

Oxford Tri Group Riding Etiquette

While we are not a cycling club and we do not want to over regulate club rides it is important that everyone that joins club rides is aware of general group riding etiquette to keep riders safe and to maintain the good reputation of the club with other road-users.

This document is not exhaustive and assumes that everyone riding is already conversant with the Highway Code and applies common sense and good manners in all situations. If you are new to road cycling, whether in groups or not, we suggest you also read the section at the bottom for inexperienced riders.

1 – Ride Leaders. If you have a ride leader on your ride, be aware they are not coaches and have no responsibility for group safety or instruction. Ride leaders are primarily there to deliver a route and maintain a pace suitable for the group. They probably are more experienced – but do not assume that. You are responsible for your own actions at all times.

2 – At all times be aware of other road users (particularly vehicles – but also consider other cyclists, pedestrians and horses). Do not assume that because you are riding in a group that you do not need to worry. As above – you are responsible for your own actions at all times.

3 – As a club, we don't rigidly adhere to formation cycling BUT it is generally desirable to keep the group as compact as possible so that it is easier for vehicles to pass when safe. So always aim to keep close to the rider in front of you. We understand that this may feel unsafe for inexperienced riders but it is important to try to achieve this. An additional benefit will be that you will "draft" off the rider in front and save effort.

We don't normally operate any rigid lead rotation system however normal etiquette would suggest that everyone that is strong enough to will take a turn on the front from time to time. If you come to the front aim to smoothly maintain existing speed.

4 – Riding close to the rider in front means that you have less time to react so it is important that all riders take responsibility for riding smoothly without sudden accelerations or braking. Again to the less experienced this will feel difficult at first, but confidence will come. Following the guidelines below will help riders to move smoothly together as a safe group.

5 – Don't ride too close and definitely do not ride with your front wheel overlapping the rear wheel of the rider in front. The rider in front may need to move sideways to avoid a hazard and may not see you there and a collision could ensue. Either ride directly behind or directly alongside.

6 – Braking - When riding at the front of the group always be aware of the road ahead so that you can avoid sharp braking. Avoid braking as much as possible, ideally slowing by stopping pedalling. If you do brake, be aware of the rider behind you and feather your brakes gently if possible.

7 – We use a simple set of verbal calls and/or arm signals to warn riders in a group of potential hazards. See the table below:

Call or sign	Meaning / Occasion
“Car Back”	Normally called out by the rearward rider first, to warn that a vehicle behind is about to overtake the group.
“Car Up”	Normally called out by the lead rider in the group first, to warn that an oncoming vehicle is approaching the group. This call normally only needs to be made when there is no white line on the road.
“Hole” / “Hole Left” / “Hole Right”	Called by lead riders to indicate a pothole or road damage. It is normal to also indicate with the relevant arm (left or right) by pointing at the hole as you go by. For smaller holes it is normal to just point rather than calling and pointing.
“Gravel”	Called whenever there is loose material on the road surface that may cause skids and slides. It can be accompanied by a flat handed wave on the relevant side.
“Slowing”	May be called when approaching a hazard or a junction. This may be accompanied by up and down waving of a flat hand.
“Stopping”	May be called when stopping at a hazard or junction. This may be accompanied by a vertically held flat hand.
Horizontal arm in the direction of turn.	Signalling to turn left or right.
Left hand pointed to the right, behind the back.	When riding past an obstruction on the left hand side of the road such as a parked car.

Particularly with calls, use common sense. Too much shouting may cause riders to ignore important calls or distract them from other hazards but not enough can allow accidents to happen. Don't endanger yourself by trying to make arm signals while braking, steering or while generally less stable.

8 – Single file or Two abreast? The Highway Code allows for cyclists to ride two abreast. There is much discussion about full interpretation of this and when it is best to ride single or double file. In general, double file is preferred because a) it halves the length of a group of riders, so making it easier for vehicles to overtake when safe and b) a wider group prevents vehicles trying to overtake when actually it is not safe to do so. So as a general rule, when appropriate, we normally ride two abreast.

That said – there are times, such as in town perhaps or on main roads where it is not appropriate, in which case single file may be best. Your ride leader may make this call for the group or you may need to make it yourself. It is not possible to make hard and fast rules on this.

While legally we may be allowed to ride two abreast, we must balance that against inconvenience caused to other road users. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups with gaps to allow vehicles to safely overtake. Angry drivers can become dangerous drivers.

9 – Horses. When riding up behind horses, of course always slow down and give as wide a berth as safely possible. It is advisable to make some noise or call out “hello” to let the rider as well as the horse know that you are there in advance of overtaking.

10 – Spitting and nose clearing. If you have to do this make sure there is no one behind or beside you. Allow for windspeed and direction.

11 – If you are riding in a group with a ride leader, respect the pace that they are setting. Group speeds, especially on slower rides, are designed to encourage confidence in less experienced riders so do not force the pace up. Faster riders are welcome to go to the front of the group (the leader does not have to be on the front) but do not ride ahead of the group and always be ready for the leader to call out turn offs. If you miss a turning because you are too far ahead do not expect the ride leader to wait for you.

12 – If riding two abreast, particularly when on the front, do not “half wheel”. That is do not move ahead of the rider alongside you as this causes the rider beside you to speed up which then causes the whole group to speed up.