



Jon's Coaching Tips

Wednesday, January 28, 2009



Jon Brittan is a very experienced cyclist. He has a lot of knowledge to impart so read his 'Tips' and take heed!

BUNCH RIDING SKILLS/RULES

Here are the Bunch Riding Rules that every cyclist should be sticking to...

Bunch Rules OK ?

You've bought the bike, then the clothes, shoes, helmet - you're nearly a pro. You're riding 20km a day, then 40km a day, averaging 25kph, but you're doing it on your own. You've seen the bunches about and you want to be part of them. Here are some hints about joining a bunch ride if you have never been on one before.

1. TYPE OF RIDE

Try to find out what type of ride it regularly is. If the group meets weekly for a 26kph plod and you run up as the new boy/girl and decide to do 35kph, you will lose a lot of friends before you make them.

2. RIGHT GEARS

An essential item is to choose the right gear to ride so that you fit in with the group. If you are use to hammering everywhere on your own in the big ring, you will find it hard to gear down to the 26kph of the bunch. Watch what the more experienced riders are doing and try to copy them. You will find that 39X16 or 42X17 are usual 'bunch' gears, maybe even 53X19.

3. BRAKE CAREFULLY

Ride safely and try to stay off the brakes. If you are inexperienced and too nervous to ride close to the wheel in front of you, stay alone at the back and practice. When the pace eases, don't brake suddenly, instead ride to the side of the wheel in front and ease the pedalling off, then drop back on the wheel. Practice on the back and soon you will be able to move up the line with a partner.

4. DON'T PROP

Many riders, even experienced ones, freewheel momentarily when they first get out of the saddle to go over a rise or up a hill. When doing this, the bike is forced backwards. This can cause chaos in a tightly bunched group of riders. The sensation of the rider in front coming back at you is very unpleasant and can cause crashes. Try to keep forward pressure on the pedals when you get out of the saddle to avoid this situation.

5. STAY TOGETHER

When riding with a partner in a line of two's, stay close. Don't ride too far away from your partner because you are intimidated by the wheel in front of you. The gap you've left between you and your partner is a waste of space and to a motorist behind, it appears you are three wide. This is a good way to antagonise motorists.

6. LOOK AHEAD

Do not become obsessed with the rear wheel directly in front of you. Try to focus four or five riders up the line so that any 'problem' will not suddenly affect you. Scan the road ahead for potential problems, forthcoming red lights and be ready.

7. NO HALF WHEELING

When you finally make it to the front, don't 'half wheel'. This means keeping half a wheel in front of your partner. This automatically makes your partner speed up slightly to pull back alongside you. Often half wheelers will also speed up, so the pace invariably speeds up as the riders behind try to catch up. You don't have to prove anything to the group, it's just an easy training ride to build endurance with friends. Try to maintain the same pace as the group was doing before you took your turn.

8. STOP AT AMBER

Bunches should stop at red lights. If you are on the front and see an amber light, do not sprint through the intersection. The rear of the bunch can easily have a much too close encounter with an unidentified flying motorist, who will be completely in the right.

9. LEAD IN FRONT

Remember when you are on the front, you are not only responsible for yourself but for everyone in the group. When you're leading the bunch, try to monitor potential problems and give plenty of warning of impending stops or changes of pace.

10. WARNING CALLS

Point out potholes or similar obstacles, loose gravel and broken glass on the road for the riders behind you. A simple call of "hole left" and pointing at the ground where the hole will appear can save a puncture or an expensive destroyed rim and the same with a shout of "glass!" The same can be said for an obstacle on the road such as truck tyres or dead animals. And, if you see a stray live animal like a dog, horse or similar, make sure that you slow down and that you warn everybody. Remember that Marco Pantani crashed seriously in the 1997 Giro d'Italia when a cat ran under his wheels.

11. SWAPPING OFF

When your turn is up, carefully pull out of the line. Groups have various ways of replacing the pair of riders at the front. If it is the usual to swing off to the left or right remember this creates a line of four until you reach the back so ease right off to get back there quickly. If your group just moves up the outside line and crosses to the left, remember not to increase the pace too much to gain the front left side and settle into the rhythm of the group.

12. KEEP PEDALING

When you are pulling on the front it is important that you do not stop pedalling on the downhills. Make sure that you are still pedalling hard enough that the person behind you does not have to use his brakes.

For all this information, it is important to be relaxed in the bunch. This comes only with experience and there is only one way to get experience - get out there and do it. Remember safety first. Safety from traffic and to and from other riders is essential.

