

Pacelines

DISCLAIMER: THE INFORMATION BELOW IS USEFUL AS A SUGGESTION, BUT EVERY PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY AND MUST USE THEIR OWN JUDGMENT.

What is a Paceline?

A paceline is more than simply a group riding single-file. A paceline is a group riding cooperatively as a team, sharing the work of being in front of the line and the benefit of the draft while following in line. The person leading a paceline is working somewhere between 15%-30% harder than those following. In order to share this workload and keep all riders fresh for long periods, the riders constantly rotate, so that each rider spends short periods in front, thus sharing the workload.

Riding in a smooth paceline can be one of the most exhilarating things to do on a bike, but everyone must work together as a team to keep the paceline smooth.

In a paceline everyone spends time both **Leading** and **Following in Line**. The 2 roles have their own responsibilities, which must be accepted by everyone in the paceline.

Leading

1. **The person in front is responsible for maintaining the steady pace.**
 - a. **DO NOT SPEED UP** when you get to the front of the line. Maintain a steady pace
 - b. **Pedal constantly, never coasting, even on downhills** (very important on downhills, otherwise the riders behind will have to brake to avoid overtaking you)
 - c. **DO NOT SLOW DOWN** for minor obstacles in the road; ride through or around them
 - d. **Always alert riders before you begin slowing** for any reason
2. **The person in front is the eyes of the group.** They are the only one with clear view of the road, thus it's the Leader's responsibility to
 - a. Call out all hazards.
 - b. Avoid hazards by taking a smooth arch around them (no sudden jerks around the hazard). If you move to the left, the #2 rider may assume you are pulling off and thus start coming around you on your right (see point 4 below for correct way to signal you are pulling off).
3. **The person in front should pull off BEFORE they start tiring and slowing down.**
 - a. On fast rides where the riders are pushing the pace, the pulls should only be 10-20 seconds, but on more casually paced rides, the Leader may spend a minute at the front
 - b. Don't be a hero by pulling too long (that will result in you becoming too tired and thus slowing the group later in the ride, or getting dropped off the back of the line)
 - c. It's ok to take shorter pulls than the others if you are tired or perhaps in a group of stronger riders. If you can't maintain the pace, you should pull off immediately when you get to the front (but make sure the previous Leader has drifted behind you before you pull off)
4. **When pulling off the front:**
 - a. **Look behind you** for traffic and/or riders

- b. **Move to the Left**, signaling that you are pulling off by wiggling your right elbow, and then easy pedal to let the line pass you without forcing them to speed up (this is your time to rest). If riding with riders unfamiliar with the signal, you may want to call out “pulling off.”
- c. **Pull back into line** after the last rider

KEY POINT FOR LEADER: Remember that the role of the Leader is to keep the paceline steady and together. NEVER try to prove how strong you are by accelerating.

Following in Line

1. **NEVER overlap your wheel with the rider in front of you.** If you tap wheels, it will usually be you that goes down, possibly bringing down everyone behind you. By staying behind their wheel, you don't have to worry about them suddenly swerving into you.
2. **Ride in a straight line and don't weave in and out of the line**
3. **Ride at a steady pace and pedal constantly.**
4. **Stay 6 inches to 3-feet behind the rider in front of you** (the faster the pace the closer you need to be). If you drift further back, you lose the effect of the draft, and risk getting dropped from the Leaders (thus dropping those behind you also).
5. **Keep a constant distance** between you and the rider in front of you. Avoid any sudden accelerations or braking to adjust the gap.
6. **If you need to moderate your pace** to avoid overlapping the rider ahead:
 - a. Sit up slightly and let the wind slow you
 - b. Feather your brakes very lightly
7. **Keep your head up and eyes scanning up the road.** DO NOT stare at the wheel in front of you. You will react quicker if you see a rider several people ahead of you avoiding a hazard than if you just see the person directly in front of you react to a hazard.
8. **If an obstacle appears don't panic** and jam on your brakes; the rider behind you will likely run into you. Regardless of the hazard, you are usually safer riding through it than braking suddenly.
9. **Don't get restless if the pace seems too slow.** Often while following it may seem like you should be going much faster, but this is because you are getting the benefit of the draft. The Leaders may be working very hard. Stay in line and accept the pace of the group.
10. **If you are the #2 rider in line, do not follow the Leader when they move to the left**, unless they are clearly doing so to avoid rough road or some other hazard ahead. The Leader moving to the left should be an indication that they are pulling off (the Leader should also signal pulling off by wiggling their right elbow). If unsure of their intentions, make sure they are aware of you as you pass them on the right.
11. **If you are the last rider call out “last”** when the next person drifting back approaches you, to let them know that they should pull in behind you.

KEY POINT FOR THOSE IN LINE: Remember you are part of a team working together and that one person either allowing a gap too large or trying to pull around people ruins the paceline. Accept the pace that the group is setting and work to maintain it. A single rider not cooperating can ruin a paceline.

Other points for everyone

1. When you go from a sitting to standing position, often you will slow significantly, which can be dangerous in a paceline.
 - a. Learn to make a smooth transition from sitting to standing (and from standing to sitting), by powering through the first down stroke as you begin to stand.
 - b. Alert the riders behind you that you are getting ready to stand.
2. Communicate: whether simply calling out obstacles or letting a rider know that they did something unexpected or dangerous, communicating solves many problems of group riding.
3. **A paceline is a TEAM working together with a common goal.** If you are not going to participate and work with the paceline, please stay out of the paceline. Do not ride beside it or pull in front of it.
4. **SAFETY FIRST**

If you want to be a rider others enjoy sharing pacelines with, here are a few things you shouldn't do:

- DO NOT brake suddenly
- DO NOT let your wheel overlap the rider in front of you
- DO NOT speed up when it's your turn to take the lead
- DO NOT let a gap form between you and the rider in front of you
- DO NOT ride along beside the paceline
- DO NOT yo-yo (speeding up then slowing down; passing everyone then blocking the whole group)
- DO NOT weave in-and-out of the line
- DO NOT stop and start pedaling. Soft pedal and keep legs moving.