

How to Safely Draft in Group Rides

One of the benefits of riding in a group is the opportunity to draft behind another rider to reduce wind resistance for more efficient cycling. While the benefits of riding the slipstream are obvious, it is critical to follow basic safety guidelines for drafting to ride safely.

Communicate: When a wreck occurs in a pace line, in most cases, the rider causing the wreck is ahead of the carnage and normally avoids falling. The most common wreck in a pace line is one rider touching the wheel of a rider in front. The way to avoid this type of accident is communication. All riders need to call out or point out road obstructions and alert riders around you as to what you are doing.

Follow your line, avoid braking and moderate speed: Your hands should be on the tops and covering your brakes when drafting, as opposed to holding the drops. When you need to moderate speed, do so by “feathering” your brakes. Shave speed by easing your pedal stroke and lifting your chest to create wind drag rather than slamming on the brakes. If you need to stand up out of the saddle, do not allow your bike to shoot backwards and touch the wheel of the rider behind you.

Mind your distancing/spacing: The distance between your tire and the wheel in front of you should be determined by your bike handling skills, reaction time capability and group riding experience. This distance typically ranges between a full bike length for most riders to a wheel length or less for highly skilled, experienced riders. Always increase distance when descending hills or encountering dangerous crosswinds. If you edge closer when facing a strong headwind, consider returning to a safer distance when wind conditions improve. Remember, you are in a MUCH better position to avert a collision with a bike length of reaction time! Respect the preferences of riders that are not comfortable with you any closer than a bike length.

Do not overlap wheels: Never allow wheels to overlap when drafting, regardless of wind direction. The exception to this rule is when the group is riding in double column formation. In this situation, riders should ride side by side as opposed to one rider slightly ahead of the other.

Look ahead: Do not stare at the wheel in front of you. You should be looking ahead to understand what the riders ahead of you are encountering, thus allowing you to anticipate turns, road conditions and visual signals.

If you would like to learn more about drafting, we invite you to watch a YouTube video entitled, “How to draft like a pro” at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqLdeLchqYA>

Another article worth reading on this topic can be found here:

<https://www.bicycling.com/skills-tips/a38238367/how-to-draft-while-cycling/>