

Pacelines The Procedures

One of the most fun aspects of bicycling is riding together in an organized paceline. A paceline of two or more riders has a distinct advantage over a single rider, especially when pushing against a headwind. By drafting behind another rider, the effort required to overcome the wind resistance is noticeably reduced, allowing the drafting rider to maintain the pace at less effort than the single rider, or the rider being drafted.

But here's where the teamwork comes in. In a paceline the riders take turns in front, so each one only has a short time pushing against the wind before slipping back to "rest" behind the others. The front rider is said to be "pulling" while the others are drafting or "riding on his/ her wheel."

The technique takes some practice to become comfortable and definitely requires the full concentration of all riders in the paceline. One cannot be bird watching or looking at the flowers along the roadside while involved in a paceline.

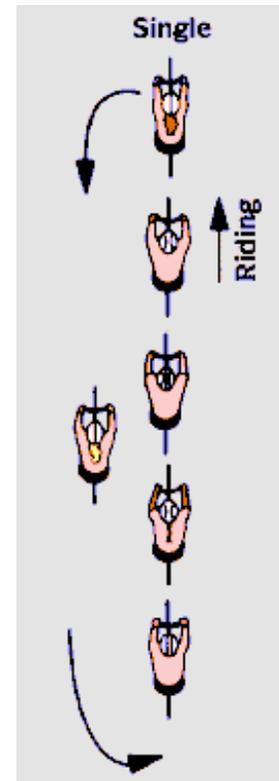
The single paceline is where all the riders in the group line up in single file and that is what we will be doing. The distance between wheels can vary with the experience and comfort level of the riders, but for experienced riders can be as close as 6 inches.

The first rider rides at the determined pace, and after a period of time ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, signals and moves aside, then slowing slightly allows the second rider to assume the lead. The former leader drifts back, relative to the line, until the last rider in the line is past. Then he/she resumes the pace and assumes a place at the end of the line.

It is important that the rider who is moving into the lead maintains a steady pace. There is a tendency to speed up, but this should be avoided.

Some basic rules for pacelines:

- Ride smoothly. Don't slow or accelerate quickly.
- Avoid overlapping wheels. When wheels are overlapped, the trailing rider puts him or herself into a dangerous position, should the leading rider make a sudden sideways move to avoid an obstacle. Almost always when overlapping wheels touch, it is the trailing rider who goes down.
- If you find yourself moving up on the rider ahead, slow down without braking by moving slightly into the wind. If you fall back, close the gap gradually.
- Adjust the time of the pulls depending on the strength and tiredness of the individual riders. Weaker or tired riders can take a shorter turn, or even skip their turn if need be.
- Don't jump onto someone else's paceline without permission, especially if the riders are unknown to you.
- The best time to drink, in a single paceline, is just after you have given up the lead and are drifting back without anyone in front of you.
- Rotating the lead.
 - The front rider checks over her shoulder for traffic, drifts a couple of feet to one side (determined by wind direction, road conditions or traffic) and slows slightly by soft-pedaling.
 - The next rider takes the lead not by accelerating but by keeping his speed constant as the former leader slows. Pedaling will feel a bit harder for the new leader because he is bucking the wind. The new lead should glance at his cycle computer to make sure his speed stays steady.
 - Stay close as you pass each other while rotating the lead. The closer your shoulders are, the less wind each of you will be pushing and the narrower your combined width. That's important so motorists can deal safely with your presence.
 - When you're the person dropping back, begin accelerating slightly when your front wheel is beside your partner's rear wheel. Then you can slip in behind before a gap opens.



Communications:

To maintain the safety of the group is imperative that the group communicates. There are three places in the packline with different responsibilities for communications; The pack leader who initiates calls about situations ahead, the last rider who communicates situations approaching from the rear and the pack riders who pass along the information initiated at the ends to all riders in the pack. These calls can be verbal or hand signals and many times both.

The lead rider is the eyes for the entire pack, searching for changes that need to be considered for every rider. He must be looking well ahead and anticipating the needs of the group so that changes are gradual. Abrupt and immediate situations can cause misery within the pack and can be avoided by vigilance.

Situations that should be communicated are:

Changes in speed including stopping. "Slowing" or "Stopping" should be called in this situation along with the proper hand signal.

An obstacle in the road surface ahead: Point out the item of concern and make a one word call describing the subject; rock, gravel, sand, grate, stick, road kill, etc.

Automobiles: Believe it or not drivers can be unpredictable. If a driver appears to be crossing the riders' path, call car right/left.

When leaving the front: Wave the next rider in with your right hand extended using a circular motion

The last rider needs to be aware of issues coming from the rear. Primarily cars or other riders about to pass the pack. This person is also the gatekeeper for the pack riders. Never let a struggling rider pass this person.

Car passing from rear. A call of "car back" lets everyone know a car is passing and to stay out of the lane.

Bike passing from rear. "bikes passing on right"

The pack rider is anyone between the lead and last rider. Their primary duty is to communicate through the pack anything that is sent back or forward of them. When this rider hears and/or sees a signal that same message should be repeated so the rider on the other side hears/sees it. You are the communications conduit for the entire group.

Of course there are situations where the pack rider does initiate communications; when a gap is created a head of the rider or you have a mechanical breakdown. A gap is considered any space between you and the rider ahead that is longer than three bike lengths that you can't close. In this case it is your duty to call "gap" so that the rider ahead can hear and pass the information forward. When you have closed the gap you must call "riders on" so that the group ahead will know the line is restored.

Additionally, any rider who suffers a mechanical breakdown will call "mechanical" so that the riders ahead will stop for assistance.

General:

Any call that isn't "stopping" or "slowing" should not be construed as requiring a speed change. Most calls require only a shift to one side or the other, or indicate that increased vigilance should be exercised by all. DO NOT slow when a call is made that doesn't indicate a slowing situation. Riders behind are not expecting the change and this action can easily result in rear end collisions.