



Stirling Bike Club

Group Road Ride Handbook



Stirling Bike Club

Group Road Ride Handbook

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1. Introduction

Stirling Bike Club (SBC) rides are organised by members of Stirling Bike Club. These rides are not led or coached sessions although coaching sessions are available regularly for the Wallace Warriors section and occasionally to the wider membership as separate events throughout the year (they will be identified as such). The safety of each rider involved in a club ride is the responsibility of the individual. Also note that they are not races and should not be regarded as such.

Non-members of SBC are welcome to join the rides. A verbal induction will be arranged where SBC group riding etiquette, verbal shouts and spelling up procedure is practised before joining our groups. After being out on a few club rides the expectation is that the rider should join the club if they wish to continue taking part.

This Road Ride Handbook has been created to provide guidance on how our group road rides are conducted and salient points to help ensure the safety of yourself and everyone who rides with you.

See <https://www.stirlingbikeclub.org.uk/index.php/menu-ride/road-rides-menu> for further details of what SBC has to offer.



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1.1 What We Do

SBC organise various Club rides in the Stirling area throughout the year. The principle aim of these rides is to function as a group and most importantly to return home safely without incident or accident. We have Road, Gravel, Track and Off-road sections catering for a range of biking styles and interests, and riders with UK legal electric bikes are welcome. SBC does not cater for recumbent bicycles or tricycles.

Rides are generally **social** rides with an element of training through progression within our sub-group categories from slower to faster groups. This guide is focussed on the **Club Road Ride** environment. SBC also run **performance** focussed Development Chain Gang and Road 5 group rides based on the same group riding guidance but they do not cater as sympathetically for the 'dropped' rider.

Intrinsic to the Club ethos is the concept of acting as a group and helping each other around the route. If anybody has a flat or mechanical, we wait and help. If a group member is struggling, we will slow down and pace them home.

Average pace will vary depending on terrain and weather conditions as well as sub-group. Group sizes larger than 8 will often be split to suit abilities subject to the Ride Organiser's discretion. In general, after roundabouts, junctions and hills we will temporarily adjust the group's speed to allow everyone to regroup. On a Club ride, no one gets left behind¹.

1.2 How We Do It

Group road riding offers many advantages both physically and mentally. It is definitely easier to drag yourself out of bed on a cold wet Saturday morning in January to ride 60 miles if you know you will be with like-minded others. A bit of a chat/banter, discovery of new roads/routes led by knowledgeable Ride Organisers, the reassurance of help should you suffer a mechanical or flat and it is much easier physically to complete longer distances within a group. Riding behind someone within a group means you are riding in their slipstream and therefore using less energy; the rider in front punches a hole through the air and you sit in the vacuum behind.

Group road riding, however, does not come without risk. It requires vigilance on what other riders and traffic are doing. As speeds increase/distances between riders decrease as you progress through the road groups, communication between riders and concentration is essential.

The etiquette, techniques, practices and behaviours described in this guide have been developed over many years through the experience of club riders throughout the world. Adopting these will not only help keep you and your fellow riders safe, but stand you in good stead for any open road group events you participate in.

¹ Exceptions include Road 5 group and Chain Gang



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1.3 Come Prepared

ID & ICE (In Case of Emergency) or your SBC Membership Card.

CARRYING ID SHOULD BE CONSIDERED COMPULSORY ON SBC RIDES. Ideally this should be housed in a plastic pouch/bag in your back pocket. Don't rely on your phone providing this information in an emergency.

A typical ID and ICE card could be as simple as....

William Wallace
DoB 30-11-45
Blood Group RH+
Allergic to Latex and Aspirin
ICE 01314 131445

Check the suitability of your helmet and clothing with the following guidance at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kQ3IPgTP-wsORe8vTXKU9K95pCMUJUbG/view?usp=sharing>

1.4 Bike Preparation

Before every ride, check your bike to assure yourself (as best you can) that it is not going to give you problems. This includes:

- Tyres are not worn out and are inflated to the correct pressures
- Brakes are functioning properly
- Gear changing is working adequately
- Rear lights are strongly advised
- Tri-bars are not permitted in group rides
- eBike battery is fully charged
- Hybrid road and MTB bikes (straight handlebars) are permitted but be mindful they tend to be slightly heavier and require more effort to keep up with a group's speed.

For road group rides, you will be expected to have at least a full length rear mudguard fitted to your bike when SBC group start times change from 9am to 10am (between the month of October and April). Your mudguard's primary aim should be to minimise spray to **the rider behind** with the secondary benefit of keeping you clean!

Consider conducting the 'M' bike check – see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mFvafUqwJi-jXvcxmo8rqgZMhoWfIJT/view?usp=sharing>

1.5 In Your Pocket

You don't need to bring a lot with you on club rides. All you need is your ID, a spare tube or two, a pump, tyre levers, a multi-tool, something to eat and something to drink, and perhaps a fully charged mobile phone. Also consider some basic first aid items like disposable gloves, bandage or gauze and a space blanket.



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2. Group Communication

2.1 Introduction

Communication between riders within a group is a key element in staying safe. Generally, the riders on the front of the group are first to spot hazards and will communicate the type of hazard to the rest of the group by either a shout and/or a hand signal.

Endeavour to pass hand and verbal signals down the line for the riders behind.

2.2 When to give a signal

Ensure your warnings from the front are timely so try to give all signals 5-10 seconds in advance of the obstacle. Passing info down the line takes time when travelling at speed.

In practice this means that when the lead riders see a hazard, they give the appropriate hand signal and, if required, gently drift out around the obstacle at least 10 metres before they get there. The rest of the group will follow the lead riders around the hazard with a minimum of disturbance to the pace and spacing between riders.

2.3 Voice Commands

When slowing or stopping give a loud clear shout of "SLOWING!" or "STOPPING!" as appropriate. This lets the rest of the group know to start feathering their brakes. At junctions, roundabouts and pedestrian crossings, the lead rider may call "SLOWING!" or "STOPPING!"

If they can see that the junction/roundabout is clear of oncoming traffic they may call "CLEAR!" This means that in their opinion it is also safe for the next rider to negotiate the junction. **It is, however, still your responsibility to ensure your own safety** so don't solely rely on your fellow rider's shout; always check for yourself.

On a narrow road if a vehicle or other cyclists are approaching from the front, the front riders may give a shout of "NOSE!" Conversely, if the vehicle is approaching from the rear then riders at the back of the group may give a shout of "TAIL!". Depending on the size and formation of the group, some action such as singling out (change from paired formation to a single line) may be considered prudent to allow the vehicle to pass. In this instance a shout of "SINGLE UP!" should be made.

Note that **no action may be the better course of action** in certain situations e.g. approaching a blind bend. See section 3.9 for further information.

Do not be tempted to wave following vehicles through as this opens up legal issues should an incident occur.



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A call of "EASE UP!" or "STEADY" can be used by those in the middle or back of the group to advise the frontmost riders to reduce the pace a little because a gap has opened up in the group. As always with group riding, all actions should be smooth and progressive rather than knee jerk and reactionary. Therefore on hearing a shout of "EASY!" the frontmost riders should ease up marginally and then wait to hear if the shout is repeated - **keep pedalling** (don't just coast or come to an abrupt stop)!

Here is the full list of calls made within SBC rides and most are self-explanatory/be obvious when you participate in your induction ride:

- Spell up (I have done my turn at the front)
- Nose
- Tail
- Inside (closest to the kerb)
- Middle (space between rider on left and right)
- Outside (closest to the middle of the road)
- Under (an obstacle, road feature or imperfection that cannot be avoided but safe to ride over with care)
- Hole (requires to be avoided)
- Gravel
- Ease up / Steady
- Mechanical
- Stopping
- Single up
- Coming through (vehicle from behind passing the group)
- Gap / Off the back (group is split)
- All on (group is back together)
- Clear (junction or roundabout)
- Clear (chain gang)
- Last wheel (chain gang)

2.4 Hand signals

Endeavour to give hand signals early and held for enough time to allow the riders behind you to have a chance to react. The next two pages show some common hand signals.



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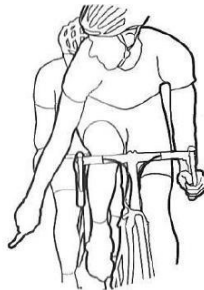
Move Out:

Place your hand behind your lower back and point to indicate that following riders may consider moving out in that direction due to an obstacle on the left (road furniture, parked car, a slower moving group of cyclists etc.)



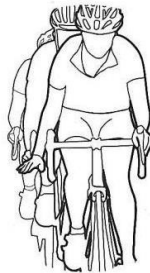
Road surface hazards:

A simple point to the road hazard is usually enough to signal to following riders. Do this well before the hazard is near and predictably move over so you don't roll past too close to it. A call of "HOLE!" can accompany this signal, or "INSIDE" for a hazard close to the kerb or "MIDDLE" for a hazard in the middle of each pair of riders or "OUTSIDE" for a hazard to the right of both riders.



Loose Gravel:

Almost like pointing to signal a pothole but using a front/back or left/right waving action. This denotes that you're approaching a scattered hazard such as glass or gravel. Consider adding a call of "GRAVEL" to accompany this signal.

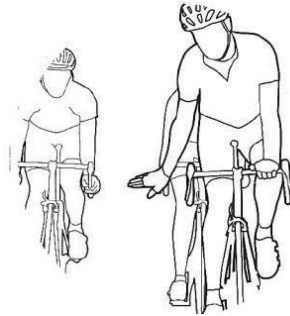




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Slow down:

Hand turned palm facing down and back accompanied by a 'dog patting' motion (if sufficient time) for any sharp bends, hazards or obstructions ahead. Make a clear call of "SLOWING!" or "STOPPING!" to notify riders behind.



3. Group Conduct and Etiquette

3.1 Guiding Principles

When riding as a Club, we endeavour to:

- Behave in a manner that represents SBC in a good light.
- Act for our own safety and well-being.
- Respect our fellow club members (both language and behaviour).
- Adhere to the rules of the road and the countryside with particular reference to the Highway Code (<https://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk/>) and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/>).
- Do not do anything which endangers yourself.
- Show respect for other road users.

Group riding is fun, but it does bring the risk of wheels touching and the possibility of falling off. Observing a few basic rules and adopting the generally accepted etiquette of group riding as described below can reduce the likelihood of this happening.

3.2 Take Responsibility

You are always responsible for your own safety and by taking part in SBC rides, you accept that you have a duty to act in a responsible manner. Responsibilities include:

1. Assuming responsibility for your own safety. If you feel unsafe at any time then remove yourself from the group and **let the ride organiser know at the earliest, safe opportunity.**
2. Abiding by the law. We will be on public roads open to traffic and you will be expected to follow the Highway Code, abide by the law and be familiar with the hierarchy of road users <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/introduction>
3. Contributing to the safety of the group by participating in what is accepted as 'good group riding etiquette' as discussed in this guide.



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4. Improving the safety of the group. You are required to advise the ride organiser if you think any aspect of an SBC ride is unsafe, or if you think our safety can be improved in any way.
5. Wearing a helmet. If you want to join us on the rides you will wear a helmet conforming to current regulations. See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kQ3IPgTP-wsORe8vTXKU9K95pCMUJUbg/view?usp=sharing>
6. Using a properly maintained bike. Your bike should be safe and in good working order.
7. Should the group split, the riders in the front group should slow down or find a safe place to stop and reform before proceeding. The group should always stop and assist any of its riders suffering from mechanical or physical problems.
8. The group should always wait for the last rider unless that rider has requested to be left or an agreement made with everyone's consent that the group will not wait for dropped riders. No rider should leave the group without first notifying other riders, preferably the Ride Organiser.

3.3 Hold Your Line

Ride predictably in a straight line with no sudden movements and be aware of who or what is around you at all times. That **does not mean looking back**. Glance to the side only rather than turn to look behind. If you need to see behind e.g. observing progress of a dropped rider catching up, then go to the back of the group. Be aware of losing your line when cornering within a group (avoid moving out into another rider/oncoming traffic or cutting across riders at roundabouts/right hand turns).

3.4 Positioning

When riding close together, it's important to position yourself and your bike properly to keep everyone safe. Here are some key positioning rules:

- Never overlap wheels with another rider. This is dangerous and could lead to a crash.
- Keep your front wheel even with the front wheel of the rider beside you to avoid a staggered group, which could lead to overlapping wheels and a greater chance of crashes. If you're not comfortable following the rider in front as closely as the rider beside you is, communicate this to them so they can adjust their following distance to line up with yours.
- Don't half-wheel. Half-wheeling is when one rider constantly rides with their front wheel slightly ahead of the wheel of the rider beside them, even if the rider beside attempts to draw in line with them. This leads to a constant upping of the pace and is extremely annoying to the person who is being half-wheeled. If you're doing the half-wheeling because you want to go faster, perhaps it's best to ride solo that day, and consider trying a faster group next time.

3.5 Eyes Up



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Do not use the rear wheel of the rider in front when gauging your distance from the rider. Look over the shoulders of the rider ahead of you and learn to trust your peripheral vision to give you the clearance you need. Get used to the distance their back is from you when you have a safe gap. Use that gap closing as your early warning that you are getting too close.



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3.6 Keep Going

Never suddenly slow down or attempt a complete stop unless you are at the back of the group. Due to the extremely close proximity of the rider behind you in the group, if you suddenly hit the brakes there is a good chance they will not be able to react in time and their front wheel will touch your rear wheel.

3.7 Keep it Steady

Maintain a constant speed and direction and avoid surging which creates a bungee cord effect, tiring riders prematurely. The lead riders are the ones who set the speed. Riders should never freewheel while at the front when descending and always strive to keep the speed constant, especially into a strong head wind.

3.8 Group Riding Formation

For the protection of ourselves, promote harmony among fellow road users and to present a easily detectable presence, SBC road ride groups will generally be in a two-by-two formation. This entails riding side by side and fairly close to each other.

Group riding is the bit that can spook newcomers. However, if you're relaxed on your bike, riding in a straight line and not looking around (too much), the bike will track in a perfect straight line.

One common complaint from vehicle drivers is cyclists riding three or four abreast across the road. SBC rides will endeavour to not ride more than two abreast. It is extremely important that you ride directly behind the rider in front of you thus presenting drivers approaching from behind with a clear 'two abreast' profile. If you are riding offset from the rider in front, it can give the impression of three/four abreast from the rear as well as not benefitting from slipstreaming the rider in front.

3.9 Singling Up

This describes the action that a group riding in pair formation will revert to single file to allow following or oncoming traffic to pass more easily or when encountering narrow streets with parked cars either side of the road. Any rider within the group can make this call when they are 1) at the head of the group *and* 2) can see far enough ahead to ensure it would be safe for following vehicles to overtake the now elongated group on the road.

Be aware that the act of singling up may encourage following drivers to consider an unsafe overtake on the group. Therefore the group *should not single up* where a corner is imminent, brow of a hill or hump back bridge, traffic islands are in the middle of the road, junctions, pedestrian crossings are up ahead or conditions of reduced visibility.

While staying paired up along a particular section of road can be safer for the group, following drivers may not understand this leading to frustration or create long queues of traffic. It may actually be safer and more considerate to take the next left turn or pull into a layby (group size



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dependent) to let traffic pass, therefore reducing the risk of confrontation. The Ride Organiser will make this call.

3.10 Turning right/moving right while on a main road

This is one of the most hazardous manoeuvres a group can make as following vehicles may be overtaking the group ahead of reaching a right hand junction or roundabout. It is the responsibility of each individual to look, ensure it is safe to move to the left-of-centre of the road and turning right. Do not assume it is safe and just blindly follow the rider in front.

3.11 Eating and Drinking

On certain occasions a stop for food will not be possible and it is best practice (for longer rides) to refuel on the move on a regular basis. This has the potential to cause accidents because you have one hand off the bars and your attention is not fully on the riders around you.

Ideally, eating and drinking can be done whilst you are at the back of the group. Like most things, this is a practiced skill.

3.12 Climbing

When riding in a group, you need to consciously protect those behind you when **you stand to climb**, even for short digs up an incline. How you stand on a hill is very important - do it wrong and wheels may touch with the rider immediately behind falling onto the road. The issue is the brief deceleration that can occur as you change from sitting to standing which, relative to other riders has the effect of sending your bike backwards and can cause the following rider's front wheel to hit your rear wheel.

Stand smoothly as one foot begins its downward power stroke - don't lunge, keep your effort constant. As you come off the saddle, push your hands forward a bit. This helps to ensure that the bike won't lose ground. When returning to the saddle, continue pedalling evenly and again push your hands forward to counteract any tendency to decelerate. This will gain several inches and put the seat right under you.

On short, rolling hills, the trick is to click to the next higher gear (smaller rear sprocket), then stand and pedal over the top with a slightly slower cadence.

Like eating on the move, this is a practiced skill.

3.13 Spelling up

Riding at the front of a group is energy intensive. Spelling up is the process of coming off the front of the group after your turn has been completed **in a controlled and safe manner**. Don't leave it too late that you are knackered!

Here is the SBC spelling up method that may be different to any previous group riding experience you may have had:

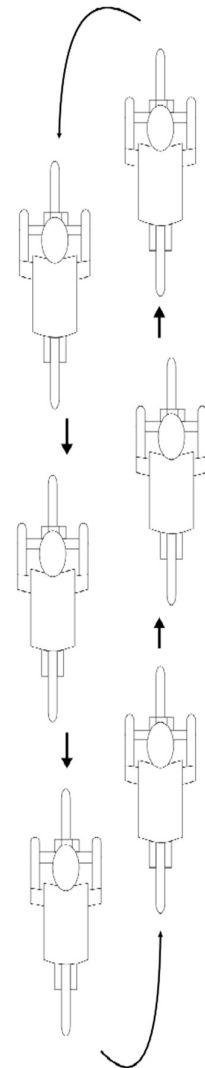


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1. Individual riders rotate in an anti-clockwise direction to take their turn at the front and to rotate off the front after a stint. The inside rider is the one nearest the nearside (left) of the road while the outside rider is nearest the centre of the road.
2. Either rider of the pair at the front can shout 'SPELL UP'.
3. If the inside rider is spelling up, the **outside rider speeds up** to clear the front wheel of the inside rider. The **inside rider continues at the pace of the group**.
4. After looking left to ensure they can safely move in front of the inside rider, the outside rider adopts the position of inside rider.
5. This is important; the new **inside rider returns to the original group pace** they were riding at prior to spelling up. **At no point does the previous inside rider slow down and neither does the group.**
6. The outside pair of riders quicken slightly to slowly move up and resume the pair formation.
7. At the rear of the group, the inside rider will look right to confirm they are the last rider in the group and move to the right to adopt the outer pair riding position. They can adopt any position if there are odd number of riders in the group.

Adopting this anti-clockwise rotation of spelling up ensures the group is never more than two abreast on the road and never slows below the original group pace. Bear in mind that each individual is taking a 'double-shift' at the front (a spell on the outside and a spell on the inside of the front pair) so be mindful not to tire yourself out by spending too much accumulated time at the front.

There is no set time that a rider has to be at the front and if in doubt, spell up early, particularly if riding into a head-wind. Stronger riders may take longer turns at the front for the training effect but **don't let that be your consideration** when you shout "SPELL UP". We want everyone to complete the ride together as a group with minimal distress.



3.14 What is a Chain Gang?

Riders will ride two abreast as in a normal group spell up process but the outside lead rider does not spend much time on the outside; they do not halt their forward motion at any point. They continue onwards to the front before taking the place of the inside lead rider. The rider following them on the outside continues forward and does the same thing.

Sometimes called 'through and off', this continuous anti-clockwise churn ensures riders spend a minimal time at the front of the group to conserve energy and share the effort. You often see this behaviour in rider breakaways within professional cycling.



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So when does a group spell-up become a chain gang? After **agreement by all**, the group morphs into a chain gang when their intention switches from being a social ride and they decide to push the pace for training purposes. The proximity between riders decreases and by extension, the amount of drafting received increases. The speed goes up, the chat goes down(!) and the time each rider spends on the front decreases. Chain gang will cease after agreement by all.

There is an important difference; normal spell up process has outside riders speeding up to take the front/inside riders riding at group pace while chain gang has inside riders taking a rest at a slower pace/outside riders riding group pace (they do not speed up)! In certain crosswind conditions, the group may agree to adopt a clockwise churn for a section of road.

SBC hosts a weekly Development Chain Gang session during the summer months where this is practiced and further guidance will be provided at that time depending on the experience and fitness levels of the participating riders.

3.15 The 'Habble' (group sprint)

Nearing the end point of an SBC group ride (typically Corrieri's Cafe in Causewayhead, Stirling), it is acceptable (weather, road and traffic conditions permitting) to expend any remaining energy in your legs in a group sprint towards the final roundabout. Purely optional, great fun but please be mindful of each other, any non-club cyclists in front of you, pedestrians crossing the road, traffic entering the road from side junctions (they may assume cyclists are approaching slowly) and most importantly, **hold your line** (do not move into another rider after overtaking them).

3.16 Returning to Group Riding

You may find yourself returning to group riding after a period of time away from the sport, club scene or have been riding solo, with a couple of mates or indoors. Be aware that bike handling, group riding and judgement is a perishable skill. You are not just riding for yourself when in a group.

In your first ride back, please consider returning to a group that is well within your fitness level to get those skills back before pushing speed and fitness in subsequent rides.



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4. Dealing with Accidents and Injuries

The Club does not provide first aid cover or medical support for riders on club runs. However, in the event of an accident, the ride organiser and the group will do all they can to assist any rider who has suffered injury.

Riders who have pre-existing medical conditions must take precautions to ensure that information about their condition can be easily found (see 1.3 Come Prepared) by the emergency services and other medical professionals in the aftermath of an accident or the onset of a medical condition.

Riders are advised to download the **What3Words app** (<https://what3words.com/products/what3words-app>) on their mobile phone which works even without a mobile phone signal and is an invaluable timesaver when identifying the rough location of the accident to the Ambulance Service or other emergency services.

Riders are also encouraged to carry a bandage, gauze, disposable gloves and a space blanket as part of their personal items.

5. Summary

There is safety in numbers but only if those numbers are made up of riders *riding safely*.

There are rules of etiquette, rules of physics and rules of the road which we all have to obey. If others don't know them, help and encourage them by sharing your knowledge and experience. Having said all that, cycling is and should be fun. So don't be daunted by the previous pages.

Come out with us on a club run and enjoy yourself!

Version History

Version	Date	Reason for Issue
1.0	10.07.2024	First release
1.1	07.08.2024	Section 3.4 updated re Positioning and Overlapping Wheels.