

The Guide to Cheltenham & County CC Rides

Read before you ride

Please read whether riding with us for the first time or as a long-term club member. There are key points for all and aims to be relevant, informative and encouraging.

Cycling is unique as both an individual and a group sport at the same time. With that comes camaraderie, trust and great fun. But that needs the right group riding behaviour – Riding Etiquette.

Cycling, like all sports has its dangers, but these can be reduced by a number of factors. As a group of cyclists you have taken the first step to improving your safety and visibility on and off the road. This also brings certain responsibilities to make sure that everyone returns home safely. You need to take responsibility for your actions and the decisions you make.

When you join us for a ride you are agreeing to abide by the club's **Core Principles**

Be Safe

We ride safely & obey the Highway Code

We wear helmets in the group

We always use lights when conditions require

We signal and call-out potential hazards to the group

We ride in a safe group size and follow the Ride Leader advice

Be considerate

We are courteous to other road/cycle path/trail users & avoid confrontation

We respect each other and treat members & other road/cycle path/trail users, as we want to be treated ourselves

We use suitable mudguards when the roads are wet

When we ride in a group, we look out for each other

We take our turn on the front

We maintain our bikes & carry our own spares, tools, hydration and nutrition

We are the club

When we wear the jersey or are on group rides, we are "The Club"

We all get involved and support the running of the club

You also need to know and understand the specifics. Group riding is safest and most enjoyable when a few simple guidelines are followed.

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Getting you and your bike ready to ride

Get this stuff sorted before you even think about coming along for a ride and you'll be starting out well... It's not about the latest outfit or technology. Better to spend the time and the money to make yourself comfortable, protect your head and body and have the skills to control your bike.

Helmet – mandatory for all club organized group rides. Simply put 'no helmet, no ride'.

Mudguards – a must for road riding in wet weather. Long enough to protect the vision & safety of those following, keep your bum dry and ensure the café will let you in.

Bike – must be roadworthy and safe to ride. At a minimum, tyres and brakes (pads, cables and adjusted) in good condition. Try a proper bike fitting and get your set-up sorted. A poorly maintained bike will fail more often. It will hold up the bunch and spoil your ride. It increases the chance of injury. If you can't do it yourself, go to a reliable mechanic to service your bike and ask for a safety check.

Aero/profile/Tri-bars – are for time-trialling and non-drafting triathlon. Aero bars should not be used in the bunch as they take your hands away from your brakes and reduce your control. You may ride a TT bike or a road bike with aero bars on group rides but hands must be on the hoods/drops while in the group.

Cycling Glasses – personal choice, but offer protection from flying hazards and rain. Make sure the arms are on the outside of your helmet straps if possible so that they can dislodge in a fall.

Visibility – when poor visibility, low light or dark, be seen. Wear some bright, even fluorescent clothing. Have good lights front (white) and rear (red), and turn them on in these conditions!

Inner tubes – practise changing inner tubes. Anyone can have a puncture, but fixing your bike on route with an experienced audience is tough! If you're not confident it's worth trying a few times in the comfort of your own home. Before long you'll be helping out others in their misfortune!

Practise/training – it's too easy to fall off a bike. Practise bike handling in various conditions. Ask for advice and attend training on offer. Make sure you are comfortable clipping in and out of pedals before joining a group ride.

Fitness – riding gets easier with fitness. As a guide you need to be able to ride solo for an hour on the flat at the speed of your intended group ride. You may want to be riding three times a week to develop your fitness. Even a shorter club ride can be a struggle if you are only getting out once a week.

Ride outdoors – the appeal of Zwift and indoor trainers is obvious, but nothing beats riding outdoors. This helps you to practise in different conditions. Your road/trail skills and safety will improve as you know your bike better, develop your ability to corner, descend, climb out of the saddle, ride in the wind etc.

Advice – don't be afraid to ask more experienced riders for advice, especially when riding as a group, or attend the training on offer. Also be receptive when advice is given – that's how we all learn.

Under 18's – must submit a completed Parent Consent Form before riding – see club website. The minimum age for a rider to attend a club ride is 14.

Insurance – for bike, personal accident, legal and 3rd Party claims. This can be sourced through a specialist provider or through the likes of British Cycling and Cycling UK. In some cases household insurance may cover it.

Pre-Ride checks

Tyre pressure and condition – make sure tyres are correctly inflated and not too worn. Check for splits, thorns and flints before every ride. This massively reduces your chances of getting a puncture
Lights – make sure lights are charged and working. Test battery powered lights the night before a ride by turning them on for a couple of minutes. A battery going dead will seem to work for a minute before fading away.

Tyre changing/Mechanical – every cyclist should carry (and know how to use) tyre changing gear. At a minimum, you will need at least one spare tube, tyre levers and a hand-pump or CO2 cylinder and dispenser. Best to carry a multi tool too.

Bottles and Hydration Packs – fill them up. It's a good idea to carry at least one bottle (with either water or electrolyte) for any ride. For summer rides of 2 hours or longer, you may need 2 bottles.

Food – bring a banana or something light to eat. You might not need it on the shorter rides but definitely will on longer ones over 2 hours.

Comfort – choose clothing appropriate for the weather. It's good to have layers you can remove or add. You warm up once moving but must remember the effect of rain and windchill. Pack a waterproof in a pocket if the slightest chance of rain.

Weather – wet and/or icy roads and trails are lethal. Wet metal plates and paint on the road are slippery and visibility may be reduced. Strong winds are also treacherous for cycling. Think about staying at home to ride another day.

Alcohol and Drugs – shouldn't need to be said but the same rules apply as driving. So if visiting a pub on route or after a late night, ensure you are in a fit state to ride. Your perception and bike handling skills may be compromised.

Earphones – definite NO in the bunch. They have no place in a group ride and are dangerous to use in any road cycling (traffic) situation. Save for the trainer.

Helmet – don't forget your helmet for safety and out of respect for other riders. Wearing and securing a suitable Helmet is mandatory on C&CCC group rides.

In Case of Emergency – Carry an ICE (In Case of Emergency) card or equal, phone and enough cash for a taxi home, if needed. (all members are entitled to a OneLife ID card). Riders are recommended to load the What 3 Words app to assist in providing location details to emergency services in the event of a serious incident.

Medical conditions and Medical treatments – ensure someone in the group (eg Ride Leader) is aware of any special needs. Have it marked on your ICE/medical emergencies card, and carry any medication likely to be needed.

Joining Group Rides – Bunch expectations:

You are part of a larger entity when riding in a group and you need to adjust your riding and thinking to suit. Your actions are no longer independent and each action must be considered, as it will impact on the bunch. Moving as a group is not as simple as an individual. The approach to junctions, lights, hazards, traffic congestion etc. needs to adapt.

Ride Leader - Role and responsibilities to the Ride Leader

When you turn up for a ride, make yourself known to the designated Ride Leader (**RL**). Saturday morning rides from Pittville have an RL appointed before the group departs.

It's important to be there for the briefing before a ride. The RL assumes a duty of care to the riders in the group and their safety. The RL must be allowed to direct the group. To clarify roles, call for a split, answer any questions re the route/pace and generally help everyone to stay on track and enjoy the ride.

If joining the group en-route or having dropped back from a faster group make yourself known to the RL. In turn if leaving the group advise the RL – you won't be popular if you drop off and the group stops and waits.

Other mid-week rides may not have a designated RL as such, but rather a core group that often rides together and performs the same duties.

Rides may also have a Ride Developer in the group. These experienced riders will guide individual riders on aspects to help their riding. (e.g. how to check that it's clear to come through on the road, avoiding half wheeling, racing techniques etc). It's not coaching but sharing expertise from a respected rider-

Rides - Know which group to Join

See our Rides Calendar for more information on the C&CCC website. Saturday rides are typically non-drop and the best option for new and prospective members with a range of speeds on road rides from 14mph.

When you arrive at Pittville, you should already know or determine which ride to join. You should at least know which route, so that you are properly prepared for the distance.

Rides are advertised based on average speeds. However, C&CCC run alternating hilly and flat road routes. So, the actual speeds are typically faster than advertised on a flat route and slower on a hilly one. The advertised speed is the average across the whole ride – NOT the rolling speed, which will be higher. For example, a 'Rococo 18' will do a Rococo loop route and may finish with an 18mph average speed. The group will be rolling on the flat sections much faster at say 20+mph.

If you're coming along for the first time, we recommend joining an 'easy' group or one not too challenging to stay with. For MTB, we would recommend one of the monthly Intro rides. You can then concentrate on learning how we roll rather than worrying about hanging on. You can always join a more challenging ride next time. Remember the rule of thumb – able to ride at the advertised speed solo for at least an hour

If you've not ridden for a while, or if you aren't getting out often, we'd recommend dropping down a level or two. There's nothing to be gained from chewing the handlebars for a couple of hours trying to keep up with mates. Dropping down a group will give you a good workout and keep you ticking over until you can get back up again.

Equally, if you're thinking of stepping up a road group, make sure you're ready. One mile an hour might not sound like much. The difference can be significant, with greater intensity and less time for recovery. You won't win many friends if you step up a group and then spend time bouncing off the back trying to keep up.

Humans are social animals, and for reasons none of us fully understand, some of the groups get very large. We aim for group sizes of 6-10 to suit when riding two abreast (roughly a lorry length). The group operates as a single unit, without unduly affecting traffic.

We aim to split the group, if more than 6-10 cyclists. A late split is sometimes necessary when people join after the start. If your RL asks for a split, please help split the group into even halves. Even if that means riding with people you know less well. None of them will bite!

Group ride versus a training ride – The advertised pace of the ride should be adhered to, unless agreed by the group to alter it. If you're not wearing a number on your back then you're not racing! Don't set out to 'smash' a ride, just because you feel strong on the day. There are no prizes for bringing yourself or someone else down. It's not cool.

Riding Technique

(check out [this YouTube clip](#) for an animated explanation)

Configuration

The joy of riding in a well-ordered group is hard to describe. It's definitely one of the best things about road cycling. To get to this point requires some discipline – riding this way is not intuitive, so it is something to learn. But when you get it right – voila! You will never want it to stop.

Pairs – on road rides, we usually ride in pairs. This means keeping your handlebar aligned with the person's next to you and aligned with the bike in front. Never more than 2 abreast as the middle rider is unable to avoid obstacles. Never ride up the middle of the group and make sure the inside rider has room to manoeuvre around obstacles.

No Half Wheeling – when you sit half a wheel or so ahead of your partner, it's called 'half-wheeling'. This is poor form and annoying as it causes surging in the group with riders trying to keep up. Overlapping the wheel in front in a line is also half wheeling. It is dangerous if the rider swerves to avoid an obstacle and clips your front wheel

Turns/rotation – unless stated otherwise road groups roll in an anti-clockwise 'up and over' chain pattern. When rotating, the front right-side rider indicates the change. The front left-side rider slightly eases the pace and the right-side rider moves up and across. The next rider on the right side, moves up into the first position.

It's helpful to let the person in front of you know they've reached the 'last wheel' position (as you move across to the back right-side). This should all be accomplished smoothly, without surging and in a timely fashion.

Don't be a hog on the front of the pack. Give everyone a turn and share the load.

No gaps but leave space – on-road rides gaps (more than a metre) reduce the drafting benefit, disrupt the pairings and encourage riders to pull in on you. It makes negotiating junctions or when signals are changing more hazardous. Conversely it's not a race so keep back 30+cm from the wheel ahead and stay offset. Align your front wheel with the quick release of the wheel in front as a guide. Try and stay slightly one side or other of the bike in front rather than moving back and forth.

Allow more space when descending, on wet and slippery surfaces, in heavy traffic or with less experienced riders.

Fatiguing, leaving or joining a group – communicate explicitly with the RL if leaving or joining a ride. If slipping off the back shout up straight away. The group will ease or stop but only if they know. Equally **if you see someone struggling inform the RL.**

In Town – rides commencing from Pittville can encounter traffic, junctions and unpredictable events. Typically the **RL** will lead until outside the town and may require no rotations and single file. It is imperative to concentrate, stick close and follow the call outs.

In the Country – with hills East and West and valleys North and South we enjoy diverse terrain, road/trail types, road/trail conditions, weather and road/trail users. We often use single track lanes, sometimes with poor road surfaces, and with overgrown hedges in the summer. We should single out and ride slower, just as we do in a car – we don't know what's round the corner. We have to anticipate and adapt to situations. This requires full concentration, good communications and empathy with other road/trail users.

Litter - please take your bar / gel wrappers and damaged inner tubes home with you or dispose of them responsibly whilst on your ride.

Handling

Don't rely on others – make your own decisions on the road/trail. Keep your eyes on traffic, turnings and other cyclists as if you are cycling on your own. Pay close attention to the road/trail surface and immediate environment at all times.

Smooth movements – be cool. Be predictable and smooth in the group. Signal intentions to fellow riders and don't make unexpected changes of speed or direction.

Braking – brake smoothly and call 'stopping' or 'slowing' first if necessary. If you have to brake heavily, try and leave the maximum room for those following you to react and stop.

Standing in the pedals – be aware that if you stand up out of the saddle (when going up a rise) your bike can 'lurch' behind you. Make sure you are well clear of the rider behind in this case or ensure you keep pressure on your pedals. When leading off from a standstill, e.g. Junctions or red lights, ease the speed up slowly so that the group can stay together.

Maintaining the Group – riders at the back should call 'on' or 'all up' to indicate when the bunch has regrouped and is ready to increase the speed. Keep pedalling on the front of the group, especially when going downhill, so the bunch is not forced to brake.

Look forward – don't look back (unless to pull out), down or sideways. Things happen fast and a moment's lack of attention can be all it takes. Calls for lane changes should come from the back of the group. If you're at the front, make your call clear when-it-is needed.

Hands on bars – keep both hands on the bar with at least one finger hooked under the bar to avoid being dislodged if hitting an unexpected hazard (bumps, holes). Never take both hands off the bar when in the bunch. You might think you look like Eddy Merckx but it can make the people around you very nervous (and we don't like that).

Drinking – when you need to take a drink, do it when conditions are predictable. Signal that you are drinking, and do not have both hands on the bars by sticking your bidon out to the side. If you're not confident replacing a bidon whilst riding, wait until the group has stopped to take a drink.

Wet roads – are slippery. Slow down, watch out for painted surfaces and metal plates (otherwise known as black ice).

Safe Place – don't stop where it is dangerous to do so. Fix flat tyres etc. in a safe place. Be prepared to remind others who may be preoccupied with the events at hand, to notice the danger they are in.

Fatigue – concentration levels are reduced, handling compromised. Leave more room between riders when tired. Firstly, choose a ride within your capability. Don't push beyond your limits and if you're having trouble ask for a pace to be slowed by calling 'steady'.

Nature Stop – call out, so the group will slow down, or better stop, to allow you to keep together. Choose a spot considerate for all road users, ideally out of sight.

Home run – crashes often happen close to home – don't become complacent.

Riding off the front – some of the fun of a group ride can be testing yourself against others. Sometimes near or after a café stop the ride grouping may be a little less rigid. For riders with energy, this is a chance to leave it all on the road and to win the sprint to the sign or back to Cheltenham. If you've got anything left in your legs at this point, give it a go, bearing in mind that you or others around you may be tired, and don't want to get involved in a sprint – do it safely. Learning to race like this is a great way to mimic your heroes and to learn the fine art of timing your sprint. If you get dropped at this point, don't worry. It's not something you said. There's always next time!

Cycle paths – club routes will only use cycle paths that conform to the current design standard – those with a green top dressing.

When travelling to and from the Pump Rooms, we encourage club members to use cycle paths where safer to do so.

In all cases, we should be considerate to other users and drop our speed when passing others.

Off Road Bike Specific

General Trail Riding

Terrain & trail conditions - can vary greatly throughout a ride from wide, open fields to steep, narrow gullies. It is important to be aware of your surroundings & those around you.

Walkers and Horses riders – we are likely to encounter other users on the trails. Whoever is at the front should slow down & warn the rest of the group. We should also communicate our presence to the other trail users & look for a safe place to pass.

Obstacles – warn other riders such as fallen or low branches, brambles, animals, etc.

Gates – the front rider should hold it open for the rest of the group & be sure to close it behind them.

Mechanical/Puncture Issues – inform the group. We will always wait for you & help out if possible.

Climbs

Pace – on long or technical climbs the group may become spread out as ability & fitness levels differ. Ride at a pace you are comfortable with, we always regroup at the top. Try to judge your level relative to the group & position yourself accordingly at the bottom of the hill.

Gaps – on particularly steep or difficult sections try to leave a gap to the rider in front. Be prepared to stop as it's possible they won't "clear" the section. If you do come to a halt, move to the side of the trail if possible & allow others to pass.

Passing – if you would like to pass the rider ahead wait for a suitable piece of trail and then indicate that you are coming past. "On your left/right" is a common call. Similarly, if you feel you are holding up other riders find a safe place to pull over to one side & wave them through.

Descents

Pace – we will generally stop at the start of a descent, and as with climbs we will always regroup at the bottom. The ride leader should warn of any particularly steep or difficult sections. So ride at your own pace & don't take unnecessary risks to keep up with the rider in front of you.

Gaps – again, try to judge your position within the group. Leave a sensible gap to the rider ahead & only overtake if it's safe to do so.

Unknown section – if you are unsure of a section you can always stop & have a look.

Obstacles – if you come across an obstruction on the trail or someone takes a tumble, stop & warn the rest of the group.

Highway Code

Always observe the Highway Code

Road Rage – resist the urge to engage if a road-rage incident arises. It's not worth it and any engagement usually just fuels the anti-cyclist sentiment. If engaged remain polite, calm and considerate, whatever the incident

Consideration for other road users – we share the road/trail and expect users to have patience and respect us. We can reciprocate by sticking to our lane on multi-lane roads, not blocking the road/trail. We make it easy for traffic to pass us safely. Keep the groups small and leave space between groups for cars to pull into. Go in a single file on narrow roads and sections. Pull over and stop where/when safe to do so on narrow roads if causing an excessive delay to allow following motorists to pass.

Pedestrians - Pass pedestrians on the road at a suitable speed and with plenty of space (1.5m). Call out to pedestrians on the road when approaching from behind.

Horses – must be passed with real care. Single out, gently pedal to reduce freewheel noise and avoid squeaking brakes. Call out to the horse rider well in advance. Talk in a friendly tone to reduce the chance of the horse panicking. Only pass or manoeuvre around the horse when the horse rider is aware of the group

Junctions – anticipate stopping at all junctions. Sometimes with a clear road it's legitimate to roll at a junction without stopping. In which case each rider should assess if clear for those behind and call out accordingly. If it is not clear for the whole group, stop. It is key for the front riders to distinguish if slowing or stopping and call out accordingly. Also, if rolling at a junction, but a distant car is approaching, the riders should call 'car left/right'. However, it always remains the **individual riders** decision to stop or roll but call accordingly – 'stopping' or 'rolling'.

Red lights – we stop at red and amber lights. If approaching red or amber lights the front pair call 'stopping'. When we stop, we are still a bunch. We stay in our pairs, stop behind the traffic and do not filter through the cars to get to the lights. On occasions lights will change as the group is crossing. Never jump a red light to keep with the group. The forward group must wait at a safe place on the other side if there is a split.

Calls and Signals – riding

Sitting in a group means the forward view is often blocked by riders ahead. Everyone behind is relying on you and the riders ahead to make them aware of obstacles, be they holes in the road, pedestrians/joggers, slower cyclists, parked cars, oncoming traffic, metal plates, glass, grates, debris, animals (dogs, etc.)

Hand signals – are the primary way of notifying fellow riders of obstacles from the front and if necessary supported by clear calls.

Call out – If the obstacle is **dangerous enough** then shout it out as well as pointing it out. However too many calls or unnecessary calls can be unsettling. Save the calls for key messages or dangers.

Calls up and down the group – Make sure you **pass the calls up and down** the bunch. Calls cannot always be heard due to wind, noise and spread of the group or softly spoken riders. It's your responsibility to make sure the next rider in the line has heard the call.

Calls (primarily from the front)

Car Front – a vehicle is approaching from the front and where road space may be limited. Riders need to be aware, close into the left, or move into single file or pull in and stop (previously **Car Down**).

Horses – be careful, slow right down, keep a safe distance.

Rider/Pedestrian Front – beware of a cyclist or pedestrian ahead. Also used to alert cyclist/pedestrian to the groups approach.

Stopping/Slowing – the group must prepare to stop.

Rolling – the group will keep moving or start moving off.

Hole Left/Right – avoid by moving left or right of current line.

Gravel – caution, pick your path and lower speeds with soft braking.

Going Left/Right/Straight On – group will be turning left/straight/right at a junction.

Car or Car Left/Right – indicates cars approaching at a junction and not safe to pull out. Away from a junction Car Left warns for slow/parked vehicle in the road. The group will need to check if clear to go around.

Single – change to single file. This is done by the rider on the right dropping into a gap created by the person on the left. The front riders may need to accelerate and the rear decelerates.

Are We All Up? – a question which goes down the group to ask if all riders have regrouped before picking up speed.

Calls (primarily from the rear)

Easy or Steady – slows the pace momentarily to close gaps and allow riders in difficulty to get back on the group.

On or all up – all riders are back in the group and the normal pace can resume.

Car back – a vehicle is behind the group. Hold your line and be aware of cars approaching from behind. (Previously **Car Up**)

Coming through – car is overtaking the group.

Clear – the road/lane is clear to enter. It is the responsibility of riders at the back to determine when clear to change lanes and call this out. Then the riders at the front are not straining to see behind when time to change lanes. The call should be clear... over if clear to change. If a car is approaching/overtaking the call is car back.

Puncture/mechanical – a rider has punctured or has a mechanical problem and will be stopping. The group must find a safe place to stop.

Lastly

All these things should and will become second nature to you after riding with C&CCC for a while. There are always a significant number of new faces in the group. So it's up to all of us to lead by example rather than follow by accident.

An accident involving a rider or third party must be reported, via completion of an Incident Report available from the club's website.

None of this happens without a dedicated committee and supportive members. Rides and events don't just happen. So, if you want to organise a ride or help out in any way then please let a committee member know. Help is always very much appreciated.

Keep in mind

1. It's not a race.
2. It's a hobby not a livelihood.
3. We have day jobs we have to go to after the ride which are harder with a broken collarbone or smashed wrist.
4. We have family and friends who love us. Get home safe!