



BALANCE BIKE BIBLE

FULL GUIDELINES FOR SAFE AND ENJOYABLE GROUP RIDES WITH BALANCE TRI CLUB

INTRODUCTION

Why should we care about how we ride in a group? Most obviously, because you don't want to stack, and you definitely don't want to cause one of your friends to stack. There are enough hazards out on the roads without us causing more! But also, responsible, considerate and cohesive group riding can greatly increase the enjoyment that you get from cycling, the image of our club, and cyclists in general. **If we demand the right to ride on the road, then we must be willing to ride responsibly and safely...especially as a group.**

Being fit and capable of hanging onto the group is not enough. Without taking away the enjoyment of the ride it is imperative that every rider hones his or her skills. The Club is growing fast, and we have riders across a huge range of ability and levels of fitness. Everyone should be tolerant, responsible and be prepared to accept politely-given constructive criticism if necessary. If you notice any unsafe riding, please either politely and constructively speak to the individual concerned, or bring it to the attention of the ride leader. Those more accomplished riders should devote part of the club ride to helping the beginners, rather than zooming off into the distance.

All Balance riders are required to read and understand this document, and put the guidelines into practice when out on the road. However, it is a long document, with a lot to take in, especially for newer group riders*. Don't worry – you will pick up a lot of it through experience, and learning from those around you. If you feel overwhelmed, and can't take in all of it, these are the TOP FIVE guidelines to remember :

SECTION 1 - THE TOP FIVE

- **Communicate.** Most accidents are avoidable through clear communication. You are responsible for your own safety and that of all members in the group - don't assume that everyone knows what you know.
- **Avoid sudden braking at all costs.** Let the group know if you plan on turning / changing speed etc. See the section on 'Slowing and Braking in a Group' for more guidance.
- **Be predictable.** Avoid any sudden movements and always 'hold your line' so those around you know what you're doing.
- **Concentrate.** You can have fun and chat, but keep your eyes and ears open at all times and be aware of what is going on around you.
- **NO half-wheeling.** This is where you overlap wheels with the person in front of you. If the person in front of you deviates from a straight line you (and probably everyone behind you) WILL come down.

* (NOTE : this document is the 'Balance Bike Bible' – the full version of Balance Club Riding Etiquette. There is a sister document available, the 'Balance Bike Basics' which is an abridged version of all the information that follows)

SECTION 2 - GENERAL RULES AND PRINCIPLES

Be courteous at all times to all road users – even if they are not showing you the same level of respect. Remember, you are not only representing yourself, but also your club and all cyclists.

Stick to the rules of the road. If it's one way, don't go down it the wrong way. If the light is red, stop. If the speed limit is 40kmph, stick to 40kmph.

Front and back positions are the most important - front riders are responsible for calculating actions for the group as a whole to ride safely (not just themselves), and the tail end riders assist the group in negotiating lane changes by acting as the rear turn indicators and signalling when the road is clear of traffic.

If you want to race, race. Balance & UTS Tri Club rides are training / recreational rides – we do not lay on races. Maintain your line and speed, and move as a cohesive bunch. Riding in a group is not the place to show your power and ability with sudden changes of pace and direction.

Stay on the wheel of the person in front of you. If you leave too big a gap, you will drop off and the group will have to keep waiting for you. How close you ride will depend on your experience and the terrain you are riding. As a general rule, stay as close as you are comfortable but with a bit of 'wriggle room' in case of emergency. (The safest way to judge your distance from the rider in front of you is to look at their backside rather than their rear wheel).

Be self-sufficient and ensure that you have everything you need in terms of lights (with fresh batteries), hydration, nutrition and spares. You should always carry at least one spare tube, and two or more if you are riding long distances or in wet weather. It is a condition of riding with Balance and UTS Tri Club that you have working lights available to use in all dawn, dusk and night time rides, as well as in poor weather conditions. It is advisable to use a red flashing rear light in all weather conditions, day or night. We also highly recommend using front lights in all conditions, day or night.

Finally, relax, but stay alert.

SECTION 3 - SPECIFIC GUIDELINES AND HELPFUL HINTS

BEFORE SETTING OFF

Establish who is the ride leader, and who is happy at the front / back – these are really important positions, and beginners should NOT be at the back.

Listen to the ride briefing from the Ride Leader. Please do not talk during this, even if you think you've heard it all before. Every ride is different, and the route and conditions – as well as briefings – do change, so please pay attention.

The ride leader should give an overview of the ride, including any tricky sections, whether we are starting off single/double, meeting points if the ride gets split etc

Riders should 'double up' BEFORE the ride sets off – so you are not getting organised when rolling on the road.

START AS A GROUP, FINISH AS A GROUP

If you get separated at intersections, as a matter of courtesy, the lead group should soft pedal (if safe to do so – do not drop to 15kmph on a busy road where cars can't easily pass you) until the rest have rejoined. If you are behind, make an effort to catch up quickly, without taking risks.

The pack should wait at certain points along the route to regroup, especially at turn points and if the stragglers don't know the route. No one should be left alone on a group ride. It is only acceptable to finish separately if the whole group has agreed, and no-one is left entirely on their own.

If you are concerned that you might not be able to keep up with the group, or go the whole distance, discuss this with the ride leader well before you are due to set off, and arrange to 'buddy up' with someone in the same situation, then you can both drop off the group together. Make sure that if you do drop off, you advise the rest of the group and ensure that they know what you are doing and where you are going.

RIDING THROUGH CHANGING TRAFFIC LIGHTS

Everyone should be alert when approaching traffic lights, and ready to stop quickly if needs be. There are various scenarios when approaching traffic lights :

1. Lights stay green – all make it through!
2. Lights turn orange at any time approaching: riders at the front of the group to decide (depending on the size, speed and experience of the group) whether to roll through or stop. Their call should be repeated clearly back down the group. NOTE: only the front riders can make this decision – it should be called from the front only.
3. Lights turn orange/red as lead riders go through : if safe, riders should follow. If a mid-group member does not feel it's safe, s/he should call "stopping" in a loud voice & following riders call "stopping" accordingly. DO NOT take hands off handlebars to signal this & try to stop without excessive braking! If the group is then split, the lead group should soft pedal (if safe to do so – do not drop to 15kmph on a busy road where cars can't easily pass you) until the rest have rejoined.

RELAX

It not only saves energy, but it makes bike handling much more effective. Anytime you are riding in close proximity of other riders there's always the chance that you may come into contact. If you have tense arms and get bumped from the side, the shock will go directly to the front wheel and you will swerve and possibly lose control. If you are relaxed, it's much easier to absorb the bump without losing control.

ANTICIPATING

Sudden movements create problems for everyone around you. Practice keeping an eye on conditions ahead of you. Try not to look down at the rear wheel in front of you, but use the back of the rider as your target while regularly glancing 3-5 riders ahead, and also up the road to see problems before they occur. A good rider at the back will know what's going on up ahead before anything happens at the front of the group.

CALLING AND SIGNALLING HAZARDS

The riders behind often cannot see the obstacles in front of the group. The lead riders have the responsibility to alert following riders of potholes, glass, fallen branches, debris, parked cars and slower riders ahead that may cause a fall or necessitate a change of direction by the bunch. This is done by calling out "hole" or similar, and by clearly pointing (where safe) to the obstacle.

People can always see hand signals & not always hear calls, so the priority is on hand signals preferably with calls, followed by calls alone. Calls need to be short, clear, loud, timely relevant. For instance call "dog" in a firm voice if a dog is about to cross in front of you. (Don't say "watch out for the dog" – too many words). Speak clearly, and above the sound of the wind, but you don't need to scream – this can be very off-putting, especially for newer riders who often slam on the brakes if they hear a scream. And it's no use calling hole once you've passed it – all calls should be made in advance and every rider in the pack should then make the call right to the back! Finally, only call hazards that may impact the group – too many irrelevant calls (eg calling every single 'car back' when the group is already nicely tucked in and the car can pass easily, or calling very small leaves/puddles which can easily be ridden over) can become 'white noise'.

If the group has to change course for a parked car or a slower rider, a sideways hand and arm wave can be used to direct riders away from the obstacle. The hazard should continue to be pointed out and / or called out by the riders progressively down the group; this ensures that all have a chance to take evasive action.

Please note that the front and tail end riders have the SOLE responsibility for making decisions and calls such as 'roll', 'stop' and 'over'. Don't call this from the middle of the group – it can lead to great confusion (too many chefs in the kitchen...!).

Avoid signalling when going downhill, when windy, or if you are feeling unsteady – it is much more important to keep your hands on the bars. Do feel free to call, though.

Never use 'No' or 'Go' as a call (they are easily confused).

CALLING FROM THE BACK

The tail end riders should assist the group to negotiate lane changes by acting as the rear turn indicators and signalling when the road is clear of traffic. Typical calls from the back are :

“Car back” – to advise the group that there is a car behind them which may affect the group. NOTE: you don’t need to call every ‘car back’ – only those that may affect the group.

“Wait” – to advise the group that it is not yet safe to move into the lane to their right (in response to a request from the front to change lanes).

“Over” – to move the group into the lane to their right. (The outside tail end rider will either be responding to a request from the front to change lanes, or will have independently identified a need to change lanes. S/he will have first checked that the lane is clear, will have indicated, and will have moved into the lane before calling the group ‘over’.) **NB. It is very important not to call ‘over’ until the car has passed ALL the riders in front.**

“Single” – to advise the group to move to single file. (This may be because there is an obstacle coming up but the right lane is not/will not be clear in time, so the rider cannot call the group ‘over’.) Remember – the outside rider always moves BEHIND the inside rider. This can be also called from the front if no call has come from the back and you are approaching a car in your lane – remember, calls should always start from the front or back only (too many chefs, and all that...).

“Double” – to advise the group to move from single to double file (for example when the obstruction has been passed, or the road widens to two lanes). Resume original positions ie. rear rider retakes the outside position.

CALLING FROM THE FRONT – AND HAND SIGNALS

The front riders are responsible for the group, and will do the majority of all ride calling. Aside from calling hazards, typical calls from the front are :



Turning right

“Turning right” – make sure that this is really obvious, and doesn’t just look like you’re stretching your arm or pointing to something on the ground. Be proud of turning! **Do this 20 – 50 metres in advance of the corner and not when rolling around it.** All riders signal and call this all the way to the pack of pack – no exceptions!



Turning left

“Turning left” – as above. Outside front rider must verbally ensure that their inside rider knows that they are turning left and is signalling – I have often seen a whole group turn left INTO their inside riders who hadn’t got the message! All riders signal and call this all the way to the pack of pack – no exceptions!



*Obstruction ahead,
move over*

“Obstruction ahead, move over” – this is used when there is an obstruction ahead (eg another single rider), but where a lane change is not required. All riders signal and call this all the way to the pack of pack – no exceptions!



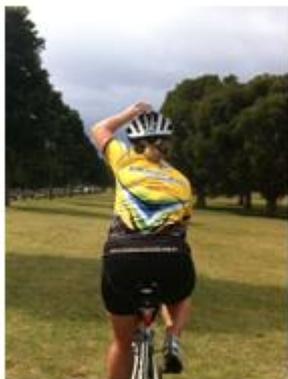
Slowing

“Slowing” – palm facing backwards. NB. This must be called BEFORE you start slowing – it is useless if called afterwards! All riders signal and call this all the way to the pack of pack – no exceptions!



Stopping

“Stopping” – umm. I think you understand this one! All riders signal and call this all the way to the pack of pack – no exceptions!



*Please call us over to the
right lane when safe*

“Call us over, please” – this is used by the front rider to communicate with the outside tail end rider. Tail end rider MUST be on the lookout for this signal, and call the group ‘over’ when safe, or ‘single, as appropriate (see section on ‘Calling from the back’.) If “wait”, “hold” or no call at all is heard from the back, the front rider may then make the call to ‘go single’, ‘go straight’ or even stop, depending what is appropriate under the circumstances.

“Double” – to advise the group to move from single to double file (for example when the obstruction has been passed, or the road widens to two lanes). Resume original positions ie. rear rider retakes the outside position.

“Car up” – to advise the group that there is a car ahead of them – only to be called when the ‘car up’ may affect the group.

“Clear” – signifying that the road is clear for the group to proceed, for example at a roundabout.

“Rolling” – Starting to move from stationary / slowing (eg as a light changes to green from red as you were slowing on approach) OR rolling the leader.

All of the above calls and, where necessary, hand signals, must be passed on down the group to the tail end riders.

CLOSING A GAP

Sometimes gaps appear for a variety of reasons. If a gap forms and you are strong enough to close it, advise your fellow riders of your intention and do so gradually and smoothly. Always communicate, so the whole group know what you are doing and how they fit in.

PASSING

If you need to pass other cyclists, keep 1 metre of clearance - more at high downhill speeds. Please note that it's your responsibility to do it safely. Check behind before you change your lane position. Call out,

"Rider right" to the bicyclist you're passing, and pass on the right. Don't pass on the left. If someone drops off on your left, subtly move left so another rider can come up on your right.

RIDING 2 ABREAST

You may ride two abreast when a) traffic is light b) there are two lanes. Don't ride two abreast where the road is narrow and cars will have difficulty passing you (unless it is a very quiet back road, and you can change to 'singles' easily). This is both for safety and for courtesy to other road users.

When riding two abreast, cyclists should occupy a whole lane - they should NOT ride with one rider on the hard shoulder/bike path, and the other in the road. This encourages cars to try and pass you when there isn't enough room. The group should make it very clear that they are 'holding the lane', and should not huddle in to the left.

On a multilane road with light traffic, cars can pass in the next lane. On a narrow road or with heavier traffic, be courteous and don't make drivers wait for you. Pull into single file well before cars reach you - it takes only one thoughtless rider out to the right of the group to endanger the whole group. The outside tail end rider will call out, "Car back - Single" to let the group know it's time to single up.

CHANGING TO SINGLE

Groups should change to single file on narrow roads, roads with only one lane, or for any other reason where the road is blocked and two can't go through. Depending on the situation either the front or rear rider will call 'Single'. This call is then passed along the line to the front, and the group transitions smoothly to single file. The outside rider should go behind the inside rider – be nice, and leave room for each other! The rear rider should call 'double' when it's safe to double up again, and the rear rider of each 'pair' moves back to the outside position (ie. resume original positions)

AERO BARS / DROP BARS

There are many views on whether it is safe to use aero bars and/or drop bars in group riding, so the Balance view is this :

Best practice : never drop down into your aerobars or the drop portion of road bike handlebars when riding with a group. Likewise, don't use the elbow rests of aero bars as 'handles' – have your hands on the handle bars themselves.

However: when riding in a small, experienced group, and where the whole group has agreed (at the beginning of the ride) that they are happy with using aerobars, then it is acceptable. Furthermore, when going downhill at speed (ie. when the group has split for a fast downhill section and is not currently in a group formation) it is acceptable (and in fact more stable) to use the drop bars on a road bike.

SLOWING / BRAKING IN A GROUP

If you are getting too close, try not to touch the brakes, but try to slow down by first sticking your head and shoulders up into the air. This will break the slipstream and wash a couple of kilometres off your speed. If this is not effective (or the person in front is a lot taller!) bring your wheel slightly to one side of the rider in front (do not overlap the wheel in front). This will once again help to break the slipstream and decelerate. If these both fail and the person in front is slowing down, then you can gently squeeze the brakes whilst pedalling through the resistance (which avoids any sudden change of speed). Make sure that every movement you do is controlled and steady.

If you are slowing as a group, for example for traffic lights, your front rider will call and signal 'slowing'. Lift your head and shoulders up first BEFORE lightly braking as necessary whilst still pedalling.

DOWNHILL IN A GROUP

On certain rides, there will be long, steep, fast downhill sections. In these instances, the group will often split up, allowing everyone to ride at a speed within their comfort zone, before regrouping at the bottom of the descent.

For shorter and less steep downhill sections, **front riders should continue to pedal** so those behind don't have to brake (remember that the riders behind are drafting). If you don't keep pedalling, everyone behind you will have to reduce their speed, and will be tempted to hit the brakes. Riders to the rear will accelerate faster downhill as drafting becomes more effective at the higher speeds. If you are following, back off a couple of bike lengths to compensate for the greater affects of drafting. If you are closing on the rider in front, sit up and let the wind slow you or use VERY light braking to maintain spacing, but in both cases you should keep pedalling against the resistance. Keeping your legs moving not only makes it easier to keep the spacing, but also helps the legs get rid of the acid build up from the previous climb.

Expect the unexpected downhill and don't rely on signals/calls from the front – keep a safe distance according to your ability level. Less experienced riders should not signal obstructions when going downhill – keep your hands on the bars. More experienced riders may signal if they feel 100% safe in doing so.

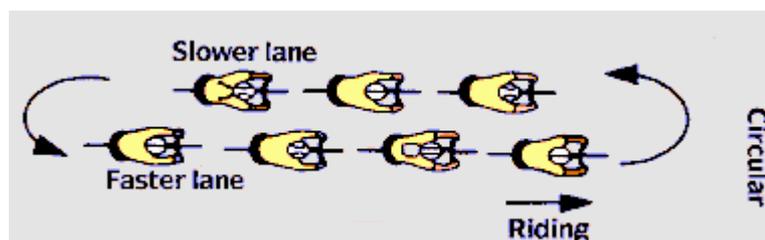
UPHILL IN A GROUP

Be aware that when you stand up on your pedals, you 'lose' half a pedal stroke (often called 'roll back'). When riding in a group, this has the same effect as if you were braking (ie. you slow significantly relative to the rest of the group). Therefore, prior to getting out of the saddle, make sure that you increase the distance between you and the rider behind you, and make sure you are at the top of your pedal stroke and keep the pressure on the pedal. Gaps can appear quickly uphill, so roll left if riders on your left drop back, and allow faster riders to pass on the right.

CHANGING THE LEADER

There are several methods of changing the lead at the front, and different clubs use different methods. Whatever method you use, the ride leader should ensure that it is made clear BEFORE the ride starts.

When on the ride, make sure that everyone is clear that the lead is being changed. 'Ready to roll the leader'. The safest way is a circular roll :



Roll until the 2 at front are two that want to lead.

SECTION 4 - DOCUMENT DETAILS

Balance Bikes Bible, Version 2.0

Written and collated by Jocie Evison, Balance Tri Club Member

Updated in February 2014

NOTE : this is the 'Balance Bike Bible' – the full version of Balance Club Riding Etiquette. There is a sister document available, the 'Balance Bike Basics' which is an abridged version.

SOURCES – with thanks to :

www.bikexpert.com

www.ctc.org.uk

www.cycling-secrets.com

www.southernvets.org.au

www.easycycling.com

www.bamacyclist.com

www.randwickbotanycc.com

... and those who reviewed the draft and provided great feedback, and all the people that I've ridden with, who've taught me along the way.