

Bike handling tips for cyclists

Be safe on your bike and to other road users at all times. Here are some handy bike handling tips that will be constantly added to.

Protect your head

You've only got one head. Knocking it on the ground won't do it any favours so wear a helmet. Helmets significantly reduce head injuries and if wearing one in a fall you may not have even been aware that they have protected you until you see the very obvious dent in the side. Don't go out without wearing one – 99% of cyclists can't be wrong!

Protect your hands

Wear gloves. They reduce wear, fatigue and injury on the hands and keep them nice and snug in the winter. When falling off your bike it's better to ruin your gloves than your beautiful hands.

Listening

Always listen to what's going on around you when you're on your bike. After your 'eyes' your ears are the next best thing for detecting what's behind or in front of you. This includes traffic noise and also any warnings that others are shouting to you especially when cycling in a group. If you cover your ears or listen to music while cycling you do this at your peril. It's a bad idea.

Getting cross at other road users

Even though you might get cross at other road users you need to keep your emotions under control. Avoid shouting comments, swearing or gesticulating to others. You are extremely vulnerable compared to other road users and others might take their rage out on you and possibly with those that you are with. So, don't inflame situations or make them any worse than they are. Keep calm and your emotions in check. If involved in any incidents always take the name, address and telephone numbers of those involved/attending. Also take number plate registrations.

Communications

Always carry a mobile phone with you if you can and ensure it's fully charged and in credit. The benefits are endless. Put in a number your phone 'for emergency' in case either you or anyone else needs to phone it and contact someone for you. Don't use your mobile when riding as you can invariably be prosecuted for not being in full control of your bike. Another handy tip is to put your name, address and telephone number in a card within one of your pockets in a laminated pouch.

Signalling

Always use the hand signals as prescribed in the Highway Code. Always signal early and clearly. You must 'look', 'signal', and 'manoeuvre' in that order. 'Looking' will involve glancing to you left and right and behind you. Check also that other road users have acknowledged your signals. Try and 'eye ball' other

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road users so that you are happy that they have seen your signals and understand your intentions. Make your manoeuvres obvious and fluid.

Cycling on the road

Always cycle on the left and about a foot (30 cm's) away from the pavement edge – however, this also depends on the road surface which if poor may mean that you have to cycle further out. Do not cycle on the other side of the road and particularly around bends especially 'blind' ones which is particularly suicidal! It is best to cycle in single file but it is permissible to ride two abreast as long as this is not obstructive to other road users. If cycling two abreast always be prepared to drop back or over take the rider on your inside if a vehicle is approaching you from behind or in front.

Avoiding potholes

Avoid potholes wherever you can as these can bring you off your bike and cause a serious accident. Always look up the road in front of you to identify potholes before you get to them. If you see one then try to cycle around it but do not swerve as this may also cause an accident. If you brake then do this progressively as again, this could also cause an accident. Avoid cycling on unlit roads even with lights as you may never see a pothole if one is there.

Overtaking other riders

Before overtaking any rider consider whether you need to do so. Overtaking can put you in danger of being struck by a vehicle travelling behind you or towards you especially when the roads are busy. Before you overtake always look well ahead up the road and/or behind you. Check that you have sufficient time to get round the rider in front and do not cut them up as you move back in as your rear wheel may make contact with their front wheel throwing you both off in to the road. Use hand signals as appropriate to indicate that you are moving out around any rider in front. Avoid overtaking when travelling into and around road bends and avoid crossing the white dividing line down the centre of the road. Also avoid overtaking where traffic is travelling fast around you as you are a lot slower!

Overtaking horses

Horses are skittish by nature and will take fright when confronted with any unknown sounds or sights especially if sprung upon them. Horses will bolt at the sound of a cycle or seeing a bike pass them. If they bolt then this puts you, the rider and other road users in perpetual danger. The outcome may be serious indeed. Therefore, if you see any horses with riders up ahead then shout in good time 'cyclist(s) to the rear' in order for the rider to see hear then see you and to take charge of their animal. Then, once you see that they have done this then pass very slowly around with minimal sound. So avoid backpedalling, coasting and gear changing. Also avoid any brake screeching. Riders will often acknowledge and thank you for this responsible attitude as we are all road users. You should also thank the horse rider for taking extra control of their horse as you pass.

Overtaking stationary cars

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When you overtake any stationary cars leave a doors' width between you and the car. This is so that if the driver alights from the vehicle without seeing you then their door will not strike you as it is opened as you pass.

Overtaking slow moving traffic

Think twice before overtaking any apparent slow moving traffic such as buses or tractors as they can ultimately travel faster than you and will want to pass you further up the road later on. Also beware that there is a risk in overtaking a stationary bus as you pull out. You can be struck from the rear or head on as traffic passes in the opposite direction.

Negotiating roundabouts

Always assert your position when moving on to a roundabout. By this we mean staking your position in the road as you travel round. As you go around and past any exit try and eyeball any waiting drivers coming on to the roundabout so that you know they have seen you on it. Check each exit in this way as you pass. Also, look at and eyeball the drivers behind you so they can see that you know they are there

Keeping a safe distance

Always keep a safe distance between your self and any rider in front of you. If they have to stop suddenly then you may not be able to stop in time behind them. Always cycle behind but out slightly to the right of any rider you are behind. This is so that you can see what is ahead of the other rider which will give you good time to react. Always cycle with your head up, looking well ahead of you up the road. Do not overlap your front wheel with the rear wheel of any bike you're cycling behind. If they swerve around a pothole then this may bring you off.

Cycling in large groups (6+)

When cycling in large groups remember that it becomes more difficult for drivers to overtake you. Consider dividing the group in two to make passing easier. Discuss this with your group before your ride starts. Maybe assign someone in each group to keep order.

Negotiating traffic lights

Treat traffic lights as per the Highway Code. Prepare to stop/stop at yellow and always stop at red lights with no exception! Many cyclists have been injured when shooting red lights and for no gain whatsoever. You must be patient where there are multiple lights such as in built-up areas where you have to stop repeatedly. Don't feel the pressure to cross red lights just because others do. Just wait.

Overtaking runners

Try to spot runners up the road. This is more likely on rural back roads with no pavement. Always shout 'cyclists to the rear' before you reach them as they may not hear your approach and run into you as you pass. When you see runners ahead bring any other cyclists' attention to them by shouting 'runners'.