



Group Riding



Safety Skills Clinic Instructor's Manual

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Overall Group Ride Safety Clinic Program

This Group Ride Safety Skills Clinic Instructor's Manual is adapted from a program developed by Bill Edwards, a USA Cycling Elite Coach, to improve the safety and enjoyment of participants in the 13,000-rider MS-150 ride between Houston and Austin. The clinics have been typically taught by ride marshals and team captains (or other team volunteers) and are designed to teach a minimum of basic group riding skills within a two-hour period. The training is credited with having substantially reduced the number of crashes on the ride since it was initiated in 2003.

The Group Ride Safety Skills Clinic demonstrates how key riding techniques taught in other League BikeEd classes (such as Road I) can be applied when riding in a group. The program vision is to impact as many riders as possible. Ride leaders and experienced cyclists are encouraged to become certified as League Cycling Instructors (LCI) or assistant instructors so they can teach these safety clinics. The safety clinics have been designed to teach a minimum of basic survival skills for group rides. A key requirement was that it should be possible to complete each safety clinic within a two-hour time frame. For more information about League's BikeEd program visit www.bikeleague.org.



Detailed Program Objectives

The following is a summary of what participants should learn in the safety clinic:

- 1 Dodging obstacles (water bottles, potholes, road kills, etc.).**
Participants will learn how to steer their bikes from the saddle (as opposed to turning the handlebars from side-to-side) by leaning the bike in either direction using their body. This will allow the dodging of obstacles with a minimum of side-to-side movement.
- 2 Proximity.** Participants will learn how to feel safe when there are riders all around them, because they can become confident they know how to react and protect their bikes from making contact when someone gets too close.
- 3 Dodging obstacles when in a group with riders all around.**
Participants will learn to dodge obstacles with a minimum of side-to-side movement while at the same time protecting their bikes from contacting riders who are too close for comfort. This skill reinforces the proximity lesson.
- 4 Emergency stopping (how to stop in a hurry without crashing).**
Participants will learn how to properly use their front and rear brakes, and to shift their weight on the bike to make a smooth, quick stop when needed.
- 5 Communication Skills (keeping other riders informed about possible hazards).** Participants will learn how to protect their own safety by informing others around them.



Staffing Considerations

Instructor & Assistant Instructor Qualifications

The Group Riding Safety Skills Clinic is taught by certified League Cycling Instructors (LCIs). Experienced riders who have an interest in teaching BikeEd should consider attending an LCI Certification Seminar. Participants who complete the Group Riding Safety Skills Clinic can be used as assistant instructors by ride organizers to work in tandem with LCIs in delivering this clinic to other riders. In deciding whether to be an assistant instructor, it is important to know that teaching safety skills, especially those involving proximity, can be dangerous to instructors and other participants. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that assistant instructors be experienced riders.

Also, it is highly desirable for assistant instructors to exhibit sound leadership skills and good communication skills in addition to their skills on the bike. Teaching

proximity skills requires a gentle approach as opposed to a commanding or controlling approach in order to insure the safety of both the student and the instructor during the course of the instruction.

Team leaders are encouraged to seek out men and women who have both the experience and the people skills to be assistant instructors and potential LCIs.

Forming a Team of Instructors

Conducting a safety clinic requires at least one instructor for every five to six students, if the clinic is to be completed within a two-hour time frame. The limiting factor is the teaching of the proximity skills, which requires giving each student as much one-on-one time as is needed to master the skills. Approximately 30 students can be handled in two hours with a team of five or six instructors. Ideally this would include one LCI for every 10 students. Each team is

encouraged to identify a safety instruction team leader who in turn can create a team of instructors appropriate for the job.

Use of Volunteers and their Duties

Volunteers are needed to carry out a successful clinic. This allows the instructors to focus fully on teaching the skills. At least four volunteers are needed to conduct a clinic involving 30 students. The volunteers will handle registration before the start of the clinic, and will help set up and maintain (re-position) the obstacle course objects whenever they are knocked over by clinic participants. One of the volunteers can be assigned the task of staging the participants at the start of the obstacle course so as to maintain a safe spacing between riders.

Volunteers also help judge the emergency stopping contest that is held near the end of the clinic.



Venue, Equipment and Supply Considerations

Choosing a Venue

Large empty parking lots seem to work best for conducting Group Riding Safety Skill Clinics. The parking space markings are very useful for setting up the obstacle course, but are not absolutely essential.

Any flat, smooth, traffic-free asphalt space with approximately 100 yards of straight run for the obstacle and emergency stopping courses is acceptable. The courses should be free of sand or other debris. It may be necessary to sweep the courses before the start of the event. For the proximity skill, a circular venue of approximately one quarter to one half mile around is best.

It is important to contact the owners of the prospective venue and to obtain permission to use it. It is often necessary to provide them with a certificate of insurance for the event.

Setting Up the Skill Courses

Obstacle Dodging Course

Use "obstacles" that are safe to run over with the bike. One can use colored (bright green or orange are

preferred) tennis balls that have been cut in half. The tennis ball halves can be stacked to make the course more difficult. At least twelve obstacles are needed for the course.

Each obstacle should be placed in a straight line on approximately 9-foot (3-yard) centers. This spacing is approximately the same as the parking lot markings. If there are no markings on your venue, then place them each at three step intervals. Just walk three steps and put one down, etc. That will insure proper spacing.

Proximity Course

The proximity course should be circular, permitting the group being instructed to go comfortably round and round numerous laps. This is one-on-one instruction with each attendee. It is important to be able to give each person all of the time they need to master the skills. If the course is too tight, then there will not be enough straightaway to preform the skills. A longish course (about a quarter mile) with 180-degree turns at each end would also work well.

Emergency Stopping Course

The course should be approximately 100 yards long to permit the riders to get up to speed before executing the stopping drill. It is important for the surface to be smooth and to be free of dirt, sand, gravel or other debris.

Rider Registration Area

It is best to assign volunteers to handle registration and signing of the liability waiver before the start of the clinic. A table and two chairs are minimal. A second table is useful for registrants to use in filling out the release forms. A pop-tent is also useful, but is not an absolutely essential item.

Instructor Specific Equipment

A coach's whistle or bullhorn is an immense help in keeping the clinic on schedule. The coach's whistle is a good tool for signaling the stopping points in the Emergency Stopping session. Brooms and dustpans should be brought in case the venues need to be swept to insure safety.

Conducting the Safety Skills Clinic

Introduce the Staff

Begin by introducing the staff of instructors and by giving a brief indication of their cycling background and their qualifications for doing this particular job.

Establish Safety Rules for the Clinic

Emphasize the need to stay in one's individual comfort zone. It is important to start the clinic by letting participants know that the instructors will be asking them to do things that may make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Ask participants to please let the staff know right away if they are feeling any discomfort. Tell them that as soon as they communicate any discomfort whatsoever, the staff will back off and give them space to regain their composure.

Stress the Importance of Communication

It is important to convey to participants that when riding in a group, effective communication with the other nearby riders is probably the single most effective way to ensure a safe and pleasant ride. Explain the following examples:

- "Passing on your left (right)" — is more effective than the simpler "On your left (right)."
- "I'm riding on your left (right)" — especially useful when riding in pace-lines.
- "Slowing" — with simultaneous hand signals.
- "Stopping" — called out loud and clear.



- "Gravel, Road Kill, Hole, Pothole, Flat tire."
- "Car Back."

Preferred Instruction Sequence

1. Describe the skill in details.
2. Demonstrate how not to perform the skill.
3. Demonstrate how to execute the skill correctly.

Teaching Dodging Skills

Dodging obstacles (potholes, road kills, water bottles, etc.) can be extremely unsafe when riders get overexcited and swerve wildly to miss the objects. By doing so, they can run

their bike into another rider's bike and cause a wreck. It is much safer to learn to dodge obstacles with a minimum of side-to-side movement. This is accomplished by learning to steer from the saddle by leaning the bike, as opposed to steering by turning the handlebars.

Bicycles are made to steer themselves. Demonstrate this by showing that one can steer the bike with no hands by moving one's rear end from side to side on the saddle. An accomplished rider can actually negotiate the obstacle course while riding with no hands.

Demonstrate how not to negotiate the obstacle course by steering with the handlebars. Demonstrate how the magnitude of the swerving can increase

as one tries to miss the obstacles further down the course.

Next, demonstrate how to negotiate the course by leaning the bike and steering from the saddle, thereby minimizing the amplitude of the side-to-side swerving.

Station a staff member or a volunteer about 50 yards from the beginning of the obstacle course to control the spacing between riders on the course. A spacing of at about 10-20 yards per rider should be adequate. Station volunteers along the obstacle course to reposition any of the obstacles that get knocked over or moved aside. It is important to keep all of the obstacles in a perfect straight line as much as possible.

Station one staff instructor near the end of the obstacle course to give encouragement and suggestions for improvement to each rider as they complete the course. Participants usually become visibly more proficient each time they go through the course. Giving them positive feedback as they show improvements will reinforce their learning of the skill.

Teaching Proximity

Teaching the proximity skill is by far the most dangerous activity of the clinic. It can be dangerous to both the teacher and the participant, especially if the instructor does not have full confidence in their own ability to perform the skill. Instructors need to be aware of their own limitations in deciding how best to teach the one-on-one portion of the leaning and bumping tactics, or even whether to try teaching proximity skills at all.

Most cyclists will naturally think, "I do not want to fall off my bike and hurt myself." This kind of thinking, however, does not lead to safer riding. A better way of thinking is to say, "If my bike does not fall down, I will not fall down." This leads one to the conclusion that it is most important not to let their bike fall down. Keeping one's bike from getting into dangerous situations is the thing to do. This includes avoiding obstacles and unsafe road conditions. It also is most important to prevent any part of one's bike from ever touching any part of another person's bike at all



Teaching Proximity — Step-by-Step

- 1 Have each participant demonstrate that they can ride in a straight line while leaning the bike, first to the left, then to the right.
- 2 Have each participant demonstrate that they can hold a straight line while retrieving their water bottle, drinking, and putting the water bottle back in the cage.
- 3 Have each participant demonstrate that they can ride a straight line while holding onto the middle of the bars and looking back to see behind them.
- 4 Show each participant what it is like to be touched by another rider, and how the touching can stabilize both riders by maintaining separation a between the bikes, thereby making it safer to ride next to each other.
- 5 Have each participant demonstrate that they can touch another rider, maintaining the separation between the bicycles, and looking back to see what is behind them.
- 6 Have each participant demonstrate maintaining proper proximity to riders in front of them. Have them practice looking down at the ground to see wheels that are in close proximity behind them.
- 7 Demonstrate and teach each participant how to react to inappropriate proximity to riders next to them. This is by far the most dangerous skill to teach, because riders can freak out when you get too close and turn their bikes right into you! You need to use your proximity and dodging skills to prevent any contact between you and the participant in this one-on-one drill. Some riders get it right away; others may take several laps around the course before they can grasp the concept.

costs. **This is what the proximity skill is all about.**

Go over the following points:

- Don't panic
- Keep your handlebars away from any other bike
- Lean into the rider beside you
- Lean your bike away from the other rider
- Use shoulders not elbows to fend off another rider
- Keep pedaling to maintain control of the bike

To demonstrate the skill, get yourself and another instructor next to each other standing over your bikes, facing the participants. First show them the effect leaning toward each other has upon keeping a separation between the bikes. Note that it is important to keep elbows in and touch only shoulders. Also, emphasize that it is not necessary for any bodily contact to occur. The purpose of the drill is to get the bikes separated from each other, not to just bump each other.

Then, show them the potential negative effects of sticking elbows out by hitting the outstretched elbow of your partner, which will turn the front wheel sideways, causing a wreck. Finally, have two staff members demonstrate the correct use of the proximity skill.

Follow the talk by dividing the whole group into subgroups of no more than of five or six participants, and assign one instructor to each subgroup. The instructors will ride round and round a circular route while working one-on-one with each individual participant. The other riders are to follow behind and watch how the instruction is progressing, making it easier when it is their turn for one-on-one.

Note that the instructors must be gentle in teaching the proximity skills, so as not to scare the daylights out of the participants. In the name of safety, PLEASE be extremely careful with this one!

The lead instructor should keep track of the progress in this skill segment, and when everyone has received one-on-one attention, blow the whistle and get the whole group together for the next skill, dodging with proximity.

Teaching Dodging with Proximity

Dodging with proximity combines the first two skills learned. Divide the entire group into subgroups of three riders. They are to take turns going up the middle of the obstacle-dodging course while their two partners are on each side, making them uncomfortable by their close proximity. Ask the

participants not to get too close, and not necessarily to cause any bumping, but just close enough to cause some discomfort for the rider in the middle.

Have three members of the instructor staff demonstrate the skill while the whole group watches. Then post a volunteer or an instructor about 50 yards before the beginning of the obstacle course to maintain a spacing of at least 20 yards between subgroups, and let the fun begin.

Station one staff instructor near the end of the obstacle course to give encouragement and suggestions for improvement to each subgroup as they complete the course. Participants usually become visibly more proficient each time they go through the course. Giving them positive feedback as they show improvements will reinforce their learning of the simultaneous proximity and dodging skills.

When this skill practice is finished, the obstacles can be removed, making room for the emergency stopping practice.

Teaching Emergency Stopping

Ask participants to stay in the same subgroups of three as in the previous skill.

Begin by having one or more of the staff instructors demonstrate the emergency stopping skill to the entire group. Emphasize to the participants that practicing this skill can be very dangerous. Applying too much front brake can cause (and has caused) the rear wheel to go right off the ground, with the rider going right over the front of the handlebars into a face plant!

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Go over the following points:

- Brakes are very effective now compared to the past.
- DO NOT use only the front brake!
- Check to see which brake handle operates the front brake (usually left).
- Check to see if rims are smooth, so brakes won't grab when stopping.
- Too much front brake unloads the rear wheel (less friction on the road).
- Too much front (not rear) brake causes skidding of the rear wheel (ease the front brake to reduce skidding).
- Shift your body to rear of saddle to put more weight on the rear wheel.
- Skidding defeats the purpose of stopping as quickly as possible.

Go over the following additional thoughts concerning braking in wet or slippery conditions:

- In wet weather, the brakes will "lock up" the wheels causing skidding of the tires with only moderate pressure on the brake handles.

- In wet weather, continuing to pedal firmly while simultaneously applying the rear brake will help prevent a skid of the rear wheel. Braking while coasting is not a good idea in the wet because it allows for unexpected "lock up" and skidding of the tires.
- Anticipate corners when it is wet and slow down to a safe speed before reaching the turn while still riding in a straight line. Apply the brakes gingerly and keep pedaling to avoid rear wheel "lock up."
- Whenever one is slowing down (wet or dry), there is more control over the rate of deceleration when pedaling continues while feathering the brakes.

Now have each subgroup of three participants come through the stopping course after being started by a volunteer posted at least 75 yards from the stopping area. As each group comes through, blow the whistle at randomly chosen points, signaling them to stop.

Begin by having participants learn to use only the rear brake with no skidding. Then, on subsequent passes

through the course, have them gradually bring the front brake into play, with no skidding.

Emergency Stopping Contest

Once it is clear that all participants have had adequate stopping practice, get the entire group together and ask for and answer any questions. Then, announce the stopping contest.

Each subgroup of three are to stop on the whistle with no skidding (skidding results in disqualification). The winner of each subgroup advances to a new subgroup of three winners, etc., until the overall winner and "champion of the world" is declared.

All available volunteers and staff should be enlisted to help judge and make the choices of the winners as fair as possible. A small prize for the overall winner might be appropriate.

This ends the clinic on a fun note. For the finale, get everyone together one last time for any needed Q&A, and be sure to thank all of the instructors, volunteers and participants for coming to the clinic.



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