

Horizon 100 Cycling club

How to lead a group.

Leading a pack can be enjoyable. It can also be a formidable task for the last people in the group if the lead out is not done with some planning and attention to speed. If done correctly the pack will stay together. If done incorrectly the pack will break up or at the very least the people in the back will always be working hard to catch up.

1. Keeping the Pack Together

When leaving the start of the ride, take note of who may be the weakest rider. The pack should work together to support this rider. They will likely be in the back of the pack in the city. Keep a close watch to see that this person does not get dropped. Pick a speed that will accommodate this rider. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack.

a) Traffic Controls and Highways

When stopping at street lights, give warning that the light is about to change to green. Yell out "everyone ready". Some lights only stay green for a short time. You must give ample opportunity for all riders to make it through the intersection. Not all riders may make it and so you must slow the lead group down to give the trailing group time to get back in the pack. Once in the pack the speed can gradually pick up again.

At stop signs, make sure there is no traffic in either direction and that it is safe to proceed. Yell out "all clear," start up slowly, and watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack. Once together, the speed can then pick up.

Most important. Lead a pack across a busy highway when it is safe for the whole pack to cross. Just because you can make it across does not mean that the people behind you can make it. If the highway is very busy, go across in small groups. Make sure everyone is ready to cross and they are paying attention to the traffic. Do not take chances.

b) Single File: Walkways and Bridges

There are other situations when the pack may become spread out. Such as when going into single file or making its way across a walk bridge. Go over the bridge in a safe speed. Once over the bridge it is important to slow the lead riders down until all riders have made their way back into the pack. There is nothing more discouraging to a rider than coming off the walk bridge and seeing the pack take off. Now they have to work very hard to catch up. Ease up in the front of the pack. It is your job to provide a group ride. When riders get strung out in single file, the people near the back have to ride hard to get back into a double pace line. Ease up at the front. Go about three-quarter speed until all riders are back in the double line. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are back in the pack.

2. Hills and Cornering

At all times you want to maintain the current speed. When going down a hill the lead riders must keep pedaling. The riders behind you will have the benefit of the draft. They will be traveling at the same speed as you but they will not be pedaling. You must keep pedaling to maintain the group speed. Should you stop pedaling the riders behind you will have to use their brakes. Going uphill it is every person for themselves since not all riders can climb at the same rate. It is important as the lead rider that you ease up at the top of the hill to once again get the riders together in a pack. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack.

The same holds true for cornering. Go around the corner at or near the group speed. Should you slow down it causes the whole group to slow down and a crash is possible. Keep in mind that you must slow down if the road conditions dictate that it is unsafe to take the corner at speed however most corners can be taken at speed. The line will stretch out because some riders are not very proficient at cornering. It is better for the line to stretch out than to get jammed together. Once around the corner ease up until all riders are back in the line. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack.

3. Road Hazards and Unsafe Riding

When leading the pack you should be the first to see any road hazards such as debris, pot holes, railway tracks, or other hazards. Keep your eyes up and look ahead for debris and other hindrances on the road. You must be proactive and informative the pack behind you by calling out the hazard and pointing to it when it is safe to do so giving the pack enough time to react to and avoid the hazard. It begins with you.

Watch for irregular and unsafe riding techniques. Suggest corrections in a courteous and friendly fashion.

4. The Wind and Drafting

Pay attention to the direction of the wind. If the wind is coming from the left, move to the left to allow the pack to draft. If the wind is from the right, move to the right. If the wind is head-on keep to the centre of the lane. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack especially in a strong wind. Adjust your speed to accommodate the weakest rider. Keep your head up for hazards that may be at the edge of the lane. When on the highway shoulders do not cross the white line into the traffic lane. In strong winds the pack may need to split into two or more groups so that those in the centre of the pack may also be able to draft.

5. Switching at the Front

Try to lead the group out to a point where switching at the front can take place with very little interference from traffic and other hindrances found in the city. This is important. Switching at the front is not a good idea when passing parked cars or while on narrow streets. Be prepared to ride through the city until you get to the highway then switch.

Summary

Leading the group is more than just providing draft to the riders behind you. It is also about keeping the pack together and watching for hazardous conditions. Do not take chances. Remember that this is a group ride and there are other riders behind you.

1. Keep the pack together. Watch in your mirror or ask the riders behind you for confirmation that all riders are in the pack.
2. Ride an even pace and a straight line. Everything you do at the front is passed down the line. Keep pedaling while going down hill and maintain speed while cornering when it is safe to do so.
3. Watch for hazards and debris on the road and for irregular and unsafe riding techniques. Point out hazards and make corrections in a courteous and friendly fashion.
4. Provide draft. Move towards the direction of the wind so that you provide draft to the riders behind you.
5. Switch out at the front of the pack only when it is safe to do so. Be prepared to lead the group out of the city.