

Ride Leaders and Leadership on Group Rides

Alternate Title – I think we still have two or maybe even three or more article here. I have started another one myself.

How to Avoid Accidents on Group Rides

Note to SC-Need to call out cars. How to handle cars turning R and L. Where to position yourself of the road when approaching a red light when you are going straight, turning right or turning left.

Generally speaking, a ride leader is/are the cyclist(s) in charge of the ride and are ultimately responsible for the safety and enjoyment of all others attending. Ride leadership is as much about the attitude and effectively communication as anything else.

This topic recently came up again as there was a **preventable** crash on a local Tuesday night Training Ride read “race”. This specific SoCal group-ride seems to have 2-3 hard crashes every year.

Crashes can typically be divided into 3 categories;

- a) Bike Handling Skills
- b) Paceline/Group riding skills (I consider c as to really fall under b. What do you think. While I realize the object caused the accident, had someone properly pointed it out, it would have been a non-issue) What do you think? I think B refers to general not understanding how pacelines work, cyclists pulling off in the wrong direction, surging, etc. C refers to something different where cyclists don't point anything out.
- c) Road Hazards such as potholes, sand, gravel and rocks that are not pointed out. Crashes in this category can usually **be averted if someone points out the object(s) in the road.**



1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL4wJ-Bts3Y>.

Cyclist stood up and lost control of his bicycle – lack of good bike handling skills



2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2WFKVq5LM>: Cyclist hit a rock that no one pointed out. Hands fell off the bars and the rest is history: broken collarbone.

This is a known area that always has rocks and gravel due to the vehicles entering and exiting this area. This person is probably new to this ride and didn't move over like the guy in the blue jersey did in the photo above. The photo to the right shows the rock just prior to impact, and, as you can see, no one pointed anything out. Just think, it could have been anyone hitting this rock, the guy in the white jersey just missed it as well as the guy in the multi-colored jersey ahead of him. You HAVE TO POINT THINKS LIKE THIS OUT!

This article focuses on ride (or lack of) leadership.

What I see typically on hard SoCal group rides is that everyone rides for themselves. Even on a team group ride, yes, where the only cyclists on the ride are ALL from the



same team, they tend to view this as a race and, more often than not, will take each other out.

Other complicating issues are that of mixed-ability. For example, there might be a well-known “A” group ride that might attract “B” and “C” level cyclists. These cyclists will tend to want to join in the pace-lining but are usually riding well above their fitness and bike handling abilities. They may not be able to hold the wheel in front them allowing gaps to form, not be able to hold their line, overlap wheels on the rider in front of them, or even cut-off others in the group. (Rick-Let’s talk about this a minute). The ride leader should ask who if anyone is new to the ride. They should discuss the type of ride and ride with the new person or suggest whoever invited them to ride with them.

DEFINITIONS: What is a Ride Leader? What is Ride Leadership?

A ride leader is the person(s) in charge of the ride and their primary responsibility is for the **safety** of the group. The ride leader might be the strongest cyclist in attendance and therefore might ride a lot at the front. In this case, they are responsible for everyone behind them. They need to set an example and call out cars, car doors and all obstacles in the road.

At a minimum, the ride leader(s) will want to have a quick pre-ride meeting discussing aspects of the ride; route, pace, any known road issues, pointing out said obstacles, how to point out obstacles, a drop or no-drop ride, where to hold the speeds back, calling out cars when crossing traffic, paceline directions of rotation, no headphones or earbuds, hold your line, pay attention, etc. (We rehash some of this under the numbered items.

It is interesting to note that there are bicycle clubs that actually have Ride Leader Manuals, and some even have training programs. See links below

Quick Safety Items for the ride leader to discuss; (Let’s talk about this as well.

Discuss the route, unless there are no new riders and the route is always the same

Get a head count

- 1) **How-To Paceline** – determine single or double, which way to rotate and discuss the how-to’s
- 2) **When it is OK to ride two up and when you need to ride single file** – especially going through densely populated areas where there are lots of cars
- 3) **Ride to the right** (in America), i.e., stay on your side of the road
- 4) **No unexpected moves** – hold your line
- 5) **No unexpected speed changes**
- 6) **No quick hard braking**
- 7) **HOW TO POINT OUT OBSTACLES IN THE ROAD** - So, what happens when there is an obstacle in the road?

In my experience,

- a) Most of the time, no one points out anything. Even within an experienced group, it’s inconsistent at best. I’ve ridden with groups where nobody pointed anything out, even large potholes, glass, nails, a tree branch, they make it feel like they want people behind them to crash. These are the groups to avoid since everyone is ‘riding for themselves.’
- b) It’s hard for anyone further back than the first two cyclists at the front to see any obstacles in the road, so, it is the duty of the cyclists in front to **announce** out what kind of an obstacle is coming up (rock, branch, pothole, glass, etc.) and point to where that obstacle is.
- c) **It’s also critical HOW you point!** PHOTOS 1, 2 below are representative of how most cyclists point out obstacles. The problem with pointing like this is that, again, only the cyclist behind the person that is pointing this way can see it. This is because the cyclist directly behind the cyclist pointing



blocks the view from anyone further back to see. So, not only do you **NOT** see the obstacle, you **DON'T** see where the cyclist is pointing. PHOTO 3 – Here is the trick! Point to the obstacle with your arm anywhere between 1 o'clock and 3 o'clock. That way, **EVERYONE** behind can see where you are pointing. Try and implement this on your next group ride. Discuss this during your pre-ride safety chat.



So, there you have it, several things for the ride leader(s) to think about. Again, the ride leader(s) main goal is to ensure the safety of the group.

Let's all agree to make any ride we are on as safe as possible for all who attend.

- 1) Ride Leader Training Manual New York Cycle Club:

https://nycc.org/sites/default/files/nycc.ride_leader.training.manual.FINAL_jul12.pdf

- 2) Cascade Bicycle Club:

<https://www.cascade.org/rides-free-group-rides/become-ride-leader>

- 3) Ride Leader Certification from ICP:

<https://icp.bike/ride-leader/>