

# Riding in a Paceline Is a Basic Cycling Skill

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Why do many cyclists choose to go it alone when riding in club rides or centuries? Many group rides can turn into survival of the fittest, where the novice is quickly sent off the back.

Ideally, a group should contain both novices and experienced riders who don't feel compelled to prove themselves on every ride. The key is riding safely and effectively in a paceline.

Pacelines are either single or double. In a single paceline, everyone lines up behind the first rider, who maintains a constant speed. The rotation occurs when the front rider pulls off to the side and drifts to the back of the line. The next rider then sets the pace. Riders stay on the front from a few seconds to several minutes. This type of paceline has the advantage of requiring less road space.

A double echelon, also known as a rotating paceline, contains two lines of riders side by side, continuously in motion. One line goes slightly faster than the other does. Let's say you're the lead rider in the faster line. You should cross over to the slow line after passing the front wheel of the rider beside you (the front rider in the slower line). Then you drift back with the others in the slow line. When the final position is reached (back of the line), slide onto the back wheel of the last rider in the fast line.

Try a single echelon first. Lead for 20 seconds, then pull off either to the right or left and slide to the back of the line. Stay close enough to bump elbows, then move in behind the last person.

Now try the double paceline. Form two lines, side by side. March up the faster line, pull over, then drop back in the slower line. Practice both clockwise and counterclockwise rotation.

Now, practice adjusting to crosswinds. Wind direction determines which way to pull off you always move into a crosswind. This way, the advancing line that is already working harder gets some protection from the wind.

In strong crosswinds, riders become offset like geese flying south for the winter, forming what is known as an echelon. They also overlap wheels, which means a mistake in which wheels touch can take down the whole bunch. The width of this type of paceline also requires a completely traffic-free road.

Here are some additional tips for becoming a more efficient paceline rider:

- Get used to following closely to the rider in front of you to get the benefit of the draft. You use much less energy following a cyclist than riding out in the wind by yourself. Top riders feel comfortable riding within inches of the wheel in front. In a rotating paceline, stay as close together side to side.
- Put weaker riders behind stronger ones. A paceline is a team. It's only as strong as its weakest member is, so help that person.
- Ride smoothly and predictably. Never accelerate or brake quickly. If you are running up on the wheel in front, slow down by moving into the wind slightly. Avoid hitting the brakes.
- Maintain a constant speed when you get to the front by glancing at your cycle computer. The tendency for new riders is to jump and pick up the pace.
- If the rider at the front charges off, let that person go and hold your speed. If you're in a double echelon, move over and fill the hole just created.

- If you tire, sit out as many turns as necessary at the back. Let riders coming back know that you are resting, and give them space to move in ahead of you.
- As the speed increases, gaps may develop because riders can't hold the wheel ahead or miss the last wheel as they try to get back on the end of the paceline. Strong riders need to fill these gaps in order to preserve the flow, even if it means jumping across and moving back up the line early.
- Reduce your effort up hills because the draft is less. Conversely, accelerate through more quickly on descents so everyone won't stack up from behind.