

CTC advice on riding with a group

If you are thinking about riding with others here are CTC's top tips for finding a group and getting ready to ride.

1. Get more enjoyment from cycling by riding with other people. Look around for a group that suits your fitness level and style of riding. Support the leader/organiser on the day.

Cycling with a group is one of the most enjoyable ways of seeing your area and getting healthy exercise. It can be done with family and friends or an organised group. But remember, all groups are different, look around until you find one that suits your pace and diary.

Your group leader is usually a friend or volunteer who has offered to share their local knowledge or cycling experience, please follow their advice and instructions for everyone's enjoyment.

If you can't find a suitable group in your area, think about starting one.
2. Stick to the rules of the road or countryside when riding. You are still responsible for yourself even in a group.

The leader can offer directions and advice but they are not responsible for you sticking to the basic requirements of the Highway Code or Countryside Code. Always look out for hazards or other road and trail users and don't just rely on the person in front.
3. Don't buy a special bike, but make sure yours is ready for the ride. You can get help on set-up and a future bike from your group. Carry at least a spare inner tube, pump and tyre levers.

You don't have to have a "good" bike when you start riding but your breakdown could spoil the day for others. You will get advice after riding with a group for a while and this is a great way of picking up tips and second hand equipment. If you have no experience use a reputable bike shop and take out recovery insurance from CTC to get you home if you have a problem.
4. Be prepared. Bring your own drink and check whether you have to bring or buy food. Also set yourself up for weather changes.

Many groups stop at cafes or pubs, however you are advised to carry water and food with you.

Most groups continue regardless of weather, it is advised that you dress appropriately. Carry a waterproof on all but the best of days. This is also a useful windproof layer if you stop for long. If you are mountain biking in high country seek advice from your leader.

Get advice from the group or CTC on how to carry essentials in a bag or cycling top that can also be used to carry spare clothing.
5. Introduce yourself to the group and give the leader your contact details, just in case. Notify the leader if you intend to leave the group.

Cycling is a way of making new friends, so make sure you get to know people's names. Staying in touch with the group is important, both during the ride and afterwards. The leader will try to ensure that you enjoy the ride, don't get left behind or get help if you need it.

Carry some form of identification and a contact phone number in case of an accident.

Over many years of cycling groups have established some simple rules that make group cycling safe and enjoyable. Below is the advice from CTC's experienced leaders for enjoyment and safety.

6. Riding in close proximity to other cyclists takes practice. Relax and enjoy the company but always allow for others in front and behind.
Riding as a close group allows for easy conversation and takes best advantage of the slipstream effect from front riders. Experienced riders call this "following a wheel". It can take some while to get used to but the best way to learn is to follow the example of those around you, especially experienced riders. In particular try to pick up the pedalling rhythm by using the same gears as them.
7. Group riding pattern is normally in pairs. This is sociable and keeps the group together. Single file is courteous and safer on some roads.
The Highway Code specifically allows cyclists to ride two abreast. It is usually the leader's decision when to move to single file because of traffic or when passing walkers or horses. Offroad you should ride in way that makes allowance for walkers. Most groups have a standard method of moving from double to single file that everyone uses to make the manoeuvre smooth and safe. Ask how it is done in your group.
8. Avoid sudden movements and horseplay, look and let others know before you change speed or direction.
Group riding is really safe, there are very few reported incidents of rider on rider accidents, especially if simple rules are followed. When it does happen the most common causes is sudden stopping. Even if you drop something or have a mechanical problem take your time. The whole group will stop with you anyway. If you are at the back let someone else know before you stop.
9. Everyone in the group lets the others know of hazards, changes in riding pattern, cars coming by. Learn the calls and signals for your group.
Established groups develop calls and hand signals that they use regularly. Everyone in the group should pass on a signal to make sure it travels the full length of the group, especially warnings from the rear. Only the front riders get a clear view of road defects, parked cars, trail hazards etc so it is vital that they give clear indications in plenty of time to those behind.
10. Always assist other group members if possible.
One of the purposes of group cycling is to learn more about the pastime. It is also the way a less experienced rider can be sure of some support if they have problems. The whole group should be supportive to all riders.
Conversely experienced riders should not bombard the newcomer with advice!
11. The group always re-forms if it splits, for example on hills or at a road junction.
Even groups of similar abilities easily get separated. Everyone climbs hills at a different pace and the whole of a group may not be able to cross a junction at once. It is usual to find a place to stop where the group can congregate away from traffic. On a hill it is usual to wait at the top if it is safe.