



Ride Leader Guidelines – Alton Cycling Club

The purpose of these guidelines is to help ride leaders to plan and enjoy a good ride and to provide some hints and tips to help the ride go smoothly. It's not definitive and there are few hard and fast rules. **We want our club rides to be fun and enjoyable.**

1. The Key Points

Our ride leaders act on the club's behalf as 'club officials'. Club officials are covered by the club's British Cycling insurance. They do not need to be qualified to perform the role, so we require all of the riders to be individually responsible for their own safety and for being properly equipped and insured.

The leader has a duty of care and is there for 2 main tasks:

1. To follow a route

2. To make sure no one gets lost and that everyone gets home safely

It is often a good idea to ask a more experienced ride leader to help you plan, prepare and conduct your first ride as a ride leader.

That said, riders will look to the leader to make decisions if things go wrong, so it is no bad thing for leaders to have thought through some of the possible hazards.

The only mandatory rules are:

- **Everyone must wear a helmet**
- **Groups must ride together and no one gets left behind (splits may occur because of terrain, but the group should regroup as soon as possible)**

2. Before the ride

The Leader should prepare for the ride by getting familiarised with the route. The route destinations are published on the website and there is a different route for each week in the month. **The leader should share their route with the group prior to the ride.** Ideally, the leader will know the route well enough not to have to rely on a GPS, although competence with a GPS is a distinct advantage. Nonetheless, it is not unheard of for the leader to lose his/her way and with the route shared, there should be someone in the group who has the route, so do not be afraid to admit being lost and asking for help.

Check the forecast and consider options for varying the route to suit the conditions. If it is especially cold or wet, work out some 'bail-out' options in advance. If you want to add some miles, be very careful to ensure that every rider is genuinely happy with the idea as often a single person may be reticent to object but may not feel up to extra miles or may just need to get home.

Make sure you bring the right gear (see checklist)

3. At the meet

Arrive a few minutes early. There is an upper limit of 12 riders per group, including the leader. **If there are more than 12 riders, you will need to split the group and allocate a second leader.**

Make sure all riders have your mobile number, so that they can contact you if they get lost. All riders on the club WhatsApp group have access to each other's mobile numbers.



Riders at the meet will be looking out for you and some riders may be new to the club.

Welcome new riders and introduce them to the group. Check they have the right kit – and point them at Owens Cycles for tubes, etc. if needed. Speak to them about their riding experience and make a call if you think they are in the wrong group. It's much better for them to try a group that is easy for them to start with and to move up than it is to have a ride where they struggle and hold everyone else up. Check that riders are insured (usually with either British Cycling or Cycling UK). New riders will need to let you have their details (name, mobile number, emergency contact, email address), the email address so we can prompt them to join once they have completed 3 rides.

You will find it much easier to lead if you have a backmarker to ensure that no one gets left behind, especially if there are new riders. Make sure the backmarker has your mobile number. It doesn't have to be the same backmarker for the whole ride, but give clear instructions as to what you want them to do and ensure that all the riders know who the backmarker is. The backmarker should ensure that any riders who get dropped are brought back to the group and on narrow roads warn of any approaching traffic from the rear of the group.

It is often a good idea, and mandatory if you have a number of new faces, to have a quick briefing before you set off. Introduce new riders and explain clearly any particular points you want to make. One of the benefits of group riding is sharing the work at the front. Explain how you want this to happen on the ride and how route directions will be given. If you are more comfortable leading at the front, tell the group how you will call out route directions and how you will indicate when it is ok for them to go ahead. A short description of the route is helpful, in case people get separated. You should also cover any hand signals and warning calls that will be used. Remind the group who the backmarker is.

If you know at the start that some riders usually ride with a faster group, make it clear what pace you will be riding at and remind them of their responsibility to stick with the group, or at least wait at any junctions. The ride leader should not feel pressured into going faster than the usual group pace.

Ensure that all riders are wearing a cycle helmet. For new riders, do a simple ABC Tight (Air-Brakes-Chain-Tight, [SafeCycle-ABC-poster.pdf \(paf.org.au\)](https://www.paf.org.au/SafeCycle-ABC-poster.pdf)) check and check their helmet is fitted correctly and has no obvious damage.

4. On the road

Your main roles on the ride are:

- **To regulate the pace of ride to that of the slowest rider and be prepared to adjust the route accordingly.** Once you have accepted someone to come on the ride, it is your responsibility to make sure they stay with the group, even if it means holding others up. However, if there is a total mismatch, consider splitting the group into two or, if one person is significantly slower, try to allow them to drop back to a slower group at the coffee stop. The routes are such that this is usually possible, but don't just leave them.
- **To follow the route.** Ideally, you will know the route well enough to manage with your GPS just as a back-up. That way, you can anticipate places where it is ok for some of the quicker riders to go off the front for a short distance (maybe on a climb) and a good place to re-group. If you are trying out a new route, just make sure riders don't go off the front and be firm in asking them to stay behind you



- **To keep the group together and make sure everyone makes it back safely from the ride.** Pacing is key to this.
- **Decide which formation the group will adopt on the road**, either two abreast when road conditions allow (makes the group shorter for cars to overtake and enables higher speed) or in single file (better for narrow roads, but slower). “Taking the Lane” by riding two abreast and blocking traffic is often the safest way to ride through busy road junctions or roundabouts and is completely legal.
- **Check that riders are ‘all in’** after lights, junctions and at stops.
- **Try to keep stops relatively short**, particularly if it is cold or wet and let people know when they have time to have something to eat or make a change of clothing. Give a little warning when it’s time to move and wait until everyone is ready to go.
- Be clear at the start of the ride of the planned café stop during the ride.

Some other points to note:

- Follow the Highway Code and ride legally
- You are representing the club on the road and our club kit makes us easily identifiable
- Indicate well in advance changes in direction or a stop.
- Check for presence of backmarker at changes of direction.
- Use hand signals to highlight particular hazards to the group eg. steep descents, very bad road surfaces, deep potholes, parked cars or pedestrians in the road and use warning calls for oncoming vehicles (car down), vehicles approaching from behind (car up), sudden holes in the road or gravel
- Avoid stopping on bends and brow of hills.
- Make sure that bikes and riders are off the road, not obstructing pedestrians, when a group stops by the roadside to resolve mechanical problems and punctures.

5. End of ride

Some riders may drop out before the end because they live close to the route. Make sure you know this is what they are doing. **The leader should usually return to the pub stop to make sure that everyone knows their way home.**

Remember to email details of any new riders to the club secretary after the ride so that they can keep tabs on new riders.

6. If the worst happens on the ride

Riders do fall off, particularly when it’s wet or icy. Bikes break and people get lost. **We ask all of our riders to be responsible for their own safety, so it is not the leader’s fault or responsibility if something goes wrong. However, other riders will look to you if there is a situation.** This is not an exhaustive list of instructions, and it is a good idea to think how you might react given a certain set of circumstances rather than finding yourself on the spot. Some basics:

A faller:

- If someone falls off, one of the first things to make sure of is that other vehicles do not make the situation worse. If someone is down on the road, quickly have someone front and back checking and warning vehicles.
- Don’t immediately try to move the faller until you know there are no injuries that would be worsened by moving them. Better to inconvenience the odd driver.



- Make sure everyone else is out of the way and off the road if possible
- If required, see if you have anyone with a first aid qualification in the group
- Apply first aid to the faller (ride leaders should carry a crepe bandage which can act as a wound dressing or a sling to support an injured arm)
- Call for an ambulance if necessary and give them clear instructions as to where you are (a mobile phone or GPS device can give you a precise location and the “what3words” app can give you a code for any 3 metre square on or off road)
- Call the police if there are other vehicles involved
- Make sure everyone, especially the injured person puts on any spare clothing. When in shock, you are particularly vulnerable to cold and quickly start to function badly.
- Alert others, including the faller’s emergency contact and make arrangements for getting people and their bikes home.
- Make notes of what happened, the conditions, time of day, etc. particularly if a 3rd party is involved, take photos and take details of any witnesses just as you would for a normal road accident. Complete an Incident Report Form.

Losing someone:

If you lose a rider, do everything you can to re-locate them while you are out on the ride:

- Call their mobile and leave a message if you get no response. Text them with an instruction where to meet
- Retrace your route to the point you last saw them or an obvious landmark that you can guide them to
- Ask other cyclists if they have seen them – the Alton CC colours are noticeable so it helps if they are in club kit
- Check after the ride if you can’t find them while you are out

Mechanicals and Punctures

These are inevitable, though can be minimised with good maintenance and careful riding. **Riders should be responsible for making their own running repairs, though it is the friendly thing to do to help out.** Make a note if someone is obviously incapable of mending their own puncture and ask them to learn how to before their next ride. If the bike is unrideable, locate the nearest railway station or call for a car (Uber take bikes and sometimes so do partners!). Don’t just ditch a rider with a broken bike to make their own way home. Make sure than any debris, such as old inner tubes, is disposed of.

One thing you should always have with you as a ride leader, better than any tool or set of instructions, is your common sense. Prevention is always better than trying to fix something after the event and most hazards can be anticipated. **You should also bring plenty of patience and a sense of humour and you will enjoy it.**



Ride leader equipment checklist

1. Fully-charged GPS unit with route loaded (and route ideally shared with the group)
2. Mini pump
3. 2 inner tubes and tyre levers or tubeless plug kit
4. Multi-tool (ideally with chain tool)
5. Rear light
6. Waterproof bag or case with mobile phone and £20 in cash or contactless payment capability
7. Your own food for the ride
8. Crepe bandage