PART III
ENJOYING THE RIDE
Riding Enjoyment

When you start riding, your technique is much more important than your speed. Maintaining a steady cadence, shifting smoothly and keeping a consistent pace are the building blocks to becoming a fast and safe cyclist. Be sure to fuel up before you go on a ride: eating and drinking lots of water are vital.

Cadence

Cadence is your pedaling rate in revolutions per minute (rpm). Higher rpm produce the same power with less force, though this may feel strange at first. For most, the best cadence for riding is 75 to 95 rpm. Practice riding with that cadence and you will be able to go longer distances with ease. Pedaling at a lower rpm increases fatigue in your thigh muscles. If your bicycle has more than one gear, continually shift to a gear that enables you to easily spin the pedals at a cadence of 75 to 95 rpm on whatever terrain you are riding.

Shifting smoothly

Using the gears on your bike will enable you to ride more comfortably for longer distances and periods of time. You want to match the effort your legs are capable of to the terrain and wind in which you’re riding. Shifting gears helps accomplish this goal. Muscles get tired when you push hard; shifting to an appropriate gear will reduce the need to use as much force. Riding into the wind can be more difficult than pedaling up a steep hill — and may require shifting to lower gears.

How to Shift

Today, indexed shifters and derailleurs are more precise than ever. Even though your rear derailleur is designed to shift while under full pedaling power, a slight reduction of force helps to complete each shift smoothly. Shift while pedaling, but not while pushing hard on the pedals. Reducing power before shifting is most important when shifting your front derailleur.

Pace

The pace you choose to ride is dependent upon your fitness level, your cadence and the group you are riding with. A steady pace makes you...
Riding with a Group

If you are riding in a group, there are some group riding rules to follow. You are responsible for your own safety when riding in a group. If you are planning on riding in a major ride with more than 100 riders, be sure to take the League’s Group Riding Skills Course.

Be Predictable
Group riding requires even more attention to predictability than riding alone. Other riders expect you to continue riding at a constant speed and lane position, following the road or trail, unless you indicate differently.

Use Signals
Use hand and verbal signals to communicate with others in the group and with motorists. Hand signals, except for the standard hand signals, may vary by region so make sure you know and agree to the same set of signals.

Give Warnings
Warn cyclists behind you of changes in direction or speed. The lead rider should call out “left” or “right” in addition to a hand signal. The lead rider should announce the turn well in advance of the intersection, so members of the group have time to position themselves and can turn without conflict.

Change Positions Correctly
You should pass others on their left. Say “on your left” to warn others that you are passing. If you need to pass someone on the right, say “on your right” clearly and be careful since this is an unusual maneuver.

Announce Hazards
Most of the cyclists riding in a group will not have a good view of the road surface ahead, so it is important to announce hazards. Indicate hazards by pointing down to the left or right and shouting, “hole” or “bump.” Everyone should be made aware of hazards, however, everyone does not need to announce them.

Watch for Traffic Coming from the Rear
Even when you are occupying the proper lane position, it often helps to know when a car is coming. Since those in front cannot see traffic approaching from the rear, it is the responsibility of the riders in back to inform the others by saying “car back.” Around curves, on narrow roads, or when riding double, it is also helpful to warn of traffic approaching from ahead with “car up.”

Be Careful at Intersections
When approaching intersections requiring vehicles to yield or stop, the lead rider should say “slowing” or “stopping” to alert those behind them. When passing through an intersection, some bicyclists say “clear” if there is no cross traffic. This is a dangerous practice and should not be followed. It encourages riders to let others do their thinking for them. Each bicyclist is responsible for his or her own safety.

Leave a Gap for Cars
When riding up hills or on narrow roads, leave a gap between every three or four bicyclists so motorists can pass smaller groups.

Move Off the Road to Stop
When the group stops, move well off the road so you do not interfere with traffic. When you start again, each bicyclist should look for, and yield to, traffic.

Ride Single File or Two Abreast
Ride single-file or two abreast as appropriate to the roadway, traffic conditions, and where allowed by law. Most state vehicle codes permit narrow vehicles such as bicycles and motorcycles to ride two abreast within the lane. Even where riding double is legal, courtesy dictates that you ride single file when cars are trying to pass you if the lane is wide enough for them to safely do so. Riding more than two abreast is almost always illegal unless the road is closed to motor-vehicle traffic.
How to Drive Around Cyclists

About 98 million people in the United States own a bicycle. About 700 bicyclists are killed each year in the U.S. Around 96 percent of these deaths result from crashes with motor vehicles. In all 50 states, bicyclists are accorded the same rights and expected to obey the same laws as drivers of motor vehicles.

How to Drive Around Cyclists

Leave at least three feet of passing space between the right side of your vehicle and a bicyclist.

Be aware that when a road is too narrow for cars and bikes to ride safely side by side, it is safest for bicyclists to take the travel lane, which means riding in or near the center of the lane. This is allowed in the laws of all 50 states.

Reduce your speed when passing a cyclist, especially if the roadway is narrow.

When turning left at an intersection, yield to an oncoming bicyclist just as you would yield to an oncoming motorist.

After passing a cyclist on your right, check over your shoulder to make sure you have allowed adequate distance before merging back in.

Don’t honk your horn when approaching bicyclists.

In inclement weather, give cyclists extra room, just as you would other motorists.

Look for approaching situations and obstacles that may be hazardous to cyclists, such as potholes, debris, and glass, and then give them adequate space to maneuver.

Look for bicyclists before opening your car door on the traffic side.

Children on bicycles often act unpredictably: Expect the unexpected.

Common Cyclist Errors

Unfortunately, not everyone who rides a bike understands or obeys the rules of the road. Some of the common cyclist errors you may encounter as a motorist are:

- **Wrong-way riding.** Cyclists riding on the left (wrong) side of the road, facing traffic, cause 14 percent of all car/bike crashes. Look both ways before turning.

- **Mid-block ride-outs.** This is the most frequent crash type for young riders and occurs when the bicyclist enters the roadway from a driveway, alley, or curb without slowing, stopping, or looking for traffic.

- **Cyclist failure to yield when changing lanes** (11 percent of car/bike collisions).

- **Cyclist failure to yield to crossing traffic** (9 percent of car/bike collisions).