time
- Maintain your bike in good working order
- Carry sufficient water, food, and spares
- Wear a helmet at all times
- Use lights when riding in low light conditions
- Fit mudguards when wet

## Important Safety Notes

- **Half Wheeling:** Don't allow your front wheel to overlap the rear wheel of the rider in front of you. If you do and the rider in front swerves and hits your front wheel you are likely to crash.
- **Overtaking:** When overtaking other road users (whether it is parked cars, other cyclists, walkers, horses, etc.) there are a few things to keep in mind.
  - Minimum passing distance: Give other road users enough space, as you would expect cars to give you when overtaking.
  - "Staying Out": When at the front of a group and you have completed your overtake, you should "stay out" until the whole group has passed before pulling in. It helps to think of the whole group as a single organism or vehicle, rather than as individuals.

## Group Riding Principles

So how do I ride safely in a group?

Put simply, one should focus on the **Five Cs**:

1. Concentration
2. Consistency
3. Collective responsibility
4. Communication
5. Constructive feedback

**Concentration:** Pay attention to what is happening around (and especially ahead) of you, and listen to signals and commands from other members of the group. By doing so you should be able to anticipate what is going to happen and not have to react to it when it does. And remember to watch the person in front of you and not their bike. Bicycles do not have brake lights and you will learn significantly more from watching a rider's body language than from watching their spinning rear tyre.

**Consistency:** When cycling in a group there is no such thing as a pleasant surprise.

- **Hold your line:** Do not suddenly veer left or right.
- **Hold your position:** Keep in line with those of the rider next to you. **Don't allow your front wheel to overlap with the back wheel of the rider in front (known as "half wheeling")**. If you do and they have to swerve, then you are likely to crash.
- **Hold the pace:** When riding at the front of a group, try to keep a steady pace. Accelerating at the beginning, or decelerating at the end of your turn at the front (or "pull") both serve to ruin group dynamics.
- **Stay smooth:** Pedal smoothly and evenly and don't surge. When possible, **soft pedal rather than freewheeling unless braking**. Remember, smooth is fast. On a downhill, riders at the front should continue pedalling so those behind don't need to brake.
- **Don't grab your brakes:** Doing so is likely to cause the rider behind to collide with you.
- **Don't throw your wheel:** Take care when you get out of the saddle as it can cause your bike to move backwards and affect those behind you. To avoid this move your body forward and keep pressure on the downstroke to keep your bike moving forward.
- **Don't overcompensate:** If a rider ahead makes an unexpected movement, such as moving sideways or braking, many riders instinctively repeat the original movement "with interest", by moving or braking in a more pronounced manner. If the original, and possibly small, action is transmitted and magnified down the group in this way the result can often be dramatic by the time it reaches the back of the group.

**Communication:** This is key to safe group riding. Use the hand and verbal signals explained below to communicate hazards such as potholes, cars, etc. If you hear or see such a signal being given, repeat it, to pass the information to those riders behind or ahead of you (as the case may be). Where possible use both hand and verbal signals.

**Collective responsibility:** In addition to being responsible for your own safety you are also responsible for safety and wellbeing of the other members of the group. You may be aware of things before the ride leader, for example if a member of the group is falling behind. Act accordingly.

**Constructive feedback:** Be prepared to give club members constructive feedback when they don't follow the guidance in this note, and be ready to receive it when you don't. We need to do these things well. And we will only do that if we all focus on it.

## Communication: Bunch Calls & Hand Signals

OK. So how do I communicate (and what do all these signals mean)?

The key signals, and related actions, are as follows:

Call	Hand Signal	Meaning
"SLOWING"	Wave hand, palm down	Made (preferably before it happens) when the group changes speed, due to upcoming obstacle or hazard.
"STOPPING"	Hand down, palm backwards	Indicate the bunch will be coming to a stop.
"ROLLING"		To make the whole group aware to begin/continue moving, such as when the lights turn green.
"MECHANICAL" / "PUNCTURE"		To inform the whole group of a puncture or other mechanical problem, so everyone can slow down and stop <u>when and where it is safe to do so</u> . Do not brake or swerve suddenly.
"RIGHT TURN" / "LEFT TURN"	Arm out, parallel to ground, in direction of turn	Bunch will be turning if road is clear, be alert.
"OUT"	Left arm bent and placed behind back with finger pointing to the right	The bunch needs to <u>move to the right</u> to avoid an object, e.g. a parked car or a jogger in the road.  Can also be used with right arm to indicate moving left to avoid obstacles to the right, e.g. car turning right. "IN"
"CLEAR"		Made when turning corners or through roundabouts to signal it is safe. (Also 'clear left' and 'clear right')
"HOLE" "DOOR" "GRAVEL" etc.	Point at obstacle	Slowly move across the road to a position where you, and those following, can avoid the hazard, point to where the obstruction is to allow those behind to avoid it, and then slowly move back to the original position on the road. <u>Pass the call all the way to the back.</u>
"SINGLE OUT"		Sometimes it may be safer for the group to ride in single file rather than in a double line, e.g. when riding up or down a steep hill. Riders on the left hand (inside) line should then adjust their pace to allow the riders on the right hand (outside) line to move across and form part of the new, single, line.

"PAIR UP"/"TWO UP"		Move from single file into riding two abreast again. Shoulder check before moving out.
"CAR UP"		On a narrow street a car coming the other way presents a potential risk so stay tight to the left.
"CAR BACK"		A car is behind the bunch wanting to pass or a car is overtaking the bunch.
"HORSES"	Same as Slowing	<p>In these circumstances the group should also slow so as to be able to pass the horses safely. As you near the horses you should then greet the horse riders to ensure that both horses and riders are aware of your approach.</p> <p>Continue soft pedalling to avoid startling the horses with your freehub.</p>
"ALL UP?"		<p>Made from the <b>front</b> riders to ask if the bunch has regrouped.</p> <p>Riders at the <b>back</b> reply with "YES, ALL UP!", or "NO"</p>
"EASE UP"		To request the riders at the front to slow the pace slightly so the whole group can stay together. It <u>does not mean a sudden slowing or braking</u> , but rather slightly reducing the effort required to keep up while continuing to pedal.
"STEADY"		Used to tell riders at the front not to speed up, but maintain current pace.
"CHANGE ONE"	Single finger twirl	Used to rotate riders at the front of the group when riding in pairs (see Group Riding Techniques below).

**IMPORTANT:** All of the signals given by the riders at the front should be passed back through the entire group (and vice versa for signals starting from the back).

Finally, it is customary to acknowledge other cyclists with a wave or cheery greeting. We are a friendly club and respect the traditions of the sport. Doing so is therefore strongly encouraged.

## Group Riding Techniques

OK. Now I know how to ride safely in a group. How do I ride in formation?

Riding in a group is generally acknowledged to reduce the required effort by up to 30%. Consequently, riding in a group, with all riders taking turns on the front, allows the group to go significantly faster and so to get to the coffee stop more quickly!

Sounds great (especially the coffee bit). So how do I do it?

We use three basic formations. Two-Up is more suited to recreational riding and the Paceline and the Chain Gang are more suited to training and racing.

### **Two-Up (Default Club Ride Formation)**

This comprises two parallel lines. Pairs of riders ride alongside each other as close to the riders in front as they are both comfortable with. Periodically we change the riders at the front so that they can shelter from the wind and so that all riders can share the effort.

To change riders at the front of the group, each of the members of the group will, essentially, shift their position in the group anti-clockwise. To do this, one of the riders at the front will shout "CHANGE ONE!". When he or she does so:

- the rider at the front on the left hand (inside) lane will ease his or her pace slightly so that the rider at the front in the right hand (outside) lane can move to the left and occupy his or her position in the group (but only when wheels are clear!);
- the left hand rider should shout "clear" to indicate when it is safe for the right hand rider to move across;
- the rider behind the rider who was at the front of the right hand (outside) line will move forward so as to be alongside the rider who is now at the front of the left hand (inside) lane; and
- the rider at the back of the left hand (inside) lane will move right to join the end of the right hand (outside) lane.

Riders may also shout "CHANGE TWO!" in which case every rider moves two places.

### **Chain Gang**

As with the Two-Up this comprises two parallel lines. And as with the Two-Up riders rotate position in an anti-clockwise direction.

So what's different?

Well, this time the riders' changes of position are constant, fluid, and are not announced by verbal signals. Essentially, the right hand (outside) lane moves about 1-2 kph faster than the left hand (inside lane). Consequently:

- when a rider reaches the front of the right hand (outside) lane he or she moves to the left to join the front of the left hand (inside) line and then eases his or her pace slightly; and
- when a rider reaches the back of the left hand (inside) lane he or she accelerates slightly and moves right to join the back of the right hand (outside) line.

Sounds complicated. Any tips?

Yes. A couple:

- **Accelerate when at the back but not when at the front:** When moving left to join the front of the left hand (inside) line, do not accelerate – Rely on the fact that the left hand (inside) line is moving slightly more slowly to allow you to do so. This is really important! If you don't do it the Chain Gang will get faster and faster until it breaks up.
- **Pull all the way through:** Keep your pace until you are completely off the front. Another rider is moving up on the outside and you don't want them to have to swerve to avoid you as you slow down. Doing that will make you very unpopular!
- **Be subtle:** When moving left or right keep your lines shallow – A sharp change of direction is likely to move you into the wheel of the rider ahead of, or behind, you (depending on which way you are moving).
- **Relax:** Look up, and don't just focus on the wheel ahead. Doing so will enable you to anticipate what is going to happen rather than react to it. And do try not to use your brakes. Yes, really!
- Remember, smooth is fast.

## Paceline

This comprises a single line and is used in high-speed training rides and race situations.

Each rider will complete a turn at the front. The length of that turn will vary depending on the speed, the general conditions (including, principally, the wind), and their fitness. They will then move to the left or to the right (depending on traffic). They will indicate they are moving off the front with an elbow flick (aka chicken wing). Flick your elbow on the side you want the group to come around you on, *NOT* the direction you are swinging off on.

When they do so the rest of the group will maintain their original pace and direction.

Having done their turn and moved off the front the first rider will then ease his or her pace slightly. This allows the rest of the group to pass and this first rider can join the back of the line.