

9 Paceline Rules

Tips to keep your group together and in good formation.

By Selene Yeager



When carried out properly, a paceline is an effective tool for a group ride: It enables cyclists to share the work of pushing through the wind. When performed poorly, the formation becomes counterproductive. "Most people are never taught the proper way to ride a paceline," says Ray Ignosh, a USA Cycling expert coach based in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. "So they make the same common mistakes that eventually become habits." Whether you're riding in a single or double formation, try these tips for taking your pulls and pedaling in line.

KEEP THE PACE The number one mistake riders make is picking up speed when they get to the front, says Ignosh. "Some guys just want to show off; others are well-intentioned—they just aren't in tune with their effort and feel like they're supposed to take a pull, so they pull." As you're riding through the line, pay attention to the group's average speed and effort. When you get to the front, do your best to maintain those levels. The goal is to keep the pack together, not blow it apart or shell riders off the back.

MICROADJUST It's nearly impossible for everyone to put forth equal amounts of effort, especially on undulating terrain. You need to make adjustments along the way to prevent what Ignosh calls the Slinky effect, where the line alternately bunches together and becomes strung out, with big gaps. "It's better to make two small undercorrections than one big overcorrection," he says. "Think of it like driving: You don't slam on the brakes, then hit the gas; you moderate your speed." To do that in a paceline, try one of these techniques:

Soft pedal: If you feel like you're getting sucked into the rider in front of you, take a light pedal stroke or two to adjust your speed accordingly.

Air brake: An easy (and safe) way to trim speed is to sit up and catch some wind. It'll slow you down a notch without disrupting the rhythm of the line.

Feather brake: Gently squeeze the brakes while continuing to pedal. You can scrub speed while shifting up or down as needed to alter your pace.

DON'T STARE Focusing on the wheel directly in front of you is a natural instinct when riding in a line, but it gives you zero time to react should something go awry. "Keep your head up and check about 10 meters down the road," says Ignosh. "Look through holes in the leading rider—over his shoulder, under his arm or through his legs—and ride proactively instead of reactively. This will help keep the line moving smoothly."

EASE OFF THE GAS Rather than accelerating when you pull, try to ride in the line at a steady pace and decelerate as you pull off and drift to the back. "This provides the right work-to-recovery ratio without all the punchy surges that tend to blow the weaker riders off the back," says Ignosh.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE Pacelines are designed to share the workload, so limit your pulls to a few minutes to stay fresh and give other riders a chance.

CONSERVE ENERGY If you feel tired, sit out a few turns until you're ready to take another pull. Simply open a spot for riders to rejoin the line in front of you, or come to the front and immediately pull off and drift to the back. You'll do the pack a favor by staying with them rather than working yourself into the red and falling off the back, which makes the group slow down to let you catch up.