



Wheeling Wheelmen



Thoughts on Group Riding

Some of our rides are free-for-alls, where the group has no real organization, and riders jump ahead, the pace changes frequently, and it's everyone for themselves. Others are what a friend of mine calls Slackin' and Yackin' riders. Easy pace, chatting with friends, kind of a "we'll get there when we get there" attitude. Both styles are fun in their own way.

But sometimes, we ride with a group (often a small group - 4 to 8) and stay together in an organized form. Those are the rides where everyone gets off at the end and comments on how good the ride was, how they were amazed that the average speed was as high as it was, and that they're not very tired, given the miles ridden. Here are the characteristics I've observed on those rides.

The key element in these controlled group rides is the lead rider pulling at a steady effort. Not a steady pace, but a steady effort. How do you maintain a steady effort when you're pulling the group? Note the speed you are riding on a flat road. When the wind picks up or you begin to go uphill, keep the effort steady and let the speed drop as appropriate. When the wind turns to a tailwind, or you begin to go downhill, keep pedaling, so the riders behind don't have to brake. Let the speed increase naturally.

Second, don't feel you need to pull forever. Assuming we usually ride between 15 and 20 mph on flat ground, a mile takes between 3 and 4 minutes. I think that's probably long enough to stay in front. Rotate back and let the next rider pull. If you don't feel like staying up front that long, then rotate back whenever you're ready - even if it's only 10 or 15 seconds. I think it's important to let everyone take a turn in front. When you're ready to rotate back, give a signal so the next rider knows you are going off the front. Most importantly, don't stay up front so long that you get tired.

It is difficult for the lead ride to see very far back in the group, so if you see that a rider is falling off the back, or that the group is beginning to split in the middle, let the front rider know to slow a bit and let the group come back together. It can be hard to catch up after falling off the back. Conversely, when you take the front, don't speed up - maintain the group's pace. And try to avoid jumping ahead to take the pull - let the group rotate to give everyone a chance.

These are just a few observations I've noted. You may have other ideas, or even disagree. And not every ride needs to be the same. The important thing is to ride safely and to enjoy your ride. If you have other ideas, speak up. We can all learn from each other.

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