

Group Riding with The Forty-Plus

Some Common Sense Guidelines

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Introduction

Our members come from a variety of backgrounds and many are not used to riding in a group. Whilst group riding is not particularly difficult, it is different from riding on your own. These guidelines suggest best practice to stay safe on the road. Newcomers, experienced club members and leaders may all find this guidance useful.

These guidelines have been divided into four areas:

- looking after each other;
- riding two abreast and singling out;
- making the group work; and
- co-habiting with other road users

The guide also covers what to do if there is an accident and includes a ‘jargon buster’ at the end.

Looking after each other

When riding in a group there will be other riders ahead of you and behind you. As we usually ride fairly closely together, you may not be able to see the road ahead clearly and you may be blocking the view of riders behind you. This means you may not see oncoming dangers as soon as you otherwise would, and so may not be able to react to them in time. To avoid consequential excitements, you need to recognise that you have a duty to act as the eyes and ears for the others in the group, by warning of any problems ahead or behind you that others should know about. There are various means for doing this, including the use of various hand gestures and / or cycling specific phrases (see jargon buster at the end). The mechanism and vocabulary are not crucial – it is timely and accurate communication that counts.

Common sense dictates what needs to be communicated to your fellow riders.

Ahead of you:

- road conditions: e.g. potholes, loose gravel;
- oncoming hazards: e.g. pedestrians, parked cars, oncoming traffic (on narrow lanes);
- relayed instructions from ride leader or sweeper, e.g. regroup at top, single out;
- any imminent intention to stop or slow down.

Behind you:

- car approaching or overtaking;
- rider in trouble for any reason.

On a slightly different tack – mudguards, or more accurately lack of them, frequently cause angst for your fellow riders. If your bike lacks full mudguards (ideally with mud flap), then, when riding on wet roads, you will spray anyone behind you with muddy water. This is not the best way to win new friends, so you should really consider riding at the back of the group in wet weather – maybe even behind the sweeper (or better still - just fit some mudguards and mud flaps).

Riding two abreast and "singling out"

Be aware that sometimes riders do not feel comfortable with someone alongside them – e.g. if they want to concentrate on where they are going, be able to see the rest of the group and not feel pressurised into going too fast.

The most common scenario in the Forty Plus is leisure rides where members ride two abreast to enjoy good camaraderie and talk to each other en route.

Some sections have faster rides where experienced cyclists ride two abreast and travel in a tight formation to cover the ground as efficiently as possible. Forming a few compact groups can also allow spaces for cars to overtake a big group in stages. This type of club ride is a specialised situation and relies on very close co-operation and trust.

If you ride two abreast, please remember:

- if you ride alongside someone else you are restricting their ability to navigate around potholes etc – you need to look out for their safety as well as your own and provide adequate room for them when needed;
- if there are several pairs riding two abreast:
 - the outside riders inevitably block the rear view of inside riders; and
 - it will take a long time / distance to single out and you will all need to co-operate to achieve this;

In summary, two abreast is OK but only between consenting (and co-operating) adults, but even then should only be done where conditions allow – that means mainly on long straight wide roads.

Moving from riding two abreast to single file is generally referred to as "singling out".

If you need to single out:

- one of you needs to go ahead while the other drops behind – normal practice is for the inside rider to move forward and the outside rider to tuck in behind;
- normal practice may not be appropriate if, for instance, the weaker rider is on the inside and you are going uphill;
- if uncertain who is going ahead just make a clear suggestion, such as “after you”.

Making the group work

Practises vary between sections but generally, on group rides, there will be both a leader who heads the group and a “sweeper” or “back marker” who rides at the rear to ensure nobody is left behind and that any problems within the group can be identified and dealt with. The leader and sweeper are collectively responsible for getting the group safely (and enjoyably) to the destination and both should know the planned route.

The leader will normally work on the assumption that if / when he can see the sweeper then everyone is present and correct – this only works when group members ride behind the leader and ahead of the sweeper. Make sure you know who the leader and sweeper are and accept that, if you do go ahead of the leader or behind the sweeper, you are responsible for your own navigation and welfare. If you do decide to leave the group (e.g. to make your own way to lunch or back home) then please advise the leader or sweeper that you are doing this, otherwise they may feel the need to delay the whole group to wait for you.

If there is no designated sweeper, it is particularly important for the leader to keep track on whether everyone is still with the group and for those riding in the group to keep an eye on those behind them.

To help the leader and sweeper there are several other things you can do including:

- relaying any messages back or forwards through the group;
- keeping reasonably close to people in front or behind of you, so the leader can, if possible, see the sweeper (but see next section regarding car etiquette);
- advising the leader or sweeper of any issues and allowing them to decide what to do – don't unilaterally make decisions yourself for the group.

If there are a lot of riders, then more than one group may be formed. Please remain with the same group, unless the leader is aware that you are changing group.

On the topic of “keeping up” the natural reaction is to try to keep the rider in front in sight. The result is that faster riders end up at the front of the group and the slower ones drift towards the rear. This will put the slower riders under pressure and can spoil their day – especially if they end up being dropped (i.e. left behind). Instead of keeping up with the one in front it is more effective to maintain awareness of those behind you. If you cannot see them – especially at significant road junctions - then wait for them to appear. In that way the group is naturally paced to the slower riders – remember we do promise to wait for everyone – and it might be you who is struggling!

Co-habiting with other road users

Unfortunately we do have to share the road with other users – notably cars, lorries, buses etc. It's worth noting that they all are:

- much bigger, much faster and a lot less prone to impact damage than we are;
- generally wanting to get from A to B quickly;
- may see you as getting in the way;
- may assume we have zero width and travel at zero speed;
- with a minority of rogue drivers, liable to regard us as sport or as disposable in an emergency.

The general rule here is to do everything we can to:

- make it easy for them to get past us quickly and safely; and
- not antagonise them.

The first obvious step is to be aware when another vehicle is approaching the group – from the front or rear. To this end, on quiet lanes without regular traffic, the leader / sweeper will generally warn of an impending vehicle and you should pass the message up or down the line as appropriate.

The next step is to make it easy for the other vehicle to get past the group: the driver needs to see a clear way past the group and to assist you should:

- single out to reduce the width of the group;
- reduce the gaps between riders and thus the overall length of the group; but
- consider opening gaps of a couple of car lengths within the group to facilitate overtaking in two or more steps - someone needs to initiate this, if you are in or near the middle it's you (a group of 12 may be too large, so leave a gap half way);
- thereafter try to maintain constant group shape and (subject to hills) speed; there should be no last minute overtaking within the group;
- consider stopping at a suitable point to let the vehicle pass safely; this is generally the leader's responsibility.

To try to avoid antagonising other road users:

- implement the above moves even where there is no immediate hope of the vehicle overtaking – the driver won't realise that situation immediately but will interpret non-conformance as being inconsiderate and may react accordingly;
- don't react to gestures or shouted comments from other road users;
- it's not your job to point out bad road manners or other infringements (e.g. mobile phone use) by others – just grin and bear it.

Avoid blocking junctions:

- if you need to stop for the group to re-assemble then find a suitable stopping place ahead of or beyond a junction;
- when you join a stopped group then join at the end of the line and avoid bunching out into the middle of the road.

A couple of final "do"s:

- do think very carefully before indicating a vehicle should overtake you or the group. You know nothing of the driver or car's performance and if anything goes wrong you do not want to be accused of being responsible.
- Do thank drivers who show any sign of courtesy (being careful to use more than one or two fingers when you do so).

If there is an accident:

Our aim is to ride safely and avoid accidents. However, it is advisable to have some guidelines as to what to do should the worst happen.

Be prepared – see the advice on our first aid page: <http://www.fortypluscc.co.uk/first-aid>

If the rider has fallen in the road and is immobile:

- send sentries 100 metres both forwards and to the rear immediately to warn oncoming traffic to slow down;
- ascertain whether any other rider or bystander has better first aid skills;
- treat the casualty according to their critical needs (priorities are severe bleeding, blocked airway, not breathing normally) before getting them into the recovery position;
- if the rider is conscious let them assess their own ability to stand etc.;
- if unsure do not move the rider.

Work out whether emergency services should be called and if so:

- while someone establishes your location (see below), nominate someone to call 999 immediately (999 calls will be diverted to another network if your carrier does not have a signal); you can also text emergency services (works on lower signal strength) if previously registered to do so (see <http://www.emergencysms.org.uk/> for details); if there is no mobile phone signal, send someone to the nearest house to use a land line;
- note names of any witnesses (riders or public);
- instruct those riders who are not needed to clear the road and take themselves on to the intended venue.

The ride leader, or a responsible person, should stay with the injured party.

The leader should decide whether the emergency contact person should be informed. Emergency contact numbers for members should normally be compiled by section secretaries and regular riders should carry copies (hard copies or on your phone); members should also be carrying their own ICE (in case of emergency) card (available from section secretaries) but this may not always be accessible.

Finally, if the injured rider can not take their bike home, find somewhere safe to leave it.

Establishing your location

If you have a smart phone with a GPS it is worth downloading an app that can find your grid reference (e.g. [Grid Reference by Arthur Embleton](#) - Android) and an app that has off-line maps (e.g. [ViewRanger](#), [Locus](#) or [Orux](#) - remember to download the maps you might need over Wi-Fi when setting it up). If you give your OS grid reference to the emergency services, please remember to include the two letter grid identifier before the 6 digit grid reference.

And Finally ...

Following an accident incurring medical treatment, or any accident involving a third person not on the ride, an [incident report form](#) (as published by the CTC) should be prepared by the ride leader within 48 hours of the incident. The completed form should be submitted promptly to the Section secretary.

Jargon buster

- N.B. Club members use the call “**OIL**” to represent traffic, so
 - **OIL UP** (up your rear) means traffic is coming up behind the group/rider.
 - **OIL DOWN** (down your throat) means traffic is coming down the road towards the group/rider.
- **COMING THROUGH** is used to indicate an “oil” is overtaking.
- **ALL CLEAR** is used when all have passed or to cancel the OIL UP call if the oil turns off.
- **ALL CLEAR can** also indicate there is no traffic coming either way at a junction.
- **CLEAR LEFT / RIGHT** are similarly used at junction together with **FROM THE LEFT/RIGHT** to indicate whether traffic is coming or not, but it is still the individuals responsibility to look and confirm it is safe prior to making any manoeuvre.
- **ON THE LEFT** means pay attention to the left side of the road, there could be a parked vehicle a pedestrian or a branch overhang or the like.
- **ON THE RIGHT** likewise means the same thing but on the right.
- **IN THE MIDDLE** means just that and more usually means loose material or other debris that has accumulated in the middle in narrow lanes, but can also refer to a “pothole” (two abreast riding).
- **HOLE or GRAVEL** means anything from a pothole or loose surface to a sunken grating. This is often accompanied by a pointing gesture in the general direction of the hazard.
- **EASY** means someone is slowing down - prepare to brake if necessary, used mainly approaching junctions and where a rider is experiencing difficulty, but can also be employed when a rider is being left behind to request a slower pace. Although the latter use is usually in the form of **EASY UP**.
- **STOPPING** means the group is stopping. Mostly used at junctions but can also apply to breakdowns such as “chain off” or “puncture” although these expression are sometimes used in their own right.
- **SINGLE OUT** – stop riding two (or more abreast). When this call comes the normal procedure is for the **Inside rider to move forward and the outside rider to tuck in behind**.
- Sometimes calls are used in combination, for example “**On the left --- Hole**”

It is every rider’s responsibility to relay calls forwards and backwards within the group by repeating them for the benefit and safety of all those on the Ride.