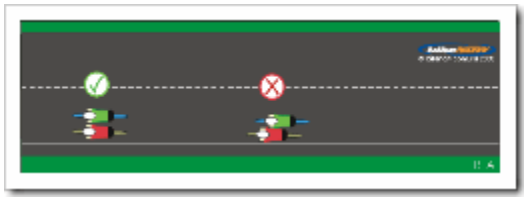
Peleton (Bunch)

Although all the laws of the road apply to road riding, being a part of a bunch requires some special skills.

The following tips below can act as a good guide to help you get the most out of riding in a group so you enjoy your time in the bunch more.

Parallel Handlebars

Always ride with your handlebars, shoulders and elbows parallel to the rider beside you. If your handlebars are not aligned, they may get hooked on the other riders bars or knocked on the other riders knees, if this happens, it's nothing but bad news from there. You will be likely to rub another rider in the bunch occasionally and it is imperative that you do not allow your bars to touch, experienced riders will hold their position by rubbing shoulders or elbows to keep upright. Make sure that your elbow is pointed downward and not outward, if it is outward a touch can control your steering.



Tip:

Within a bunch (peloton) you will eventually find yourself leaning towards or touching another rider. If your elbows are bent outward and you rub another rider it pushes your bars in the direction you don't want, however while bent down you can resist, push back or roll against your shoulder without affecting your steering at all. If you can get a willing participant, try practising at slow speed away from traffic and remember keep your bars, shoulders and elbows very close to next to each other as pictured above.

Also always have a thumb below the handlebar, if you hit a bump and your hand slips off, it will be "all over rover"! Make sure you grip in a fashion that if your grip slips, it will not slip off the bar and you will still have control over the bike.

Change of Direction

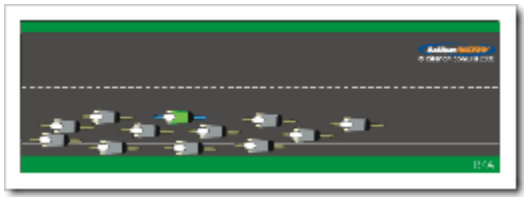
Anticipate changes in direction and traffic flow including the speed of individuals or the bunch by keeping an eye on what is happening ahead and do not unilaterally trust the cars or other riders you are riding behind, all can be unpredictable for any reason, so be aware and ready. Keep your hands in a position close to the brakes (see below) and remember while your wheel is crossed with the rider in front, you are in the danger zone.

Hand Positioning

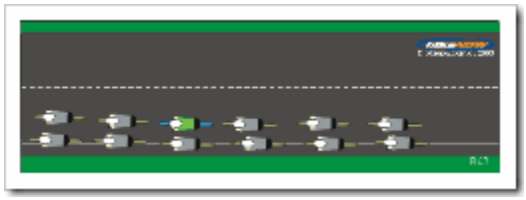
Ride on the hoods or on the drops while in the bunch with two fingers on the brakes ready in case of the unexpected. Your brakes are operated with a wrist twist movement, forward pivoting off the web of your thumb and the peek of the brake hood, the obvious squeezing of your brake lever is not efficient, you will have more leverage, it's easier on your hands and you can be more supple with your brake modulation.

Elasticity

Give the bunch some elasticity which means if riders in the bunch are speeding up and slowing down allow them to surge forward and then fall back. It is ideal if you can help regulate the speed to be more constant, which means if you don't brake, you may roll forward and cross wheels which as stated above (pt.2),which puts you at risk. However, if you brake to compensate it causes a chain reaction through the bunch behind and it takes only one rider to not be ready and the slow will create an accident behind. This may seem like it does not apply because all should be alert in the bunch and they should however, it is not always the case especially on recreational rides.



As the riders in front slow, the group bunches up a little.



As the lead riders speed up again, you can position back to an ideal spot in the bunch that is not at risk of crossing your front wheel with the rider in front.

If the pace is really on, or the bunch is riding into a headwind, the bunch will likely string out to single file. If you cant keep on the wheel of the rider in front, the riders behind you will be very disappointed. It is best to do one last effort up the outside and signal to drop off so the riders behind can take your position.

Communication

Communicating to the other riders in the bunch with hand signals is encouraged, however many accidents are caused by people trying to alert riders of a risk but become a risk themselves. If you move smoothly and predictably around parked cars or slower cyclists allowing plenty of room you will only need to signal for a hazard bad enough to cause an incident. Most obstacles can be seen by all riders, use your common sense. You can gesture for things like pot holes, broken glass and parked cars.

You may also alert the other riders in the bunch verbally.

Vocal alerts

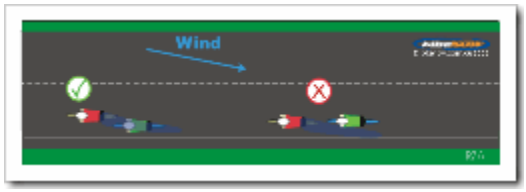
- Yell “Stopping” if a red light is coming up or the bunch is stopping soon.
- Yell “Car Up” If there is parked car or car pulling out that may represent risk coming up, sometimes the bunch swing out of the way and an unsuspecting rider is left with nowhere to go.
- Yell “Car Back” If a car is coming and the bunch have to move in to allow room for it to pass.
- Yell “Rider/s” if the bunch is passing slower riders, as per above with the parked car, sometimes the bunch can be going much faster than the a slower rider on the road and passing at high speeds can be a hazard like a parked car.

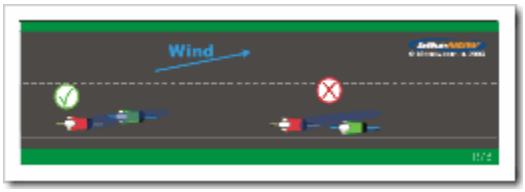
Standing

Getting up off your seat can be very dangerous to other riders because as you stand up, your bike slows a little which can cause the rider behind to touch your wheel. It is advisable to be careful in close racing to not just jump up unless you don’t care what happens behind you. A good rider behind will be prepared however a less experienced rider may not be as ready and your actions could cause an incident. Be aware of the riders behind you and in front of you for erratic manoeuvres, keep a steady pace ensuring a smooth transition within the bunch. You will be more respected and will hopefully not be the cause or be involved in an accident.

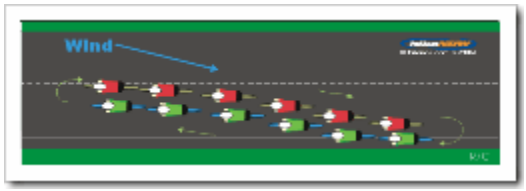
Echelons

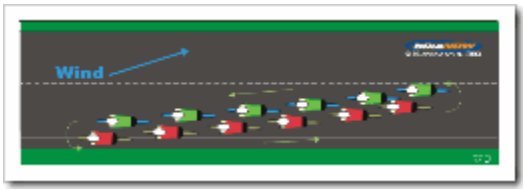
An echelon is when riders position themselves to take advantage of the slip stream of the riders in front. It is 70% easier to sit in the slipstream of another rider and that is why it is so important to cyclists. It may be necessary to position yourself exactly in the right position give or take an inch or two to get the maximum benefit.





To be a part of an organised bunch in an echelon, riders do the work into the wind for a short time while the bunch ride leeward. An organised bunch will constantly rotate off to the back of the pack. The system repeats thus giving each person a small stint at the front with a big rest in between. Note that the riders coming up to their turn are leeward, this helps with a kind of slingshot effect because the riders protected from the wind can pick up a higher speed for the turn at the front and after they loose their momentum drop back with a wind disadvantage and protect the riders coming up. In a fast chase group, a rider may sit at the front of the group (rider in the red shirt) for as little as 10 – 30 seconds. You may take note that the bunch change rotation direction depending on the wind indicated below with green arrows.





If you are suffering in the bunch and finding it difficult to keep up, stay at the back and allow the rotating riders to stay in front of you to take the load.

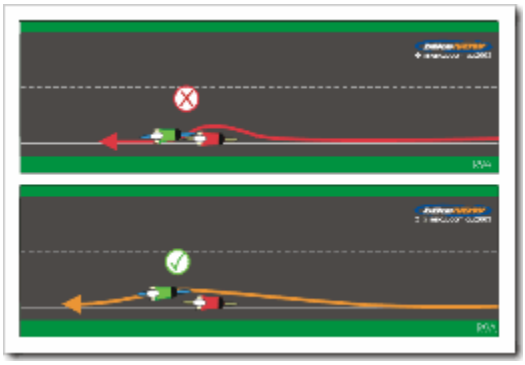
Traffic Lights

Red light signals are sometimes not observed by cyclists, however many cyclists expect other vehicles to respect their position on the road. If a cyclists conduct is professional and reflects consideration to the other road users, in the long term cyclists will benefit. So considering the danger of disobeying road laws, the possibility of being fined and in

pursuit of sharing the respect of all road users, please observe and obey the road laws, signals and signs

Wheel Chopping

Never chop a wheel. When passing a slower rider it may be an advantage to move in front of the slower riders path quickly to stop other riders sitting on your wheel or for you to gain the best wind advantage from the rider or environment in front. Make sure you allow enough room for the rider you are passing. If you chop their front wheel (pull in front of their path too soon) or your hip touches their handlebar or hand, they will fall outward causing the riders sitting behind you to fall and it could result in a major incident. Also remember when passing riders slower than yourself, they may be spent (tired) and their reflexes and awareness may be a bit slow due to oxygen debt.



Peleton Blocks Traffic

If the peleton is blocking traffic it will annoy drivers and gives riders a bad reputation. If you are riding beside another rider and there is not enough room for a car plus two cyclists, provided there is enough room to let the car through, it is recommended to make room and wave the car to pass. This may mean the bunch will have to drop into single file until there is enough room for all to share the road.

There will be times when there is not enough room for a car to pass even if the bunch (or individual) were to drop into single file. In that situation, making room for a car to pass is giving the car an invitation to come through which may put riders or on-coming traffic at risk. It would be better in some cases for you to purposefully block a vehicle from passing however, it would be ideal to hand signal to the driver that it is not safe, keep your speed up so the driver will not be too frustrated or held up.

Some riders believe that it is their right to take up a whole lane however that argument is hard to make from a hospital bed. We have to work with drivers and respect their use of the road as well. It is the shared respect of all road users that make our sport a safer more enjoyable activity.