

Valley Striders Cycling Club (VSCC) wants cyclists to get maximum enjoyment from their club rides whether high-paced race training or steady-paced social rides. All cyclists (both members & guests) do so at their own risk, but experience shows that adherence to the points laid out below will create a safer environment in which we can all enjoy our cycling. The rules and advice incorporate long-standing practices and will be familiar to experienced cyclists. Whilst they have been drawn up to help those who have never ridden in a group, we would like everyone to make a point of reading and following them. We have taken the opportunity to also include items of general advice that may help new or relatively inexperienced cyclists.

Ahead of all the other suggestions below always adhere to THE HIGHWAY CODE, RULES, REGULATIONS AND LAWS OF THE ROAD. <https://www.gov.uk/rules-for-cyclists-59-to-82/overview-59-to-71>

You are responsible for your own safety so ensure your bike is road-worthy and you are confident riding on the open roads. We recommend you wear a helmet for your own safety and wellbeing and this is MANDATORY on all VSCC rides.

1. RISK MANAGEMENT

1.1 All cyclists take part in the club rides at their own risk. Those risks can never be totally eliminated but can be minimised by following these guidelines in the spirit as well as the letter. Our ride leaders will be happy to offer general advice and to help clarify the content below. Prior to all our club rides, our Ride leaders will deliver a safety briefing which will describe the route, expected pace, known hazards, and other advice and expectations.

1.2 As a cycling club, we have an obligation to correct/point out riding styles that may prove unsafe to the group. If a ride leader or experienced fellow-cyclist has a word with you, please don't take it too personally. We have all been there and the vast majority of us are still learning. If the ride leader believes that a cyclist's conduct is putting others at risk they have the authority to exclude the offender from the ride and will subsequently report the circumstances to the club committee who may wish to take further action.

1.3 Consider your own insurance needs. In particular ensure that you have Third Party (Public Liability) insurance that covers you whilst cycling. Although this is not a legal requirement, the current "claim/blame culture" and attitudes makes insurance essential. The Club has such a policy to cover claims against the Club and its officers but it does not cover individual riders. You should consider joining the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC), British Cycling or the British Triathlon Federation – membership includes both Third Party insurance and free legal assistance should you need to claim against someone else.

1.4 If you do not currently take regular exercise and/or are in any doubt as to your health, please consult your doctor before starting. Some general fitness is necessary so you might find it useful to try a short ride on your own or with a buddy, to check your fitness and familiarity with the bike, before joining a group. When beginning don't push yourself too hard, particularly on the hills. Ride up at your own pace. The group will always wait for you.

2. GENERAL SAFETY

2.1 Ride steadily. Keep a steady line and constant speed while in a group. Any sudden change is magnified as it reaches riders at the back and so can have dramatic consequences. Stay calm and try to make small corrections to your position and pace as necessary.

2.2 We don't allow racing on general club rides, although some aspects of racing may be encouraged on training rides but will be briefed in and be at the ride leaders discretion.

2.3 Ride two abreast where it is safe to do so (our ride leaders will advise on this dependent on the chosen route) but always be prepared to single file when necessary. The Highway Code states we should ride single file through busy areas and on narrow roads with poor visibility.

2.4 Riding in a group requires discipline and practice but some basic rules apply

- ride immediately behind the cyclist in front
- do not overlap your front wheel with the rear wheel of the cyclist ahead – there should be a gap between both bicycles if looking from the side
- ride with your front wheels in line with the cyclist next to you and at the pace of the slower cyclist in the pair to avoid creeping
- avoid Half-Wheeling - when a cyclist creeps ahead of the cyclist they are riding beside. This causes the other cyclist to speed up and will increase the speed of the cyclists behind
- keep the group as compact as possible – don't ride 'between' the 2 cyclists ahead of you to have an unobstructed view or to listen to the conversation as to other road users it appears we are riding 3-abreast
- cover your brakes at all times

2.5 When approaching a hill anticipate the gradient and change gear in good time. Missing a gear change on the steep bit can bring you to a sudden halt – not a good thing for the riders behind you! If you rise out of your saddle on a hill it is customary to call “standing”. This gives following riders notice that you may be about to alter your speed. As cyclists rise out of their saddle their bicycle often goes backwards slightly so it is advisable to give the cyclist ahead of you a little extra space when climbing.

2.6 Treat other members of the group with courtesy and respect. Within any group of cyclists there will be varied experience, fitness and abilities and we all need to keep this in mind as we ride together.

2.7 Treat other road users with courtesy. Remember you are an ambassador of the club and the cycling community in general. Acknowledge courteous behaviour with a friendly wave to other road users. (Many oncoming motorists will slow down or stop when they meet a large group of cyclists, whilst others allow the whole group to join or cross a major road). Do not “wave through” a following vehicle that is waiting to overtake – let the driver make this decision. This will avoid the risk of being held responsible if the overtaking results in any form of accident.

2.8 Do not react to bad driving incidents with gestures or provoke retaliation. Remember a road rage motorist has a one ton weapon!

2.9 Ride with the group which best suits your ability. It is usually better (and less embarrassing) to start low and build up. If in doubt, any of our ride leaders will be happy to advise. Please note, it is considered bad manners to hold back a strong group when an easier group is available.

2.10 Let others know if you are unable to keep up (although our ride leaders will look out for signs and be aware), have a problem or have decided to leave the group. Pass the instructions along if a rider cannot keep up, the leader needs to know.

2.11 Always remain aware of what is going on around you in the bunch and eat and drink appropriately to avoid becoming over tired. Towards the end of a long ride look out for signs of tiredness and lack of concentration in others; slow reactions, more erratic movements than usual, dropping their head, locking their elbows to name but a few, and be aware that they will react more slowly than usual. Look after each other.

2.12 Always carry your VSCC Membership Card containing your details and those of your emergency contact. If you are not yet a member you should have these details on you in case they are required. Other useful items to carry include a phone if possible, and some money (e.g. to buy food at the café stop or in extreme circumstances, taxi fare to get yourself home in the event of a unfixable mechanical failure). Always carry sufficient fluid and food for the ride.

2.13 Wear cycle-specific clothing if possible as it provides a better level of comfort and practicality. A brightly coloured jacket or jersey makes you more visible to other road users. Carry a waterproof jacket, not only for the rain but also to give an extra layer if you have to stop with a puncture as you will cool down quickly. You may require more layers and/or winter-specific clothing for riding in colder weather.

2.14 Carry enough tools to get you out of everyday problems like punctures or nuts or bolts working loose. It's easier to change an inner tube than it is to repair a puncture at the roadside (especially if it's cold or wet). As a minimum carry a spare inner tube, tyre levers, a pump and multi tool and latex or similar protective gloves. A puncture outfit may also be carried in case you get further punctures. (Additionally but not essential, it is also a good idea to carry a chain tool and quick link replacement- and the knowledge of how to use it!)

2.15 Helmets are mandatory on our group rides and mudguards are advised from October to March (Note: mudguards are mandatory on group rides between November and February). Both perform useful functions. Helmets provide additional protection against head injuries. Mudguards prevent you getting wet and dirty and also reduce the amount of spray thrown up at the rider behind.

2.16 Lights are mandatory on our evening club rides throughout the year and are advised from October to March on our weekend club rides and whenever visibility is (or is likely to be) poor.

2.17 Keep your bike in good condition and replace any worn out parts. The group will help if something goes wrong but will not be best pleased if the problem was caused by poor maintenance. Keep a close check on your tyres which should be fully inflated, especially the one on the back wheel as it's always out of sight. Look for bulges or cuts as well as the actual tread depth and pattern or obvious signs of wear.

3. SPECIFICS

3.1 Cyclists of secondary school age (nominally 11 to 15years) may join our club rides if accompanied and supervised by a parent (subject to displaying basic proficiency in open road conditions). An appropriate adult may act as guardian to the child in the absence of a parent but only upon completion of the club's Parental Consent Form. The parent/guardian is fully responsible for the conduct and welfare of the child on the ride.

3.2 Cyclists aged 16 and 17 may ride with written parental approval and will otherwise be treated as adults (Written approval must be presented to the ride leader for retention and filing with the membership secretary).

(More details on junior participation can be obtained from the Junior Welfare Officer)

3.3 Whilst the club appreciates that some members may have Tri/Aero bars fitted their use is not permitted on our group rides for safety reasons.

3.4 Purpose built tandems are permitted on our rides but we restrict them to our "C" group rides and Sunday Socials

3.5 Add-on child trailers are not permitted

4. Warning Calls When Riding in a Group

These calls and signals are universal to all experienced cyclists – please use them at the appropriate times. It is vital that calls and signals are passed up and down the group to ensure everyone in the group knows what is happening. Without these calls, group riding is simply not possible.

- “Car up” There is a vehicle coming up behind the group.
- “Car down” There is a vehicle approaching towards the front of the group.
- “Single out” A call from cyclists at the back/front of the group, used on busy or narrow roads. This call is relayed forward/back by everyone to ensure that the move to single file is executed quickly and safely. The standard procedure is for the outside rider to drop back behind the inside rider. The call “single out” alerts everyone to the need to adjust speed and create spaces in the inside file.
- “Clear” and “Car on Left/Right” This call lets following cyclists know at junctions or similar whether or not the road is clear. If the group cannot stay together the first ones through ride slowly until the others catch up.
- “Hole /surface” Any pothole/surface that could cause a rider to fall. If possible indicate where it is so that following riders can steer away from it and not into it. Do this by either pointing or adding to the call “on the left / right” or “inside/outside” (we suggest that inexperienced cyclists in the group do not point or signal but keep both hands on the handle bars to maintain stability)
- “Under” when a cyclist has been unable to avoid a hazard and has to ride over it this call alerts the cyclists behind that there is a hazard directly ahead.
- “Out” A general warning of some kind of hazard – usually parked cars or pedestrians, so prepare to pull out to the right. For hazards on the left, an alternative warning is to put your left hand behind your back, pointing to the right, away from the hazard. Give way to pedestrians – they can feel intimidated by cyclists just as we sometimes feel intimidated by motorists.
- “Stopping” “Slowing” “Easy” indicates slow down or prepare to stop. If you brake without letting those behind know your intention they can easily run into you
- “Mile Off” asking the cyclists at the front of the group to slow the pace down
- “Puncture”(or other mechanical fault) To let the others know you have a problem. The group will wait while you repair it. (You will probably be given help).
- “Horse(s)” The group is about to pass horses and special care is needed. Slow down and pass as widely as possible. Make sure that both the horse and rider are aware of your presence and if you are approaching from behind call out a friendly “good morning/afternoon” or a gentle bell ring. Keep pedalling slowly as you pass to keep noise from your freewheel and gears to a minimum. Pay attention to any request by the horse rider – they will know the temperament of the horse and its likely reaction to a group of brightly clad cyclists.

FINALLY.....These guidelines are created to allow the safest and most enjoyable environment for our members, it's really all about being sensible and aware whilst riding on the road. Our club runs attract lots of riders and so these rules set out what's required.

Remember, you are responsible for your safety and the safety of others and take part in activities at your own risk. In a group please think of your fellow cyclists at all times, just because you can see and predict hazards don't assume everyone else in the group can. Share your observations and insights with the rest of the group to help create a smooth, safe and calm cycling environment for your fellow cyclists.

We appreciate that some of these guidelines may require updating from time to time but any deviation or alteration must only be made with the approval of the club committee.