Stop for Stop Signs

Cyclists sometimes get into trouble by developing bad habits and stopping only at stop signs where they perceive cross traffic. Stop signs are often inconvenient to cyclists, but they are there for a reason. They have been placed at intersections where coming to a complete stop is regarded as necessary for safety; in other words, places where merely yielding is not sufficient. Therefore, in order to safely and legally operate a bicycle, one must come to a complete stop at all stop signs.

On group rides those at the back must not develop a tendency to follow-the-leader through intersections, assuming that the intersection is clear for the whole group. Each cyclist must look for, and yield to, traffic on the superior street before proceeding into the intersection.

Don't Pass at an Intersection

Do not pass other cyclists at an intersection. Immature cyclists sometimes come from behind and ride through while other cyclists are taking their proper turn at the intersection. This is highly dangerous and discourteous, and any observers will mark your group as another bunch of crazy bicyclists who should not be allowed on the roads.

Warn of Foot Traffic

Pedestrians, including joggers, travel on their left side of the road, so we often encounter them head-on. Worse are pedestrians on the wrong side, moving with their backs to us. Since we travel fairly close to the edge of the road, it is important for cyclists in the front of a group to warn of foot traffic on our side. Say "runner up.

Watch Out for Railroad Tracks

Railroad tracks require special care. It is important that you cross perpendicular to the tracks to avoid having the track divert your wheel from under you. Many cyclists can testify to the dangers of violating this rule. Cyclists need ample warning in order to prepare to cross the tracks properly, so yell "tracks" in plenty of time. In preparing to cross diagonal tracks, you will have to deviate from your usual lane position in order to cross the tracks squarely, so you must watch carefully for traffic approaching from ahead and behind. Remember that most motorists will not understand your problem. Plan ahead, position yourself properly, and give clear indications of what you are doing. Do not crowd or pass other cyclists during the crossing maneuver.

Watch Out for Dogs

Dogs present a hazard to cyclists because of their unpredictable behavior. Cyclists are bitten by dogs infrequently, but a dog can inadvertently hit the front wheel of a bicycle, with disastrous results. Usually a dog will be minding its business up ahead, but it might decide to give chase or just cross the road as we go by. Dogs call for extra communication within the group because some cyclists try to outrun them, some slow down, and everyone is looking at the dog instead of watching where he or she is going. Warn of dogs immediately upon sighting them in order to give your companions time to plan their actions without emergency maneuvers. Shout "dog up," "dog left," or "dog right," as appropriate. Occasionally other animals such as cats and chickens can cause problems by crossing the road in front of a cyclist, so warn your companions of these hazards also.

Don't Wear Headphones

With the importance of verbal cues in group riding, it should be no surprise that most clubs do not allow riders to wear headphones on group rides. Being plugged into a radio or cassette player on a club ride is unsociable and seriously erodes the communication necessary for safe group cycling. In many states, cycling with headphones is illegal.

Ride One or Two Across

We ride single file or double file as appropriate to the roadway and traffic conditions. Riding double file is fun, and on club rides we are eager to get out of town and onto quiet roads where we can double up. Most state vehicle codes permit narrow vehicles such as bicycles and motorcycles to ride double file within the lane. Nevertheless, as a courtesy we are quick to single up when this will permit faster traffic to move by us more efficiently. "Car back" is the signal to get into single file. Riding more than two abreast is illegal.

When the call comes for cyclists to merge from double to single file, the leftmost (inside) cyclist takes charge. The leftmost cyclist is the one most at risk from a passing vehicle and will usually be quickest to act. Sometimes the leftmost cyclist will elect to drop in behind the cyclist on the right, but usually he or she will pull ahead. Pulling ahead eliminates the problem of negotiating with a cyclist who is traveling in the inside cyclist's blind spot at the right rear.

Leave a Gap for Cars

When we are riding on narrow roads where the inadequate roadway causes us to impede faster traffic, we leave a gap for cars between every three or four bicycles. This way, a car can take advantage of shorter passing intervals and can eventually move piecemeal around our entire group.

Move Off-Road When Regrouping

When we stop to regroup, we move completely off the roadway where possible, so that we don't interfere with traffic and can relax our attention to the road. When we start up again, each cyclist looks for and yields to traffic on the road.

Try Drafting

If you are an experienced cyclist you may enjoy drafting—riding close behind the wheel of a bicycle in front—because of the greatly decreased wind resistance experienced by the following cyclist. Several cyclists may form a "pace line" in which each cyclist follows the preceding rider closely, separated by a few inches to a few feet, with each cyclist taking a short turn at