

Occasionally while riding with the many strong and steady cyclists I meet at cycling camps, centuries and mountain bike festivals, I see people who have it all, well, wrong. (Obviously they never read BICYCLING.) Hence this list of what not to do.

I know-identifying "don'ts" is negative teaching, so rather than focus on Thou Shalt Not, we'll also suggest how to do it right. No matter what kind of rides you do (from road to technical singletrack) you'll find something here to hone your skills.

1

DON'T. Make sudden movements in a pack
DO: Keep your riding steady and smooth.

Nothing disturbs a group more than a jerky rider, someone who makes abrupt movements that send ripples of fear through the paceline. One example: Instead of merely pointing out obstacles on the road, some riders yell, "Rocks! Gravel! Pothole! Dead skunk!" at the top of their lungs while jerking a hand up and down at the offending bit of flotsam. So ride fluidly and predictably in all situations. Pacelines are an act of shared trust.

2

DON'T. Ride on aero bars in a paceline
DO. Keep your hands on the brake hoods, the drops or on top of the handlebar near the stem.

Riding in a paceline on aero bars is a major no-no for several reasons. First, you'll get yelled at by other riders. In some road circles, having aero bars mounted at all is prima facie evidence that you have no group riding experience. That's stereotyping of the worst kind but it won't stop the snide remarks.

Second, aero bars mean you're basically steering with your elbows and have a lot less control than when your hands are on the hoods-not the way to make yourself welcome in a group. Finally, in the event of an emergency, your hands are so far from the brake levers that you'll have to sit up abruptly to find them. Sure, you don't want to be hitting the brakes in a paceline, but if it's necessary, you'll want to get to your stoppers in a hurry.

3

DON'T. Overgear on technical climbs
DO: Pick a gear that lets you spin over obstacles.

It's tempting to bash through that tough section of singletrack in a big gear. After all, if you maintain momentum you can often float over rocks and roots that would stop you dead if you were going slower. That's fine if you're strong and skilled enough to pull it off, but once you bog down in an excessive gear, you're dead in the water. So on most steep uphill, it's better to pick a gear a bit smaller than you think you'll need. Then when you encounter roots, rocks or that six-inch ledge you didn't expect, you can spin out of trouble rather than slogging to a stop.

4

DON'T. Hammer every hill
DO: Use your gears to keep your effort level steady as you climb.

You've ridden with people like this-they go berserk on every hill, leaping out of the saddle and attacking, shattering the group's continuity and breaking everyone's legs. But by the

last ten miles, they're usually so tired they slip off the back on the mildest rises. There's a time to go hard on hills, but it isn't in a cohesive group that's trying to maintain a steady pace. Save the heroics for interval sessions and races when it counts.

5

DON'T: Look at the obstacles in the trail or on the road
DO: Look at the line where you want your bike to go

Have you ever seen a big boulder in the middle of the trail that you wanted to avoid-and then ran right into it? There's a simple reason: The bike tends to go where you look. If you stare at the obstacle, that's where your bike will track. Fighter pilots call it "target fixation"-they concentrate so intensely on the target that they fly right into the ground. The same thing happens on singletrack or when glass litters the road. The solution is to focus ahead on the good line that cuts through the clutter. The bike will automatically follow your eye, just like magic.

6

DON'T: Stand up abruptly when you rise
DO: Get out of the saddle in one smooth motion

When you stand suddenly to climb, your bike has a tendency to kick back slightly. This lurching motion can take out the front wheel of the rider behind you, or at least scare him to death. If you regularly dropkick your riding companions in this way, you'll get a bad reputation on group rides. To stand smoothly, shift to a gear one or two cogs harder than those you've been climbing in while seated. As one pedal comes over the top, roll your hips smoothly

up and forward and come out of the saddle. Let your weight finish rolling the pedal around. Don't jerk on the bars, either. Your goal is a seamless transition from sitting to standing.

7

DON'T: Put your inside pedal down in corners
DO: Put your outside pedal down and weight it

True fright is watching a novice rider totter through a corner with the inside pedal just millimeters above the pavement. If it hits, the resulting shock will knock the rear wheel sideways, a sure crash. To corner safely, stop pedaling as you approach the turn. Put the outside pedal down (that's the right pedal if you're turning left, in other words). Shift your weight to that pedal by standing on it and rising slightly off the saddle. This assures that your inside pedal is up and out of harm's way. It also lowers your center of gravity so you can carve the turn with safety and style. Practice your technique around traffic cones in an empty parking lot.

8

DON'T: Ride with a rigid, tight upper body
DO: Relax the muscles of your hands, arms and face

You've probably ridden next to people who grasp the handlebars so tightly they exhibit the signs of rigor mortis: white knuckles, locked elbows, clenched teeth and protruding neck veins. If you're one of these riders, relax. Literally. Think of your upper body as another form of suspension on your bike. Relaxed arms and shoulders absorb bumps on the trail and shoulder touches from your group companions. If your light touch on the bars tenses into a deathgrip, those shocks get transferred to the front wheel and you could crash.

9 DON'T: Accelerate when you get to the front of the paceline
DO: Maintain the group's speed when you're at the front.

Pacelines work best when they proceed at a steady speed. But there's something about being at the front that makes inexperienced riders want to hammer. Maybe it's the chance to show everyone how strong they are, or maybe it's the thrill of having a group strung out behind. In any case, resist the urge to increase the speed. Such yo-yoing makes gaps open farther back, exhausting riders who should be getting an easier ride in the paceline. A tip: When you're second in line, check your cycle-computer to see how fast the group is going. Then when you hit the front, maintain the same speed.

10 DON'T: let gaps open in a paceline
DO: Stay on the wheel in front of you

Another simple but important paceline skill: Stick close to the wheel in front of you. If you're in the middle of the line and you lose contact with the draft, you'll waste substantial energy catching back up-and so will everyone behind you. If you fall too far behind, the riders following will have to jump past you and conduct their own chase. It's better to expend a little energy to smoothly close a five-foot gap than to blow a lot of energy bridging a 20 or 30 feet chasm. Pay now or pay later.

DON'T: Overlap wheels
DO: Ride one to three feet behind the rider in front of you

Most crashes in packs or pairs happen when one rider overlaps a wheel with another. If the lead rider swerves or drifts, the trailing rider's front wheel can get taken right out

from under him. Ouch. So always protect your front wheel. Think of it as your most precious possession-fragile, ephemeral, golden. Nothing touches it. Nothing even comes close. Your front wheel should spin along as if in an invisible force field.

DON'T: Bif it in the rain
DO: learn some simple tricks for cornering on wet surfaces

12 If you watched the epic mountain stages of the '98 TourdeFrance, you probably noticed that they were plagued with rainy conditions. How do the pros handle rainy descents and slimy corners, often at speeds in excess of 60 mph? We asked former Tour riders like Ron Kiefel and Davis Phinney.

► Go fast when you're in the straights, brake before the corners, take the corners slowly and then accelerate once the bike is upright. Hitting the front brake while the bike is leaning over can result in a disaster.

► Wear eye protection. Clear lenses help keep grit out of your eyes. If you can't see clearly, you simply can't ride safely.

► Reduce tire pressure slightly and choose wider rubber. If you know it's going to be wet, use tires made specifically for rain.

► Practice. Instead of pouting on the couch when it rains, practice cornering in a parking lot. Learn how much tire adhesion you have in varying conditions.

► Distribute your weight properly as you enter the turn. Keep your upper body low over the top tube, slide back slightly on the saddle and relax your arms and shoulders. If you tense up, you're less likely to be able to control a skid.

11 ► Ride a mountain bike in varying conditions to learn to feel com-

comfortable and confident on the road when your tires start to squirm around on the wet.

13

DON'T: Stare fixedly at the rider in front of you
DO: Look several riders up the road

When you're going hard or when you're tired, you may develop tunnel vision, staring at the spinning cogs of the rider directly ahead. But if there's a crash in front or someone swerves, you won't see it in time to react. Len Pettyjohn, formerly the coach of the Coors Light Pro Cycling team, told his riders, "If you stare at the rear wheel of the rider in front of you, that's the last thing you'll see before you hit the pavement." The solution is simple. Keep your head up so you can scan the road ahead. Look through the riders directly ahead of you to spot potential danger well in advance, when there's still plenty of time to do something about it.

14

DON'T: Climb seated all the time
DO: Vary your position and stand occasionally.

There's a trick to handling long climbs with a minimum of effort. It's simple and obvious-but for some reason many riders forget to do it. Simply alternate standing and sitting every minute or so. If you never vary your position, the same muscles will get fatigued and your efficiency (and your enjoyment) will vanish. So sit for several minutes, then shift to a slightly harder gear and stand up. Rock the bike back and forth gently, letting your weight push down on the pedals. After a minute or so, sit back down and shift to an easier gear. Repeat the process all the way to the top. You'll be more relaxed and less tired.

15

DON'T: Fight the wind
DO: Be smarter and more patient than the worst gale

Many times of the year, if you don't ride in the wind you won't ride at all.

Here's how to buck the breeze:

► **On out-and-back rides, head into the wind on the outward leg.** You'll do your hard work first, using the wind for resistance, then you can spin back and work on leg speed. It's easier mentally, too, knowing that the return leg won't be so hard.

► **Don't overgear.** It's tempting to push a big gear to keep the speed you normally maintain on a given stretch of road in calm conditions. It won't happen. Gear down, keep your cadence up and you'll not only be more efficient but you'll also get better training.

► **Get low.** Present as little frontal area as possible to the gale. Get down in the drops or cup your hands over the tops of the brake hoods while resting your wrists on the bend of the bars. Use aero bars if you're riding solo. Keep your back flat and your head up so you can see.

► **Be strong mentally.** Wind is demoralizing because it's so relentless. So tell yourself how much stronger the wind is making you and how good you are in windy conditions.