

## Pro Tip #1

By Gale Bernhardt | For Active.com

### Group Riding and Etiquette

You don't have to be a professional to enjoy the benefits of group rides, however if you lack the technique or fitness to ride with a group the experience can be frustrating and leave you riding alone. In the worst case, the lack of skills may cause you to crash, bringing others down with you.

A few basic skills are required to safely and successfully ride in a group. You must be capable of riding a straight line, controlling your speed, anticipating possible problems and watching the road ahead of you. At the same time, be alert for activity in your peripheral vision.

**Hold your line** -- If you have watched a professional cycling race, you know that every rider needs to "hold a line." This means that cyclists need to be capable of riding a line parallel with the edge of the road. Practice this skill by riding 30-60cms to the right of the white shoulder line while trying to keep parallel with that line.

**The slipstream** -- Some group rides practice staying together as one large mass—more or less—with little movement among the group.

Other group rides incorporate pace lines—or some version thereof (Figure 1.)—into their sessions. In its most basic form, a pace line occurs when one rider pulls a line of other riders behind them. Each person follows the rider in front of them by staying within a few inches to a few feet of their leader's rear wheel. This area of least wind resistance is known as a slipstream.

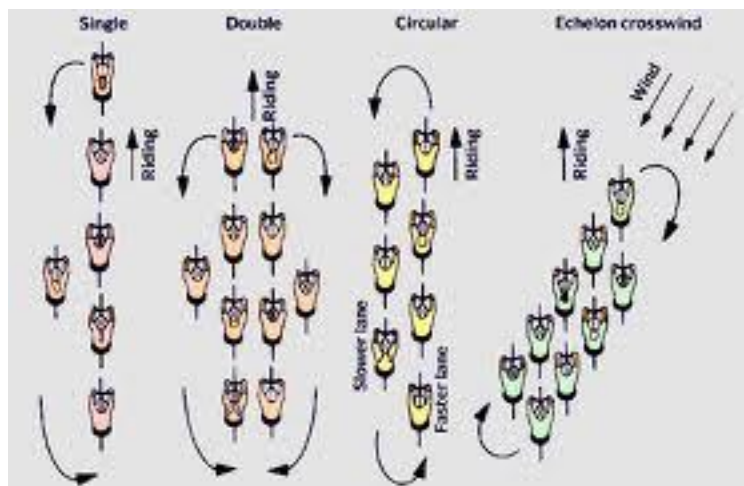


Figure 1. Paceline Formations

Staying in the lead rider's slipstream is called drafting (Figure 2.). Riders that are in the draft position save upwards of 30 percent of energy compared to the lead rider. If you've ever had a chance to draft, you know that riding 30km per hour is significantly easier when you're following rather than leading. The difference is even more pronounced in a head wind.

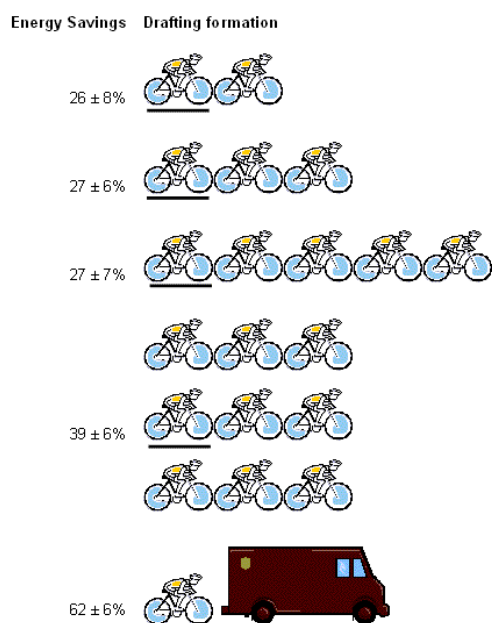


Figure 2. Drafting Formations energy savings.

**Control your speed** -- The lead rider in a pace line can stay at the front for just a few seconds or for several minutes. When you join a group that is rotating the lead position and it is time for you to lead, resist pouring on the gas to show everyone how strong you are. A pace line is happiest when the pace is steady. Fast accelerations or jerky braking motions disrupt the line and can cause a crash.

**Keep eyes and ears open** -- The first person in the group can see clear road. Thus, they need to point out road hazards—as do the rest of the people in the line. Pointing out hazards and verbal communication skills are important. For this reason, do not use headphones in a group-riding situation.

When you are following someone, avoid getting a visual fixation on his or her rear wheel. Look several feet ahead, keeping the distance between your front wheel and the rider ahead of you in your peripheral vision. Watch for road hazards as well as motion to either side of the pace line.

Listen for cars approaching from the rear. A rear view mirror mounted on your helmet or glasses can be very helpful when watching for cars.

Maintain the pedaling motion of the other riders in your peripheral vision. Watch for sudden changes in cadence—this usually signals some sort of problem.

**Anticipate problems** -- If you are riding in windy conditions or it is a hilly course, anticipate changes in the group or peloton. When the peloton changes directions, sometimes the weaker riders are no longer sheltered from the wind

and they fall off the pace. The same is true for a hilly course. Riders that can usually stay with the group on flat roads can fall off the pace on a hill.

Get accustomed to watching for signs that a rider is struggling. This includes having difficulty finding the right gear, breathing like a steam engine or constantly looking over their shoulder.

You don't want to be stuck behind a struggling rider if you are feeling strong. Pay attention to the signals so you can maneuver yourself into a good position.

### **Practice**

This column just scratched the surface of group riding skills. Once you master the basics, you should continue to hone your skills. Even if you are not a competitive cyclist remember: in-group rides smart riders often have the advantage over strong riders.

**For video footage of how to ride in a group, see**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK5MPtMrMqU>

