

# Bunch Riding

by Chris White

As the Club evolves, attracting less racing and more recreationally oriented riders who may lack the necessary skills to ride with utmost safety in a bunch situation, it is vitally important to learn this art whilst out training on the busy and sometimes dangerous urban streets.

Racing on a closed circuit such as Heffron Park is great for your bike handling skills, but will not equip you with those skills necessary for bunch training and recreational rides.

The only way you can learn the skills is to practice. However, I am sure that practice without basic knowledge of the responsibilities of bunch riding will get you no where. So here is a list of 'do's and don'ts':

## 1. ***The correct formation***

Riders should pair off in 2 by 2 formation. You should not sit directly on the wheel of the rider in front. Try to maintain about a 30cm – 60cm distance off the rear of and slightly off to the side of the rider in front.



The reason you offset slightly is to get better vision down the line, giving you more time to react to any problems.

## 2. ***Sitting the wheel***

You should not focus on the rear of the wheel of the rider in front. By focussing on the person you will be more aware of what is happening in the bunch.

Try it. It wont take you long to judge the distance between you and the rider in front.

## 3. ***Position on the road***

There is no way that motorists will ever become more courteous towards riders, however, we have clearly defined rights that in simple terms allows riders to occupy a full lane, ride in pair formation and have the same responsibilities as motorists.

Therefore, it is dangerous to ride to the far left of a lane. This exposes you to great danger from cars trying to squeeze past. A car must give you a full metre when passing.

Riding too close to the gutter also can create problems for riders. Slipping off the roadway into the gutter can bring you down as you try to get back over the lip of the gutter. Great skill is required to hop out of the gutter, so if you find yourself in this position, slow down and stay in the gutter until it flattens out. Then exit at an angle.

The lead riders staying in the middle of the lane can avert this problem.

## 4. ***The lead riders***

The two riders on the front have a huge responsibility. They must set the pace, call all road obstacles and warn the bunch of any traffic changes.

When approaching a set of lights the lead riders have sole responsibility in making the call. It will either be "**lights...stopping**" or "**rolling**". Remember that the bunch is one vehicle so if the bunch is committed to roll don't make decisions in the middle of the bunch to suddenly stop. This will cause heavy braking towards the back of the bunch.

If the lights are turning orange on approach, the lead riders must be aware of the size of the bunch and make the appropriate call. It is better to be more cautious than gung-ho!

When entering a roundabout or turning at an intersection the lead riders must call “**clear**” or “**car coming**”. All calls should be relayed down the line.

## 5. **The tailenders**

The riders on the back also have a huge responsibility, particularly the rider on the right hand (outside) side. This person must call the bunch across lanes or warn of trucks, cars etc that are approaching when on narrow and/or single lane roads.

When crossing over lanes the call is either “**wait**” or “**over**”. It is important that the instruction is relayed up the line and when crossing over the bunch moves as one and does not fragment. The rider on the outside rear must maintain a distinct hand signal until the manoeuvre is completed.

On a narrow single lane road the last rider must warn of cars behind. A call of “**car up**” is a simple call that all should understand.

## 6. **Rolling over**

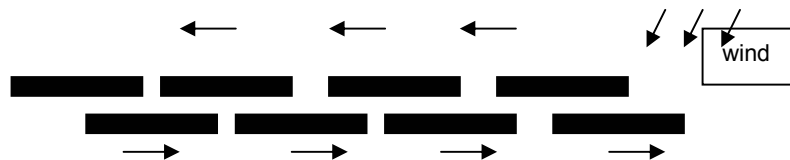
The lead riders should not attempt to stay on the front too long. Five kilometres is plenty. This gives every one a chance to go to the front. If you feel that you are not fit or strong enough to do a turn, go to the front, advise your partner and both immediately roll off. Do not suddenly pull out of the line prior to getting to the front. This only leaves gaps.

The roll over procedure is simple. The two front riders, on a safe section of road, move out approximately a metre. This will leave a gap for the following two riders to move through. The two riders rolling over will simultaneously wave the following riders through. They then soft pedal until the bunch has passed them, whereby they slot in at the rear.

If you are in the line and must pull out, advise your partner and both should drop to the back of the bunch.

## 7. **Pace line**

When coming back from Waterfall the pace usually picks and a pace line forms. The formation is similar to a chain, where the rolling off the front occurs at speed by the lead rider.

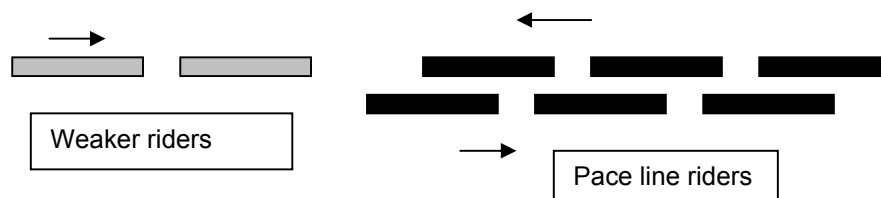


The way the rider rolls off is usually dependent upon the direction of the wind. The rider always rolls off to the side the wind is coming from. In the case of a head or tail wind rolling off to the left towards the gutter is generally the best way.

The rider rolling off immediately starts soft-pedaling dropping speed. The rider coming through **does not pick up speed**. Surging through by the lead rider only strings the field out making it hard for those moving back down the line to move back on to the forward moving line.

Riders in the slower pace line must stay on the wheel. Do not stop pedaling. This causes huge gaps in the line and can drop riders off the back.

If you cannot do a turn stay out of the pace line. Too many times weaker riders position themselves 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> wheel and do not come to the front. This is infuriating to those wanting to keep the line moving. We appreciate the fact that you do not want to get dropped, but there is a better place to stay.



Those riders not able or wanting to join the pace line should stay slightly off the back of the line containing the riders coming off the front. You will get good cover here, plus not disrupt the riders in the pace line.

## 8. ***Avoiding holes, rubbish, obstacles, other riders etc.***

If you are following the wheel properly and the riders in front have identified an obstacle and given advanced warning then nasty incidents should be avoided. However, we as a Club continue to come to grief. This I believe is due to the following reasons:

- We generally do not ride as a bunch until weekends, therefore when we get together the ride becomes a talkfest, with riders more concerned with the local gossip and news rather than a disciplined training ride. All riders should be more aware in a bunch situation and less inclined to socialise. If you do wish to talk to your partner, speak, but continue to face the front down the line.
- Riders are not confident of the rider in front and tend to ride off the wheel creating disorganisation in the bunch.
- The rider lacks the bike handling skills to adequately respond to a call in time or with safety.

The concentration and fear factor are easily overcome, however the lack of bike handling skills can only be done over time with practice and support from the more accomplished riders.

One of the most obvious faults that I have noted is the way riders sit on their bikes. There is a tendency for riders to '**choke**' their handlebars. By gripping the bars tightly with locked straight arms moves the bike control to the front of the bike away from the hips. If you all attempted to ride with hands off the bike, the steering would come from the hips.

By moving your centre of gravity away from the hip region and as such the rear wheel onto the front wheel, you are prone to oversteer the bike. Instead of gently avoiding a hole moving a few centimetres to the side, riders are overreacting, exaggerating the avoidance. This causes a domino effect throughout the bunch as other riders are now following your wheel on an untidy line.

Skilled riders should be aware of less experienced riders in the bunch. For example do not '**bunny hop**' an obstacle. You may avoid a problem but you may lead others into one.

Another problem involves the '**roll back**' when getting out of the saddle, particularly up an incline. Do not stop pedaling during this action since you will fall back a fair way, straight back into the rider behind who generally has to break hard or undertake a sudden swerve. Prior to getting out of the saddle make sure you are at the top of your pedal stroke and keep the pressure on the pedal.

In summary, being fit and capable to hang onto the bunch is not enough. Without taking away the enjoyment of the ride it is imperative that every rider hones his or her skills. If you want to improve ask one of the more accomplished riders. If you are not sure stay down the back until you are confident enough to join the bunch. If you are nervous or lacking confidence, consider the safety of the other riders first before joining the bunch.

The Club is developing as a recreational/racing club, where riders have a wide range of ability and levels of fitness. Everyone should be tolerant, responsible and be prepared to accept criticism if you do not come up to scratch. Those more accomplished riders should devote part of the club ride to helping the beginners, rather than zooming off into the distance.

### **Safe Riding.**