



GROUP RIDING ETIQUETTE GUIDANCE

DTCC Club rides are organised by members of Deeside Thistle Cycling Club (DTCC). These rides are not coached sessions and no coaching will be offered. Safety of each rider involved in a club ride is the responsibility of the individual.

Non-members of DTCC are welcome to join the rides. After being out on a few club rides the expectation is that the rider should join the Deeside if they want to continue taking part.

See www.Deeside.org and/or <https://www.facebook.com/DeesideThistleCyclingClub/> for further details of what the DTCC has to offer.

WHAT WE DO

Deeside Thistle CC organise various Club Rides in the City and the 'Shire throughout the year. The principle aim of these rides is to function as a group and most importantly to return home safely without incident or accident. These rides are strictly for dropped bar road bikes. Sorry no MTBs, hybrids, or recumbents.

DTCC Club Rides are generally social rides with an element of training. This guide is focussed on the "Club Ride" environment. DTCC also run Chain Gang and Training Rides (Culter Tuesday/Saturday and Banchory Thursday). These rides should be based on the same group riding guidance but will not cater as sympathetically for the "dropped" rider.

Intrinsic to the Club ride ethos is the concept of acting as a group and helping each other around the route. If anybody has a flat or mechanical then we'll wait and help. If a group member is struggling then we will slow down and pace them home.

Average pace will vary and groups will be split to suit abilities. In general, after hills we will adjust the group's speed to allow everyone to regroup. On a "Club Ride", no one gets left behind. **It is very important that you are aware if you are attending a "Club Ride", a "Training Ride" or a "Chain Gang"**

HOW WE DO IT

Group riding offers many advantages, both physically and mentally. It is definitely easier to drag yourself out of bed on a cold wet Sunday morning in January to ride 60 miles if you know you will be with others. A bit of a chat and some banter, the reassurance of help should you suffer a mechanical or flat, and the knowledge that physically your ride will be easier if in a group.

Riding behind someone when in a group means you are riding in their slipstream and therefore using less energy. The rider in front punches a hole through the air and you sit in the vacuum behind.

Group riding however does not come without risk. It requires vigilance on what the other riders and traffic are doing, and as speeds increase and distances between riders decrease concentration becomes essential.

The etiquette, techniques, practices and behaviours described below have been developed over the years through the experience of club riders throughout the world. Adopting these will not only help keep you and your fellow riders safe, but stand you in good stead for any open events you participate in.

Come Prepared

ID & ICE (In Case of Emergency)

CARRYING ID SHOULD BE CONSIDERED COMPULSORY ON DTCC RIDES. Ideally this should be housed in a plastic pouch/bag in your back pocket. Don't rely on your phone providing this information in an emergency.

A typical ID and ICE card could be as simple as....

William Wallace
DoB 30-11-45
Blood Group RH+
Allergic to Latex and Aspirin
ICE 01314 131445

Bike Preparation

Before every ride, check your bike over and make sure it is not going to give you any problems.

In winter you will be expected to have mudguards fitted to your bike. (Compulsory from start November to end March in group rides). Your mudguard's prime aim should be to minimise spray to the rider behind. "Ass Savers" are not mudguards.

In Your Pocket

You don't need to bring a lot with you on the rides. All you need is your ID, a spare tube or two, a pump, tyre levers, a multi-tool, something to eat and something to drink, and perhaps a fully charged mobile phone.

Communications

Communication between riders in a group is a key element in staying safe. Generally, the riders on the front of the group will be first to spot hazards and will communicate the type of hazard to the rest of the group by either a shout and/or a hand signal.

Hand signals are the preferred method as these are less ambiguous, won't be disrupted due to wind or traffic noise, and in winter won't be muffled if your ears are covered due to cold.

Always pass hand and verbal signals down the line for riders behind.

When to give a signal

Ensure your warnings from the front are timely, so try to give all signals 5-10 seconds in advance of the obstacle. Passing info down the line takes time when travelling at speed.

In practice this means that when the lead riders see a hazard they give the appropriate hand signal and if required gently drift out around the obstacle at least 10 metres before they get there. The rest of the group will follow the lead riders around the hazard with a minimum of disturbance to the pace and spacing between riders.

Voice Commands

When slowing or stopping give a loud clear shout of "SLOWING!" or "STOPPING!" as appropriate. This lets the rest of the group know to start feathering their brakes. At junctions, the lead rider will call "SLOWING!" or "STOPPING!" If they can see that the junction is clear of oncoming traffic they may call "CLEAR!" This means that in their opinion it is also safe for the next rider to negotiate the junction.- It is still your responsibility to ensure your own safety so don't solely rely on your fellow rider's shout; check for yourself.

On a narrow road if a vehicle, or other cyclists are approaching from the front, then the front riders should give a shout of "NOSE!" Conversely, if the vehicle is approaching from the rear then riders at the back of the group should give a shout of "TAIL!". Depending on the size and formation of the group, some action such as singling out may be considered prudent to allow the vehicle to pass. In this instance a shout of "SINGLE OUT!" should be made. Note however no action may be the better course of action.

A call of "EASY!" can be used by those in the middle or back of the group to advise the leaders to reduce the pace a little because a gap has opened up in the group. As always with group riding all actions should be smooth and progressive rather than knee jerk and reactionary. Therefore on hearing a shout of "EASY!" the leaders should ease up marginally and then wait to hear if the shout is repeated.

Another voice command that is good practice to adopt is a shout of "STANDING!" when you get out the saddle on a climb. See the later section on climbing for more details.

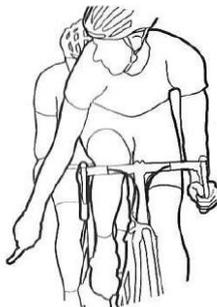
Hand signals

Hand Signals need to be held for enough time to allow the riders behind you have a chance to react and signal the riders behind them. So do make your hand signal sufficiently early. Below are some common hand signals.

Move Out Place your hand behind your lower back and point to indicate that following riders should move out in that direction due to an obstacle on the left (can be road furniture, parked car, a slower moving group of cyclists etc.)



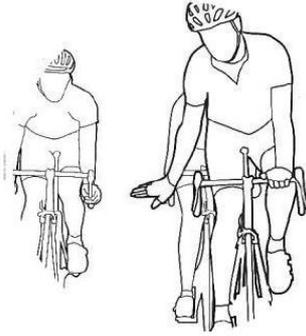
Pothole or Hazard A simple point to the road hazard is usually enough to signal to following riders. Do this well before the hazard is near and predictably move over so you don't roll past too close to it. A call of "Hole!" can accompany this signal, or "Inside" for a hazard close to the kerb or "Middle" for a hazard in the middle of the group.



Loose Gravel. Almost like pointing to signal a pothole but using a waving action. This denotes that you're approaching a scattered hazard such as glass or gravel. Consider adding a call of "Gravel" to accompany this signal.



Slowing or Stopping. Hand turned palm facing down and back accompanied by a 'dog patting' motion (if sufficient time). Make a clear call of "Slowing!" or "Stopping!" to notify riders behind.



Staying Safe

Group riding is fun, but it does bring the risk of wheels touching and the possibility of falling off. Observing a few basic rules, and adopting the generally accepted etiquette of group riding, as described below can reduce the likelihood of this happening:

Take Responsibility

You are always responsible for your own safety, and by taking part in the DTCC rides you accept that you have a duty to act in a responsible manner. Responsibilities include;

Assuming responsibility for your own safety. If you feel unsafe at any time then do remove yourself from the group and let the ride leader know at the earliest, safe opportunity.

Abiding by the law. We will be on public roads open to traffic and you will be expected to follow the Highway Code and abide by the law.

Contributing to the safety of the group by participating in what is accepted as “good group riding etiquette”, as discussed in this guide.

Improving the safety of the group. You are required to advise the ride leader if you think any aspect of a DTCC ride is unsafe, or if you think our safety can be improved in any way.

Wearing a helmet. If you want to join us on the rides you will be expected to wear a helmet conforming to current regulations.

Using a properly maintained bike. Your bike should be safe, and in good working order.

Hold Your Line

Ride in a straight line with no sudden movements and be aware of who or what is behind you at all times. That doesn't mean looking back. Glance to the side only rather than turn to look behind. If you need to see behind e.g. observing progress of a dropped rider catching up, then go to the back of the group.

Half Wheeling

If your front wheel overlaps the rider in front's rear wheel, even by only a few inches, if that rider moves off his/her current line and your wheels touch, you WILL go down. The rider in front probably will not, but there is every chance that several riders behind you will also come down. The rider in front cannot see where your front wheel is, so the crash will be your fault.

Never allow your front wheel to overlap the rear wheel of the rider ahead of you .

Eyes Up

Do not use the rear wheel of the rider in front when gauging your distance from the rider. Look over the shoulders of the rider ahead of you and learn to trust your peripheral vision to give you the clearance you need. There shouldn't be more than a foot or so between their back and your front wheel. Get used to the distance their back is from you when you have a safe gap. Use that gap closing as your early warning that you are getting too close.

Keep Going

Never suddenly slow down or attempt a complete stop until you are on the back of the group. Due to the extremely close proximity of the rider behind you in the group, if you suddenly hit the brakes there is a good chance they will not be able to react in time and their front wheel will touch your rear wheel.

Keep it Steady

Maintain a constant speed and a constant direction, no surging which creates a bungee cord effect. The lead riders are the ones who set the speed. They should never freewheel and always strive to keep the speed constant especially into a strong head wind.

Eating and Drinking

On certain occasions a stop for food will not be possible, therefore you will need to refuel on the move. This has the potential to cause accidents, because you have one hand off the bars and your attention is not fully on the riders around you.

Ideally, eating and drinking should be done whilst you are at the back of the group.

Bodily Fluids

At some time on a ride you are going to want to spit, snott, or maybe even pee. So for the comfort of yourself, and others, it is worth learning how to do it cleanly and safely.

Ideally, spitting and snotting should be done when you're at the back of the group. If you can't get there and have to do it in the line, then move out of the line slightly to give those behind a little warning.

Pee stops. Let the leader know that you want to stop. They will get the group to slow and let everyone know what is happening. It is likely others will take advantage of the stop and go as well.

The rest of the group may do a loop to stay warm, and give you some privacy. PEE STOPS SHOULD BE MADE IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS AWAY FROM RESEDENTIAL AREAS.

Climbing

When riding in a group, you need to consciously protect those behind you when you stand to climb. How you stand on a hill is very important - do it wrong and the rider behind might suddenly be on the road. The issue is the brief deceleration that can occur as you change from sitting to standing, which, relative to other riders has the effect of sending your bike backwards and can cause the following rider's front wheel to hit your rear wheel.

On short, rolling hills, the trick is to click to the next higher gear (smaller rear sprocket), then stand and pedal over the top with a slightly slower cadence.

The correct way to stand:

It is good etiquette to announce "Standing!" a couple of pedal strokes before you do so. Stand smoothly as one foot begins its downward power stroke - don't lunge, keep your effort constant. As you come off the saddle, push your hands forward a bit. This helps to ensure that the bike won't lose ground. When returning to the saddle, continue pedalling evenly and again push your hands forward to counteract any tendency to decelerate. This will gain several inches and put the seat right under you.

Group Riding Formations

For the protection of ourselves, and presenting an easily detectable presence to other road users, DTCC groups will generally be in a two by two formation. This entails riding side by side and fairly close to each other.

Group Riding is the bit that can spook newcomers. However, if you're relaxed on your bike, riding in a straight line and not looking around to see where your mates are, then the bike will track in a perfect straight line.

One common gripe from drivers is "cyclists riding 3 or 4 abreast". DTCC rides will never ride more than 2 abreast. It is extremely important that you ride directly behind the rider in front of you, thus presenting drivers approaching from behind with a clear "2 abreast" group. If you are riding offset from the rider in front, it can give the impression of 3 or 4 abreast as you approach from the rear.

Terminology

Q) So when does a group become a chain gang?

A) In general terms, a group morphs into a chain gang when their intention switches from being a social ride and they decide to push the pace for training purposes. The proximity between riders decreases and by extension, the amount of drafting received increases. The speed goes up, and the time each rider spends on the front decreases. DTCC Club rides will generally be just that, a club ride (not a chain gang).

Group Rotation – Double Line

Whenever possible DTCC Groups will adopt a Double Line configuration because it is more sociable, and for a given number of riders the group will be shorter in overall length (compared to the same number of riders in a single chain), which can facilitate easier overtakes for following faster moving vehicles.

The peel off direction will be advised by the group leader so that everyone knows the etiquette, and will generally be to the left. In this configuration each rider will take a turn leading each line before working their way back through one line to the rear and then across to the opposite line before working their way forward through this line. Turns can be a set length of time, or almost none, in which case a more 'rotational movement' ensues with riders constantly rotating through the various positions within the lines.

How Long on the Front?

How long do you pull on the front of the chain before rotating to the back? As Bob Dylan might say, "The Answer is Blowing in the Wind". It depends on the number of riders in the group and their relative strength. If you are struggling to maintain speed at the front of the line, then it is past the time to rotate to the back. No matter how short your turn at the front, every contribution, small or large, adds to the complete effort and provides additional rest for the stronger riders that they would not have had without your effort.

Stronger riders should not however 'hog' the front for too long; everyone wants a bit of a workout. In a group of equally strong riders, the ideal would be to up the pace a little more so all riders want to get a bit of shelter after their pull. If one rider is sitting on the front for an extended period then the chain is not moving as fast as it could.

SUMMARY

There is safety in numbers, but only if those numbers are made up of riders riding safely.

There are rules of etiquette, rules of physics and rules of the road which we all have to obey. If others don't know them, help and encourage them by sharing your knowledge and experience. Riding past as close as you can, telling them they're doing it wrong and not advising on how to do it correctly doesn't help.

Having said all that, cycling is and should be fun. So don't be daunted by the previous pages. Get out with us on a club run and enjoy yourself.

Ride Safe