

Advice on riding with a group

If you are thinking about riding with Witham Wheelers then here are a few pointers and normal etiquette. Please remember that the Sunday club run is just that, it's a chance to get a bit of fresh air and chat to other riders. It is not a substitute for a training session, neither is it a race. Please do not allow minors to ride in the group without nominating a responsible adult to keep an eye on them and wherever possible riders should have passed a cycling proficiency test. We want to encourage as many riders to come out on these runs but your safety is important and these simple points will hopefully ensure not only that everyone returns safely but also that we don't upset other road users.

1. Get more enjoyment from cycling by riding with other people.

Cycling with a group is one of the most enjoyable ways of seeing your area and getting healthy exercise. It can be done with family and friends or an organised group. But remember, all groups are different, look around until you find one that suits your pace and diary. Witham Wheelers will normally have two groups on a Sunday, a slow group suitable for competent riders who can maintain 15 mph for 50-60 miles and a quicker group for riders who compete in road races during the season. This group might average close to 20 mph and is therefore not a group for the beginner. Details of both groups will appear on the forum although the slow group will normally leave the Market Cross at 0830 every Sunday.

Your group leader is usually a friend or volunteer who has offered to share their local knowledge or cycling experience, please follow their advice and instructions for everyone's enjoyment.

2. Stick to the rules of the road or countryside when riding. You are still responsible for yourself even in a group.

The leader can offer directions and advice but they are not responsible for you sticking to the basic requirements of the highway code or countryside code. Always look out for hazards or other road and trail users and don't just rely on the person in front.

3. Don't buy a special bike, but make sure yours is ready for the ride. You can get help on set-up and a future bike from your group. Carry at least a spare inner tube, pump, levers, a waterproof, a drink and some food.

You don't have to have a "good" bike when you start riding but your breakdown could spoil the day for others. You will get advice after riding with a group for a while and this is a great way of picking up tips and second hand equipment. If you have no experience use a reputable bike shop and take out recovery insurance from CTC to get you home if you have a problem. Always give your bike the once over before a ride. Check both tyres for damage and use a pin to check each and every hole for glass or small stones. Replace tyres when they start to look tatty or you have a spate of punctures. Inflate the tyres to the recommended pressure on the side wall and clean and lube the chain. Keep the bike clean.

4. Be prepared. Bring enough energy drink for the mileage which should be specified on the forum before the ride and check whether you have to bring or buy food. Also set yourself up for weather changes.

Many groups stop at cafes or pubs; however you are advised to carry water and food with you.

Most groups continue regardless of weather, it is advised that you dress appropriately. Carry a waterproof on all but the best of days. This is also a useful windproof layer if you stop for long. If you are mountain biking in high country seek advice from your leader.

Get advice from the group or CTC on how to carry essentials in a bag or cycling top which can also be used to carry spare clothing.

5. Introduce yourself to the group. Notify the leader if you intend to leave the group. Please don't ride off the front of the group unless you know exactly where the group is heading. If you want to do a sprint session go out on your own!

Cycling is a way of making new friends, so make sure you get to know people's names. Staying in touch with the group is important, both during the ride and afterwards. The leader will try to ensure that you enjoy the ride, don't get left behind or get help if you need it. If you are struggling to keep up shout and the other group riders need to pass this information onto the front.

Carry some form of identification and a contact phone number in case of an accident.

Over many years of cycling groups have established some simple rules that make group cycling safe and enjoyable. Below is the advice from CTC's experienced leaders for enjoyment and safety

6. Riding in close proximity to other cyclists takes practice. Relax and enjoy the company but always allow for others in front and behind.

Riding as a close group allows for easy conversation and takes best advantage of the slipstream effect from front riders. Experienced riders calling this "following a wheel". It can take some while to get used to but the best way

to learn is to follow the example of those around you, especially experienced riders. In particular try to pick up the pedalling rhythm by using the same gears as them.

7. Group riding pattern is normally in pairs. This is sociable and keeps the group together. Single file is courteous and safer on some roads. If you hear that a car is behind the group (CAR UP) then single out when safely able, likewise if a car is coming towards the group (CAR DOWN) then single out. Don't ride wider than pairs and please try to be predictable, don't cut into the group, give other riders plenty of room and shout if there is a hazard that other riders need to know about.

The Highway Code specifically allows cyclists to ride two abreast. It is usually the leader's decision when to move to single file because of traffic or when passing walkers or horses. Offroad you should ride in a way that makes allowance for walkers. Most groups have a standard method of moving from double to single file (outside riders move behind the inside rider of "your" pair) which everyone uses to make the manoeuvre smooth and safe.

8. Avoid sudden movements and horseplay, look and let others know before you change speed or direction

Group riding is really safe; there are very few reported incidents of rider on rider accidents, especially if simple rules are followed. When it does happen the most common causes is sudden stopping. Even if you drop something or have a mechanical problem take your time. The whole group will stop with you anyway.

If you are at the back let someone else know before you stop.

9. Everyone in the group lets the others know of hazards, changes in riding pattern, cars coming by.

Learn the calls and signals for your group.

Established groups develop calls and hand signals that they use regularly. Everyone in the group should pass on a signal to make sure it travels the full length of the group, especially warning from the rear. Only the front riders get a clear view of road defects, parked cars, trail hazards etc so it is vital that they give clear indications in plenty of time to those behind.

10. Always assist other group members if possible.

One of the purposes of group cycling is to learn more about the pastime. It is also the way a less experienced rider can be sure of some support if they have problems. The whole group should be supportive to all riders.

Conversely experienced riders should not bombard the newcomer with advice!

11. The group always re-forms if it splits, for example on hills or at a road junction.

Even groups of similar abilities easily get separated. Everyone climbs hills at a different pace and the whole of a group may not be able to cross a junction at once.

It is usual to find a place to stop where the group can congregate away from traffic. On a hill it is usual to wait at the top if it is safe.