

## ALTER EGO CYCLING CLUB GROUP RIDE INSTRUCTIONS

Riding safely in a group requires everyone to think and ride as one. Think of it as the Zen of road riding. Our Sunday morning rides are an opportunity for all of our club members to ride together for fun and fitness. Experienced club members will assist newcomers and the super fit shall consider this a “recovery” ride. Inexperienced members will not find a better opportunity to increase their fitness, bike handling skills and overall confidence.

### General Expectations

**“Leave no one behind”** – no one is to be “dropped” from the group. We will establish “re-grouping” points prior to the start of each ride. These will be points along the route where we agree to stop and....well, re-group. Depending on the day and the riders we may agree to split into 2 or more smaller groups.

**Controlled pace** – the speed of the group will not exceed 25km/h through the city and 30km/h past the city limits until we reach the end of Red River Dr. (re-group point). At this point a “faster” group may split from the main group but only by consensus. The next re-group point is in St. Adolphe.

**Drafting** – *to ride closely behind another cyclist in order to benefit from the wind resistance provided and move along in the lead rider’s slipstream.* At all times we will be riding closely together in order to benefit from the “draft” of the riders ahead. By doing so the group as a whole will expend 20 – 50% less energy than a solo rider (depends on the size of the group and how well it is working together).

### Group Ride Commandments

**#1: It’s Not a Race** – A group ride is a ride, not a race. You must not “attack” off the front or sprint from the back. There are no points awarded or cash prizes bestowed for besting your fellow cyclists. If you’d like to join the Alter Ego road race team they meet on Sunday afternoons.

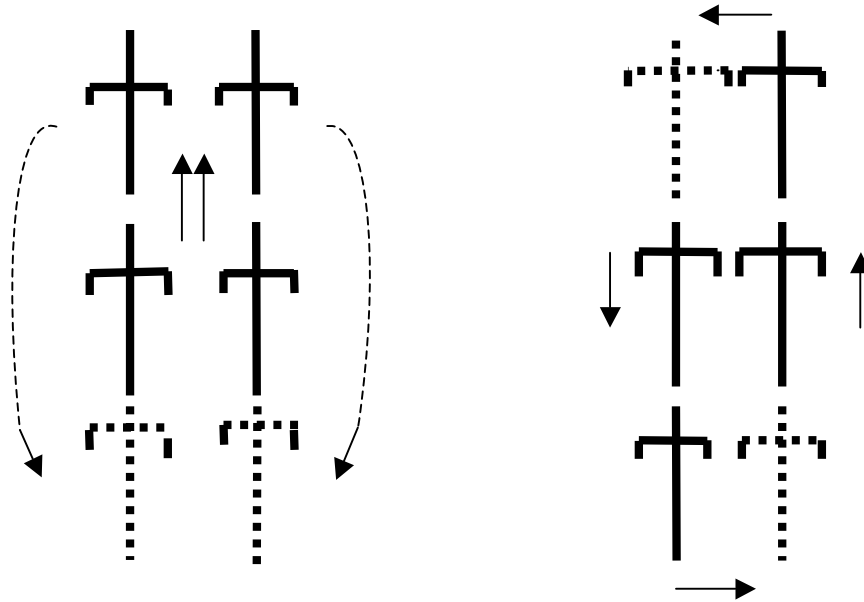
**#2: Riding Bar to Bar** – Most of the time we will be riding in pairs or a *double paceline* (see diagram below). When riding in this formation you must position yourself side by side, handlebar to handlebar, with only a few centimeters between you and the rider beside you. You don’t have to hold hands but you should remain as close as possible so that the riders behind will benefit from your draft. You must match the speed of the rider next to you at all times. Riding with your bars ahead of the rider beside you is called “half-wheeling” – it’s dangerous and annoying and just don’t do it. If there are an uneven number of riders in the group or you otherwise find yourself without a rider beside you, you should place yourself in between the two riders ahead of you, with your front wheel between their two rear wheels. This allows the riders behind you to remain bar to bar and to keep the group tightly together. It’s not acceptable to sit directly behind the rider ahead of you and leave a gap to your side. The riders behind you should ride with their front wheels on either side of your rear wheel. This may seem like a risky position but it is quite safe *so long as the paired riders ahead and behind you are riding bar to bar.*

**#3: Communicating** – When you see an obstacle in the road ahead of you, put your hand down and give a signal that lets the riders behind you know a significant obstacle is forthcoming. Traditionally a quick wave of the hand will suffice. Do not yell into the peloton “HOOOOLE” or “RED LIIIGHT”. The problem with yelling is that 90% of the riders will not hear what you have said and will be distracted with wondering what the yelling is all about. Lead riders shall point out significant hazards and steer the group gradually around glass, potholes, pedestrians etc. Critical to a successful group ride is *trusting* that the rider in front of you will not drive his/her bike into a gaping hole or wheel sucking sewer grate. If you are riding correctly (directly behind the rider in front of you) then you should trust that whatever they are riding through you can also ride through. If you do find yourself riding through a large hole or a parallel crack in the road (very common here!) do not panic, relax, keep your wheel pointed straight ahead and ride it out.

You need not, and should not, point out every pothole, crack, oncoming car or small patch of gravel. Leave the warnings for the major obstacles – things that could potentially damage a bike or person behind you. Also, there should be no reason to alert the group of a red light up ahead. Each rider has to take responsibility for their self. This means that everyone rides “heads up” and paying attention to the traffic and the road, even at the back. Do not assume that you can leave it to the other riders to watch the road ahead.

If you need to communicate something to the group, such as a flat, or that the group has been split due to the pace or a red light etc. then speak to the rider(s) in front and beside you who will do the same until the whole group has the message.

**#4: Peeling Off** – 90% of the time we will assume a “social” double paceline (see diagram below). When you have taken your turn at the front make sure the rider beside you knows you intend to peel off. **Both riders must peel off at the same time.** Once you have both established that you are going back, check briefly that there isn’t someone overlapping your back wheel, then slowly and gradually move to the outside and let the group come through the middle. You should neither veer off suddenly nor take all day to move over – peel off in a deliberate and controlled manner. Giving the riders behind you a signal is perfectly acceptable – a flick with your inside elbow tells the riders behind that you are about to peel off. Don’t point your finger at the ground beside you as that signals an entirely different thing (see #3). And for goodness sake, don’t exhaust yourself at the front. Peel off before you get tired. The group is only as strong as its weakest member so it is in the group’s best interest to keep everyone fresh and happy. So what if your turn at the front is only 10 seconds while everyone else seems to pull “forever”? Let them. Not only *should* the stronger riders take longer pulls they will *want* the training benefit this provides.



**“Social” Double Paceline** – pairs of riders peeling off on either side. Our most common riding formation.

**Double Paceline** – resembles a rotating chain. Pairs of riders continually changing. Used when riding into a strong crosswind or on a narrow roadway. Counter clockwise rotation for cross wind from right. Clockwise rotation for a left cross wind.

**#4: Change Positions Correctly** – A common beginner faux pas is to stop pedaling just before peeling off the front. This creates an accordion effect toward the rear. Simply, check that it is safe for you to move to the side and then do so slowly and deliberately while keeping a steady pressure on the pedals until you have cleared the front. After peeling off, “soft pedal” and let the group pull through. As the last couple riders are passing through, begin to apply more pressure to smoothly take your position at the rear. If you don’t time it correctly, you’ll create a gap and have to sprint to get back on. A technique used to reenter the line is to move your bike sideways first then your body. Try it. It will feel awkward at

first, but it is the safest way to move within a group. It's just a small subtle move not an exaggerated one. If you lean your body first and misjudge the speed or the person in front of you slows down, you'll touch wheels and be leaning the wrong way...bad situation! If you move the bike first, you will have a chance to pull it back.

**#5: Pulling Through** – When the two riders ahead of you peel off, it is your job to come through to the front and pull the group along. If you do not want to ride at the front because you are tired or less fit than the rest of the group, it's too late to avoid it now. Once you are in second wheel, you **MUST** come through to the front. **Do not** speed up, and do not get out of the bar-to-bar formation. Maintain your speed and go straight through without hesitation. If there is a strong headwind you will notice when those lead riders peel off that your speed will decrease. It's important to keep in mind that you will need to increase your *effort* (pressure on your pedals), in relation to the wind, in order to maintain the pace of the ride but do not overcompensate and increase your *speed*.

If you find that you do not have the strength to be at the front then take a “token pull” – ride at the front for a couple of seconds, agree with the rider beside you that you are both peeling off, and go to the back. Once at the back decide whether or not you want to remain in the rotation (take another turn at the front) or if you need to sit at the back for a while (or all day). Taking token pulls is a good way of increasing your fitness but remember, don't exhaust yourself. It's perfectly acceptable to stay at the back. Just let the riders coming back from the front know that you are “sitting in” and allow them to slot in ahead of you in the group.

**#6: Filling the Gaps** – There should be no gaps in a group ride. As soon as you see a gap, fill it by riding into the space in a steady and controlled manner. There is no need to sprint into the space and then slam on the brakes, just gradually fill in any gaps as soon as you see them.

**Tip:** When moving over in front of another rider, look down under your elbow to see the front wheel of that rider behind and judge exactly when it is safe to move over in front of them (not too soon as to cause them to swerve to avoid touching wheels but not too late as to cause a split in the group).

**#7: Maneuvering in the Group** – If you need to go to the back of the group, or need to move away from the side of the road because the road is damaged (for example), just steadily move in whatever direction you want to go in. The key to all group riding is to do things gradually and steadily. Even if there is a rider right next to you as move over, if you do it gradually, the other rider will naturally move over with you. If you do anything sudden you will likely cause a crash. Something to mention here is where best to position yourself in the group. If you are feeling strong (willing and able to expend more energy) and there is a cross wind you should position yourself on the windward side of the group (the line on the right if the wind is coming from the right, left if the wind is coming from the left). This way the “weaker” riders will be sheltered from the wind and able to conserve more energy. Likewise, if you are on the windward side and getting tired let the riders beside and behind you know that you need to switch sides. The rider beside you can then let a gap open in front of them that you can slowly fill while the rider behind you moves up to fill your space. See the tip above under #6.

Strong cross winds are best battled in an “echelon”, however this is not a safe way for a large group to travel on open roadways (it takes up the whole road). So, we will predominately stick to the “social” double paceline formation. A regular double paceline that is constantly rotating (see diagrams above) is the best alternative to an echelon in a strong crosswind situation. Familiarize yourself with this rotating double paceline so you will know what to do when we decide to ride this way.

**#8: Slowing and Adjusting Speed** –You should be riding ever so slightly to the side of the rear wheel in front of you; so that whenever the rider in front of you slows down all you have to do is stop pedaling and start to slightly overlap your front wheel with their rear wheel, or you gently “feather” the brakes gradually, using the “wheel overlap” as a buffer zone so as not to slow down too suddenly for the riders behind you.

**Climbing**— When you need to get out of the saddle, such as when climbing, your bike will naturally shift backwards as you stand up. This is fine when riding solo but when in a group, with a rider close behind you, be aware. Shift up into an appropriate gear and stand up smoothly while keeping a steady pressure

on the pedals. This will keep your bike from shifting backward as you stand up. Apply the opposite technique when changing to a sitting position. Downshift and keep a steady pressure on the pedals to avoid abrupt changes in speed.

**Descending**—The leader must overcome a much greater wind resistance as the speed increases. If you are leading, keep pedaling. If you don't, everyone behind you will eat your lunch. Riders to the rear will accelerate faster downhill as drafting becomes more effective at the higher speeds. If you are following, back off a couple of bike lengths to compensate for the greater affects of drafting. If you are closing on the rider in front, sit up and let the wind slow you or use light braking to maintain spacing, but in both cases you should keep pedaling against the resistance. Keeping your legs moving not only makes it easier to keep the spacing, but also helps the legs get rid of the acid build up from the previous climb.

**#9: Where to look?** – Don't fixate on the rear wheel of the bike in front of you. Look around, know what's coming. This is easier said than done if you are inexperienced. So, if you need to keep a close eye on the rider ahead of you, look through their front wheel. With experience you will become more and more confident of your peripheral vision and will begin to "sense" where you are, in relation to the bike ahead of you, without staring.

**#10: Relax** – We save the best for last. This one is really important. Staying relaxed, especially in the shoulders and arms, will allow you to be smooth and responsive. If you are not relaxed you will be "twitchy" and "all over the road" and you may notice that other riders don't want to be near you (you are fearsome). Anytime you are riding in close proximity of other riders there's always the chance that you may come into contact. If you have tense arms and get bumped from the side, the shock will go directly to your front wheel and you will swerve, possibly lose control, and possibly cause a crash. If you are relaxed, it's much easier to absorb the bump without losing control.

A good exercise is to go to a grass field with a friend and ride slowly side by side. Relax your arms and lightly bump each other using your relaxed elbows to absorb the (light) impact. While you're at it, take turns riding behind one another and touch wheels (gently). You will become familiar with how to safely recover from this type of contact. It may save you, and others, from suffering "road rash" someday.

#### **Other things to keep in mind:**

- Ⓢ No aero bars – you don't need to remove them from your bike but please do not use them while riding in a group. Aero bars are for fast, solo rides.
- Ⓢ Obey the rules of the road – we will "unclip"/put foot down at each stop sign and red light. Once safe to do so we'll travel as a group through the intersection. If the group is large and the light is short do not run the red light. The group ahead will wait.
- Ⓢ Bring at least 1 spare tube and a means of pumping air into it in the event that you flat. If you do not have these with you then let the group leaders know before the ride starts.
- Ⓢ Bring enough fluids and bar(s) or gel(s) to hydrate and energize you for a 2 hour ride. This is especially important in the heat of the summer!
- Ⓢ Be aware and look after each other – if you notice that a rider is being dropped or otherwise having difficulty let others know. If you hear "slow down" or "flat" from behind it is your responsibility to relay that to the rider(s) in front of you etc., etc. until everyone has the message (see #3). Social conversation with your fellow cyclists is a good thing and by no means discouraged but don't let it distract you from a general awareness of the road and the group.
- Ⓢ Keep to the side of the road as much as possible. We only need to use half the driving lane. But remember to allow enough room on the right for riders coming back from the front.