

**Beginner/Intermediate Group**



# **Ride Leader Handbook**



Sponsored by the El Paso Bicycle Club

D R A F T: February 15, 2011

Much of this Beginner/Intermediate Group (B/IG) Ride Leader Handbook has been shamelessly lifted from a number of resources available on various cycling clubs' websites. We are very grateful to the individuals and organizations that put in this effort to encourage safe and enjoyable riding for cyclists of all levels. We have customized the materials we found hoping to enable our members to be better able to help new riders as well as become safer, more experienced riders themselves.

Specifically, we would like to thank the Cascade Bicycle Club in Seattle, Washington, for allowing us to use their *Cascade Bicycle Club Ride Leader Guidelines* as our template for our handbook. The Oklahoma Cycling Society also provided valuable information.

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## WHY LEAD A B/IG TRAINING RIDE?

- You can inspire people, motivate them, get them excited about bicycling. B/IG Ride leaders who lead regularly have countless tales of novices who can barely shift gears on their first ride but who blossom into avid cyclists by the end of the season.
- You get to contribute something to the community.
- Leading a ride makes you go riding yourself.
- The club throws a party at the end of the riding season (September)
- You get to choose the route and pace (appropriate for a B/IG ride). This means that you get to share *your* favorite destinations and routes and bring a lot of people to *your* favorite eateries.
- Other people have to call you "Leader."

*Idea: offer free first-aid training to ride leaders.*

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOKLET?

If you've led rides for the El Paso Bicycle Club in the past, some of the information in this handbook will already be familiar to you. You'll probably want to look through these guidelines, however, for ideas on how to make your rides even safer or more fun, and as a refresher on the basics of ride leading.

If you *haven't* led rides before, this handbook will give you a good introduction to how you go about leading a safe, enjoyable, B/IG ride. You'll find information on how to select a route; what to do before, during, and after the ride; how to handle problems and accidents; and how to make a ride more fun. At the end, you'll also find tips on safe cycling, *as well as a bibliography*.

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**Don't be daunted!** You aren't expected to read the entire booklet cover to cover and memorize it as if for a test. More likely, you'll want to use it as a reference for detailed information on specific topics.

**See the checklists at the back:** Included are a couple of day-of-ride checklists at the back, which give a quick summary of the items you may want to bring to a ride and what to do before and during a ride.

**Not all guidelines apply to every ride:** These guidelines are written for all B/IG Training rides, but the focus is on the most common types of rides—social rides at a slow or moderate pace with regular rest stops.

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## IF YOU'VE NEVER LED A RIDE BEFORE

If you've ridden on a lot of club rides, you already know much of what you need to know to lead a ride of your own. Not everything about leading rides is intuitively obvious, though. Thankfully, there are several resources available for learning more about becoming a ride leader. This handbook is intended to give you a good introduction. In addition, we encourage you to attend an orientation for new ride leaders.

We also recommend that you co-lead a ride with an experience ride leader. Just ask any of the club's ride leaders if you can help with their next ride, or ask if they'll help you plan a ride of your own. If you'd like to get to know a ride leader better, volunteer to *sweep*, which means that you ride at the back and help the slower riders. You can also contact the Ride Coordinator (see information on club's website) and ask for the name of someone who could give you a hand getting started.

Finally, you can sweet-talk a friend who has never led rides into jumping in with you. Calmly explain that it's *easy* it's a great way to get or stay in shape, and it's the *best* way to meet the greatest people in the world.

Assemble a "team" for your B/IG ride and talk with them before your ride. Your team will help you manage your group of riders. Brief them on your expectations, such as riding sweep, watching and visiting with new riders, and helping in the event of an emergency.

## WHAT KIND OF B/IG RIDE DO YOU WANT TO LEAD?

Before thinking about what kind of ride you want to lead, let's talk about the general categories of B/IG riders we see. They generally fall into four types: Beginners, Beginner/Intermediate riders, Intermediate riders, or Returning riders. Here are some guidelines to describe each group.

### Types of B/IG Riders

#### Beginners

Beginning riders probably will not know

- Parts of the bike (so if you refer to the "chainring", show them what the chainring is.)
- Which brake lever controls which brake

- How to shift
- Why it's important to know how to ride in a paceline
- How a paceline works
- Bike maintenance
- Why cycling clothing is worn on rides
- How to place feet properly on pedals or clip in/out

Beginning riders may or may not be strong enough to

- Ride in a straight line
- Ride in a pace line at 13-15 mph
- Ride a distance greater than 10-15 miles
- Rules for sharing the road with vehicles.

### **Beginner-Intermediate riders**

Beginner-Intermediate riders will have a fundamental understanding of how to

- Ride a bike safely
- Shift
- Ride in a paceline
- Clip in/out

BUT

- will need practice to internalize knowledge into habit and to build strength and endurance

Additional practice will be needed for

- Safely doing a sustained ride in a group
- drinking from their water bottle while riding
- Properly maintaining equipment
- Calling out and signaling road/other riding hazards

### **Intermediate riders**

Intermediate riders will be able to

- Ride 30 or more miles at a sustained pace of 15-17 mph safely in a group

Intermediate riders will need to

- Build more power and endurance
- Learn advanced riding skills, like safely standing on the bike
- Practice good nutrition/hydration for cycling to avoid bonking

### **Returning riders**

Returning riders may need review of

- Safety skills, such as group riding etiquette
- Bike maintenance
- Physical conditioning

Knowing the different needs for these types of riders will help you decide what kind of ride you want to lead.

### **Decide who you want to ride with**

- A beginner ride, for example, will have different considerations than for intermediate riders.
- There are other groups that you may want to design your ride for, such as family rides with children.

### **Decide on a pace**

- Be sure it matches the folks you want to ride with. If you want to do a family ride, you won't be leading a fast ride, probably not even a moderate ride. Also, make sure the pace you choose is one that you can *very* comfortably maintain for the duration of the ride. If you're already at the outside edge of your abilities and you drop back into the pack to check on one of your riders, you may have trouble catching the front of the group.
- No B/IG ride scheduled in April or May should have a pace greater than 15 mph. These rides are intended to build skills, not endurance. Many strong riders confuse speed with proficiency. This can create hazardous riding conditions for all riders. Over the riding season, the pace should gradually increase. It would be unrealistic to lead a B/IG ride at 16-18 mph early in the season.

### **Decide on a distance**

- As with the pace, the distance will increase over the riding season to account for increasing conditioning of B/IG riders.
- Leading any B/IG ride means additional responsibility with the potential of new riders, who may be unfamiliar with safe group riding and may need a more detailed pre-ride briefing, as well as assistance during the ride. This is a good opportunity to recruiting any experienced club members to help manage the ride.
- Think about what time the ride should start. Consider that a Saturday ride starting at 10 am tends to draw a larger crowd than a ride starting earlier. In the heat of the summer, however, early rides are recommend.
- Consider the season, particularly with respect to the probable weather and the amount of available daylight. Most beginning riders don't think of riding in the rain or wind as being all that much fun.
- Be sure you're not conflicting with anything that could make your ride *very* unpleasant. For example, you wouldn't likely be happy with the results if you were to try to lead a ride on a parade route (such as homecoming in Canutillo near Gallegos Park) or on the marathon route in March.

## SELECTING A ROUTE

### **General considerations**

- However your route is selected, pre-ride or pre-drive it so you know everything you need to about road conditions; mileage; and water, lunch and restroom stops.  
If you've been on the route but not recently, you may want to go over it again to ensure that nothing has changed significantly—no long detours over gravel roads, for example.  
If you're using a route that you've never ridden or that you're designing on your own, it's even more important that you travel it before the ride, preferably on a bicycle.
- Choose a starting point that people can find easily and that has ample parking. If possible, the starting point should also have nearby restrooms.
- Consider food, water, and restroom breaks. Everyone needs to eat and drink, and some bladders are weaker than others. If you're planning to stop for a lunch break, there's a psychological advantage to stopping after the midpoint rather than before. The riders who are feeling a bit tired can take solace in the knowledge that you're over half way.

### **Using an existing route**

The best choice for a route is often one that you've ridden and enjoyed. Ride leaders rarely mind if someone repeats one of their rides, so you needn't worry about plagiarism. Feel free to add your own variations; just because you're borrowing someone else's route doesn't mean that you can't give it your own touch.

### **Designing your own route**

If you decide to design your own route, here are a few suggestions. These suggestions apply most of all to slow rides with inexperienced riders. If you expect to lead a more experienced group of riders, adjust accordingly.

- Safety is the deciding factor for all route-related decisions. If you can't find a safe way to get somewhere, don't go there. Keep in mind that riding with a group is *much* different from riding by yourself, and rarely is it easier.
- Avoid intersections that are too close to a hill or a curve if opposing traffic isn't required to stop. You want your riders to have an ample view of oncoming traffic and vice versa.
- Avoid streets that are too narrow for cars to pass unless you'll only be traveling there for a short distance. For example, some streets with medians only have enough room for one lane of traffic in each direction.

- Avoid crossing busy streets except at controlled intersections (those with stop signs or stop lights).
- Avoid heavily traveled, multi-lane roads whenever possible. If you find yourself with no good alternatives, at least try to avoid making left turns. Even with the best of riders, getting a group safely across two lanes of traffic so they can make the turn is a dicey proposition. With inexperienced riders, it can only get worse.
- In general, avoid taking a group on sidewalks. On occasion, a short stretch of sidewalk is clearly the safest, best way to get from point A to point B. However, if we're to be taken seriously as operators of vehicles, we can't be spending a lot of time on the sidewalk like a bunch of six-year-olds.
- Unless you're leading a mountain-bike ride, avoid difficult riding surfaces whenever possible, for example, rough or rutted roads, cobblestones, bridges with metal decks, railroad tracks, dirt, gravel, grass, stairs, and so on. However, don't miss out on a stunning view or a ride along the water just because the path is a short stretch of gravel. Simply suggest that people walk if they would rather.
- Try to avoid surprises. Suppose, for example, that you choose a route on which there is a railroad crossing the road at a dangerous angle. If you don't remember to warn riders in advance, they'll all be so distracted trying to cross at right angles to the track that they won't watch out for one another or for traffic. With an inexperienced group, some riders will simply stop, with no thought to whether anyone might be behind them.

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**Note:** If you can't circumvent a problem that may stymie your riders, try to warn everyone during the ride, possibly at a stop immediately before you get to that location.

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- Study maps in search of promising back roads. However, be sure you pre-ride these roads before the day of the ride, so you don't run into road construction or several miles of gravel.
- Explore. The best way to find unique routes, unusual sites, or anything else that doesn't show up on a map is by exploring. Take a buddy along and make it an adventure.
- If you know a ride leader who has led rides in the area where you want to go, call and ask for suggestions on roads to use or avoid, good places for mid-ride snacks, scenic views, loose dogs, and other relevant details.

## **SUBMITTING A RIDE DESCRIPTION**

To have a ride listed in the El Paso Bicycle Club Ride Schedule (to be posted on the club's website or in the El Paso Scene), submit a ride description to the Ride

Coordinator (see the club's website) by the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month prior to the ride. For example, a ride for May needs to be submitted by April 10<sup>th</sup>.

If you don't know the exact mileage, it's better to overestimate than underestimate, so no one is unpleasantly surprised. Also, a ride that you may think of as only a little hilly may be *very* hilly to some riders. Finally, be realistic about the pace you intend to ride at. If you're very comfortable riding at 18 to 20 mph when you ride on regular club rides or on your own, you will really need to rein yourself in to lead a group at 12 to 14 mph.

In your ride description, remember to include any cautions, quirks, or special requirements for your ride. Don't identify anything as "required" unless you intend to enforce the requirement; instead, make "request" or "recommendations." Here are some examples of items worth including:

- If you're planning a lunch stop, indicate whether people should bring a lunch or bring money for lunch.
- If the ride begins or ends after dark, note that riders should bring headlights and taillights. (Be conservative. If there's a reasonable chance that you won't finish riding until after dark, include that information in the ride description.)
- If you're climbing three mountain passes in the same day, *warn* people in the ride description so you won't get riders who aren't up to it.
- If you're planning to spend three hours at the museum in the middle of a 20-mile ride, mention this so potential riders know that the ride isn't just a quick loop.
- If you're taking a route that's shy of amenities like restaurants and restrooms, caution people so they can bring their own food and toilet paper.

**Important!** If you want to include any non-cycling activities as part of the ride, make these activities optional. Riders must be able to choose between participating in extra activities and waiting for the ride to resume.

This applies to all non-cycling activities, but it especially applies to anything hazardous, including activities that involve alcohol (winery and brewery stops) and activities that require special training or skills (rock climbing, bouldering, and so on).

### **EPBC's no-discrimination policy**

All El Paso Bicycle Club's rides are open to everyone who is able and willing to participate safely and cooperatively. In your ride description, you can specify who a ride is primarily intended for, but you can't specify who the ride *isn't* for. For example, you can specify that your ride is a **Norwegians** ride, but you can't specify that it's a **Norwegians-only** ride or that it's a **no-Swedes** ride.

This no-discrimination policy does not prevent you from asking a rider to leave a ride based on the rider's abilities, equipment, or actions on that ride or previous rides.

## **FIELDING PHONE CALLS FROM PROSPECTIVE RIDERS**

In your ride description a phone number should be provided so riders can call with questions before the ride. Typically, callers will want to know whether they can handle your ride. How you answer this question depends on the difficulty of the ride and on your preference as a ride leader.

If the ride is difficult, you'll obviously want to be clear with callers about the distance, the speed, the number and sizes of hills, and so on. Certainly a beginning rider should not be encouraged to join a fast ride up Transmountain and Anthony Gap.

If the ride is less strenuous, you have more discretion. For a slow, short, social ride, you may want to encourage anyone who isn't wheezing into the phone to come along. After all, everyone needs to start somewhere. If you take this approach, you must be prepared to wait patiently at a predetermined meeting spot for riders who may be slower on hills. Your reward is the chance to meet delightful people who don't happen to be great cyclists (yet) and to make occasional riders into better, stronger, more enthusiastic cyclists.

If you're not prepared to wait for everyone who needs to be waited for, by all means make that clear to callers. Convincing folks that they can handle your ride and then leaving them in the dust is a great way to discourage them from ever joining a club ride again (and a pretty good way to make them drop their membership.) Keep in mind, however, that the whole point of the B/IG rides, is to encourage cycling, not sort out who can or who shouldn't do a B/IG ride.

From time to time, you may get a phone call from a parent who wants to bring one or more children along. The club doesn't forbid children on rides, but a parent must sign the liability waiver for anyone under age 18. In addition, unless you are just doing a short ride on the river bike path, be cautious about encouraging parents to bring children along on a ride. Parents don't always have a realistic perception of how far or how fast their children are able to ride, or how safely the children are able to ride in a group.

## WHAT TO BRING TO THE RIDE

The items on this list also appear on the “Day-of-ride checklist” at the back of this handbook.

Show up at least 20 minutes early with the necessary stuff:

- Your bike and helmet.
- Plenty of copies of the map or cue sheet if you advertised that you would provide one.
- One or two EPBC sign-in sheets (containing the liability waiver). This is downloadable from the club’s website.
- An extra helmet.
- 1 or 2 full water bottles.
- Membership forms. Downloadable from the website.
- A couple of pens.

You may also want to bring:

- A floor pump.
- A rudimentary first-aid kit. See “What to carry in a first-aid kit” on page XX.
- A cell phone.
- Cleaning rags for cleaning up if repairs need to be made.
- Money.

## AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RIDE

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**If you cancel a ride:** If you cancel a ride, show up at the starting point or have someone else go and announce that the ride has been canceled.

**If you can’t lead a ride:** If, for some reason, you can’t lead a ride yourself, try to find a replacement. The Ride Coordinator may be able to help you find someone.

If you advertised the ride as including a map or cue sheet, be sure your replacement has them.

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### **Get signatures, check on helmets, and get a count**

- Have everyone sign in for the ride. On a large ride, you can’t know whether everyone has signed, but make a good-faith effort. You may want to announce that this is a liability waiver and that riders should sign even if they’re not members of the club. Be sure that riders indicate their cell number if they have it with them AND that there is an emergency number listed as well.

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**Important!** A parent or legal guardian must sign the liability waiver for any rider under 18 years old. If you have doubts about whether the child will be able to safely complete the ride without holding up the group, you should discuss it with the parent. You may refuse to allow a child on the ride if you believe the child's participation would be unsafe or disruptive.

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Carry the sign-in sheet with you on the ride in case of an emergency.

- Don't let anyone ride without a helmet. The club requires all riders to wear helmets on all rides. If someone arrives without a helmet, offer your extra helmet or you can ask if any of the other riders has a spare.
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**Important!** If someone refuses to sign in or insists on riding without a helmet, make it clear to other riders that the uncooperative rider is not part of the group. Thankfully, this problem rarely occurs.

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- Count the riders in your group so you can determine if you have everyone at regrouping points and when leaving rest stops.

### ***Make a pre-ride announcement, including a reminder about safe riding***

Here's a pretty long list of topics to try to cover in a short pre-ride announcement. If you chatter on for too long, people will stop listening, so try not to turn it into a lecture. However, particularly for slow rides that attract a lot of beginners, these are topics that bear repeating time and again. It doesn't hurt to offer a few reminders to experienced riders either.

The items on this list also appear on the "Day-of-ride checklist" at the back of this handbook.

- *Introduction:* Introduce yourself and identify your sweeps, co-leaders, and other helpers. If the ride will be breaking into two or more groups, explain who will be leading each group.  
If you don't already have someone to ride sweep, you may want to ask if anyone wants to volunteer. For more information on sweeps, see "The benefits of having a sweep" on page XX.  
If the group is small, you can also ask the riders to introduce themselves.
- *Welcome to new riders:* Ask if there are any riders who have never been on a club or B/IG ride and if so, welcome them to the group. In addition, encourage the regular riders to check in with the newcomers during the ride

and ensure that they're doing all right. In a group that rides together regularly, a new rider, shy or not, may not feel welcome if the regulars spend the entire ride talking among themselves.

- *Waivers, maps/cue sheets, or lesson handouts:* ask if everyone has signed in, has received the map/cue sheet and/or lesson handout, if they are available.
- *Pace:* Announce the pace and explain what it means. If you don't intend to wait for slow riders, you should announce this, too.
- *Stick-togetherness:* Indicate whether the ride will stick together or regroup at a specified point.
- *The route:* Briefly describe the ride, including food and rest stops, difficult hills, unusual or dangerous conditions, the first regrouping point, and hazards and other cautions before that point.
- *Safety:* Talk about safe riding and remind riders that each person is responsible for his or her own safety. They may have heard it all before, so say it some amusing or vivid way that they can't forget. You might emphasize that riding like lemmings is not a good idea. Or that just because the ride ahead of you made it through an intersection without being run over doesn't mean you can, too. Or that cars kill cyclists one at a time. You get the idea.

You can't teach safe cycling in the three minutes you have before people stop listening, so vary your safety announcement to fit the hazards of the ride. If you lead rides regularly, rotate topics from time to time. Point out the safety tips that you copied onto the back of the map/cue sheet or on the lesson handout.

- *Traffic regulations:* Remind riders that a bicycle is a vehicle and that bicycle riders are, therefore, expected to obey traffic regulations.
- *Courtesy:* Ask riders to be courteous. Drivers who are impressed with the courtesy of a group of cyclists will be more inclined to treat other cyclists with respect.
- *Group riding techniques:* For the benefit of new riders, mention group riding techniques, including:
  - *Riding single file in traffic:* make it clear that riders are *not* to block traffic by riding two or more abreast in heavy/fast traffic areas.
  - *Riding on trails:* If you'll be riding on trails, remind riders to stay on the right half of the trail and to be considerate of other trail users.
  - *Hand signals:* Remind riders to use hand signals for turning or stopping. It's also a good idea to point out road hazards.
  - *Voice signals:* Give riders a quick overview of voice signals: "Car up/back/left/right", "on your left" to indicate that you're passing another rider or a pedestrian, "Glass/pothole/etc." to indicate road hazards (combined with hand signals as appropriate). Emphasize that "car back" means a car is coming from behind, so riders should start riding single file if there is oncoming traffic.

Caution that just because riders call “clear” at intersections does not indicate that the intersection will be automatically be clear when following riders enter the intersection. “Clear” is a subjective and temporary condition, so riders should always look for themselves.

- *Other cyclists:* Remind riders to watch out for one another. On a group ride, they're much more likely to have an accident with one another than they are with a car.
- *Stop lights and stop signs:* Caution riders not to run stop lights or stop signs out of fear of being left behind.
- *Special equipment:* Remind riders about any special equipment that's required for the ride (for example, lights).
- *Keep the leader informed:* Ask riders to pass the word if someone leaves or breaks down and to notify you if they are planning to leave the ride before the end.
- *Cell phone:* If you are carrying a cell phone, it's not a bad idea to make sure that new riders, especially, have your cell number in their phones. If you aren't carrying a phone, ask if someone else is.
- *First aid kit or first aid training:* Ask if anyone has a first aid kit or first aid training.
- *After-ride refreshments:* If you're going somewhere after the ride for a meal or a snack, tell everyone where you are going now. You probably won't get a chance after the ride because everyone will scatter when the ride is done. If a significant number of riders will be eating together after a ride, it is a good policy to notify the restaurant of the approximate time and number of people to expect after the ride.
- *Questions?* Ask if there are any questions.

## LEADING THE RIDE

Every ride is different, so it's impossible to anticipate everything you might encounter on a ride. Here's a quick list of some items to attend to.

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**Note:** Not all of these items apply to all types of rides. For example, if you haven't promised to keep everyone together, you don't have to worry about whether everyone made it through the last stop light.

**Also note:** The items on this list also appear on the “Day-of-ride checklist” at the back of this handbook.

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- *Set a good example:* Ride safely, be kind to strangers, pet dogs, kiss babies and remember that you represent the El Paso Bicycle Club.

- *Courtesy:* Anticipate situations where your group may inconvenience others. For example, when you stop to regroup, be sure your riders aren't blocking the road. When you re-enter the roadway, wait until there's a break in traffic, so drivers aren't forced to slow down for your group

If you are taking the group on a trail ask everyone to yield to on-coming riders/pedestrians and go single file, which will make socializing more difficult. However, have to shout to one another is better by far than forcing other trail users off the trail and leaving them with an indelible bad impression of group rides and cyclists.

- *Unsafe riders:* Unsafe riders endanger everyone around them, ruin the experience for others on the ride, and give cyclists a bad image. If you are uncomfortable with a rider's actions, quietly and politely explain your concern. If the situation doesn't improve, ask the rider to leave the group.
- *New riders:* Check in with each of the new riders periodically to ensure that they're getting along all right and that they feel welcome.
- *Pace:* Ride at or near the front to lead the way and *set the pace at the advertised speed*. Make sure riders know that, if they get ahead, they are on their own. Your responsibility is to lead the ride you've advertised and to keep track of the people who are doing the same.
- *Too fast or too slow riders:* At the first regrouping point, if some riders are clearly too fast or too slow for the group, consider splitting into more than one group. You can also ask the fast or slow riders if they'd prefer to break off from the group or return to the starting point. If they choose to leave the group, try to ensure that they have a map or cue sheet, or that they know the area well enough to find their way. (This suggests that the first regrouping point should be relatively close to the starting point, so riders can find their way back to the start on their own, if necessary.)

Especially on B/IG rides, where the emphasis is primarily on helping riders improve, it is not prudent to leave riders behind without a sweep. You can't always keep track of all riders, but do the best you can. Assess how the riders at the back of the group are doing, and adjust the ride as appropriate. Try not to leave anyone behind or lose them. **However, you are not obligated to go back and look for anyone.**

You may want to have someone ride at the back of the group to encourage and keep track of the slower riders. For more information, see "The benefits of having a sweep" on page **XX**.

- *Regroup frequency:* How often you stop to count heads and make sure everyone is fine depends on a plethora of factors. If you have some slower riders who are consistently falling behind but you don't want to ask them to leave the group, or if you're leading one of those meandering in-city rides on which you turn frequently, you'll need to regroup pretty regularly. If you

are riding on the same road for the next 20 miles with a bunch of self-sufficient riders, you may not need to regroup at all. Base your decision on the comfort of the slowest riders, not on the testosterone levels of the fastest.

- *Stop lights, stop signs, and crosswalks*; Stop for red lights, stop signs when traffic is present, and occupied pedestrian crosswalks. Not stopping endangers your riders, opens you to liability in the event of an accident, and gives onlookers the impression that cyclists flaunt the law.

Don't stop too close to the intersection to wait for the group to catch up. Drivers have enough to cope with at intersections without having to worry about a gaggle of cyclists. Sometimes it is better to cross the intersection and then wait out of traffic for the rest of your group.

At a stop sign or stop light, join the line of cars. Don't pass cars on the right and make your way up to the intersection, especially if the road is narrow. The cars will just have to pass you again after the intersection, and this *really* makes some drivers *mad*.

- *Unforeseen problems*: If you run into unforeseen problems (new construction, bad weather, unusually heavy traffic), be creative. Change the route, take shelter, choose another rest stop. Consider safety about all else, and don't be afraid to ask for suggestions from your riders. They may know the area better than you do. However, you are in charge, so don't let yourself be railroaded into something that you think is unwise.
- *Mid-ride announcements*: At each regrouping point, announce the next regrouping point. Re-emphasize safety, especially related to upcoming conditions. For example, if you will need to move into the left lane to make a turn, remind riders to *look* before they change lanes. If there's a steep uphill immediately after a turn, try to warn riders in advance.
- *Restaurant and restroom stops*: Whenever you stop somewhere with your group, encourage your riders to be considerate of the non-riders around you. Try not to leave folks with the impression that cyclists are inconsiderate. If you happen to inconvenience someone, apologize sincerely and do your best to rectify the situation immediately. You are the leader. You set the tone.

When it's time to start riding again, announce your departure enough in advance that everyone has time to stash their extra cookies, get their helmets and gloves on, and untangle their bikes from all the other bikes leaving against the same tree. In addition, be alert for riders who have wandered off or are in the restroom.

- *Messes*: Wherever you stop, make sure you and your riders clean up after yourselves. Don't make your mark on the world with banana peels, energy bar wrappers, and dead inner tubes.

- *Helpers:* Ask for volunteers to fix flat tires, to pump air into tires, or to give shifting lessons.
- *Good will:* Smile, wave, and call out thanks whenever anyone (especially a driver) is even unintentionally helpful to your group.
- *Riding after dark:* If you are riding after dark, slow down and keep the group together. A group of cyclists, each one properly lit with a headlight and taillight, is much more visible after dark than an individual rider.
- *Injuries and other problems:* If one of your riders is injured, follow the guidelines under "Handling injuries" on page XX. For information on handling a variety of other problems, see "Handling other problems on page XX.
- *Have a good time yourself:* Some rides are a joy to lead, while others are unadulterated drudgery or downright aggravating. If you aren't having a good time yourself, think about what you could do differently next time. Moreover, if you aren't having fun, some or all of your riders probably aren't either. Be bold and ask *them* how you could make the ride more enjoyable.

### **Leading from the front or the back of the group**

You don't necessarily need to lead a ride from the front of the group. As long as you've passed out a map/cue sheet or communicated the route, you may be able to serve your riders as well by leading from the back as you can from the front. Some ride leaders spend the ride making their way back and forth between the front and the back of the group, checking to see that everyone is doing all right. Other ride leaders choose to spend the entire ride at the back of the group. This ensures that they'll eventually come upon anyone who has stopped for any reason.

If you choose not to lead from the front, here are a couple of things to watch out for:

- If it's a stick-together ride, remind everyone what the pace is and ask them to maintain that pace.
- If you want riders to stop in a particular location, be sure everyone understands where that location is.
- If appropriate remind riders to read the map carefully and stop if they have any doubts about which directions they should be going.\

### **The benefits of having a sweep**

If you lead from the front, you may want to have someone ride *sweep*, meaning a helper who stays at the back of the group. On most rides, the chief advantage of

having a sweep is that the leader knows when everyone has arrived at a regrouping point (assuming no one in the middle of the group missed a turn). However, if you have unusually slow riders, mechanical problems, or an accident on your ride, a good sweep can be invaluable, serving as cheerleader, mechanic, or medic as required.

If you are leading a short, slow ride, which will attract a disproportionate number of inexperienced riders, having *any* sweep is better than having *no* sweep. Ideally, though, you should try to find someone who can successfully change a tire, who doesn't pass out at the sight of blood, and who will happily slow down and encourage the riders who are having a tough time. Try to avoid asking, or worse, expecting the same person over and over again to ride sweep.

### **Controlling pace lines**

In general pace lines can be dangerous, especially for riders inexperienced with pace lines and for rides on busy streets, regardless of riders' experience. Here are some suggestions for safe riding:

- Stop at stop signs in high traffic intersections. Even at high speeds, the last person in a pace line is a second or two behind the leader. This is a *long time* when the group is in danger of being broadsided by a fast moving truck.
- Call out stops, hazards, and changes in direction loudly, clearly, and EARLY.
- Don't allow riders to lead a pace line if they don't know the course.
- Don't allow riders to ride in a pace line if they're using aerobars. In a pace line, the ability to control the bike is paramount.
- Be extra careful if you have single bicycles and tandems in the same pace line. A tandem with two riders weighs *a lot* more than a single bike and rider, so it isn't as maneuverable in an emergency.
- Limit pace lines to a reasonable length, preferably eight or fewer. Longer pace lines tend to yoyo with the riders at the back struggling to catch up and then having to slow down or brake to keep from overtaking other riders.
- Do not let pace lines put inexperienced riders beyond their abilities. If you see that riders are struggling to stay at the pace or the wind is sapping riders energy, slow the line down. When riders are tired and riding at the limit of (or beyond) their abilities, accidents can happen.
- If you are riding in double pace lines, be sure that everyone knows how riders rotate out of both pulling positions and that when assuming a pulling position to not speed up. That's a sure way to drop the riders who are rotating to the back.

## AFTER THE RIDE

Immediately after the ride, you should thank riders for coming along and ask for comments or suggestions. Did riders enjoy the ride? Did they like the route? Is there anything you could have done differently?

When you get home, you should call any rider who was injured or lost during the ride. If you get home too late in the evening to call, be sure you call the next day.

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**Using the information on the sign in sheet (liability waiver):** The liability waiver on the sign-in sheet exists to legally protect you and the bike club in the event of an accident. If a rider asks you for the phone number of someone else on the ride *do not* give out that information. Instead, take the name and number of the person making the inquiry, call the other rider, and pass on the inquirer's name and number.

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## HANDLING INJURIES

### *Handling severe injuries*

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**Important!** If a rider has an accident and lands on his or her head, neck, or shoulders, you must consider the possibility of a neck or back injury.

- *If the person is conscious:* Ask if the person has neck or back pain, weakness, or loss of limb function or sensation. If so, you should suspect spinal cord injury and have the person stay very still.
- *If the person is unconscious:* You have no way to know what injury the person may have suffered, so *do not move an unconscious person.*
- *If an unconscious person regains consciousness before help arrives:* Keep the person as still and quiet as possible. You may need to be firm. Someone who is in shock or suffering a concussion isn't the best judge of what to do at the moment. Be sympathetic, but firm.

If someone may have a neck or back injury, you should *almost never* move the person. You could cause irreparable damage to the spinal cord, possibly resulting in *permanent paralysis.*

If the injured person is in a roadway, divert or stop traffic rather than move the person, and wait for help to arrive.

In the *rare case* where you must move the injured rider, get help from as many people as possible. Make every effort to maintain the *current* position of the person's back and neck. *Do not try to straighten someone out.*

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### **What to do if one of your riders has an accident and is injured**

- *Stay calm:* You are no help to the others if you are frantic. Pause, take a deep breath, and survey the situation before you act.
- *Divert or stop traffic:* If the injured rider is in the roadway, have other riders divert or stop traffic until you can determine if the person has a possible neck, head, or back injury. Get all other riders and their bicycles off the road.

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**Important!** If you determine that the person has a possible neck or back injury, continue to divert or hold up traffic until help arrives. *Do not move the person.*

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- *Determine if the person is injured seriously enough to require medical attention:* The injured rider should get medical attention if he or she:
  - *Is bleeding heavily.*
  - Has a head injury and lost consciousness even briefly.
  - Can't remember what happened.
  - Has obvious pain when moving an injured limb.
  - Has trouble opening his or her jaw.

If you don't know much about first aid yourself, ask if anyone in your group does.

If the person has no obvious injuries, you still should pay careful attention to determine if the person is confused or disoriented, which could also indicate a head injury.

- *If necessary, send someone for help:* If there is *any* question about whether professional medical attention is necessary, call 911 immediately.
- *Care for and reassure the injured rider until help arrives:* Be as helpful as possible given the situation and the available materials. In particular, keep the person as warm and dry as possible.

Regardless of the rider's condition, act calmly, speak in reassuring tones, and be sure that everyone around you does the same. Ask everyone who isn't helping to stand well back, so the injured rider isn't looking up into a mob of worried or horrified faces. Also, caution the others not to discuss the rider's injuries; no one who is injured wants to hear the words, "Wow! Look at all that blood!"

- *Make sure the person's contact information and helmet get into the ambulance:* If an injured rider is taken away in an ambulance, be sure the rider's contact information and helmet go along. Someone at the hospital will probably want to examine the helmet to determine the likelihood of head injuries. Ideally, you'll get the ambulance crew to take the rider's bike, too, so you don't need to worry about it.

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**Important!** Be sure *you* know the rider's name and contact information, so you can call later to check on his or her condition, send get-well card, and return the rider's bike.

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### **Other concerns in the event of a severe accident**

In addition to taking care of the injured rider, you need to be concerned about the other riders and about the injured rider's bike and gear:

- *Continuing the ride:* In some cases, you may need to continue the ride before the injured rider has recovered enough to start riding again or before the ambulance has arrived. For example, if it's evening and you're running out of daylight, you'll need to get the other riders back to the starting point.

You shouldn't leave the injured rider alone unless he or she is clearly all right and has a way to get back to the starting point or back home. If the other riders can find their way back to the starting point, you and someone who knows first aid should stay with the injured rider. Otherwise, you should ask for volunteers to stay, again including someone who knows first aid.

- *What to do with the injured rider's bike and gear:* If you need to leave the rider's bike where it is, lock it up and take all of the removable gear with you (bike bags, headlights, computer/GPS, and so on). Return for the bike as soon as possible (preferably before nightfall), and let the ride know that you have it. Alternatively, you may be able to leave the bike at a nearby fire station or bike shop, or at the home of a club member or one of the local residents.

### **Who to notify in the event of an accident**

The sign-in sheet includes an emergency contact phone number. If an injured rider is taken to the hospital unconscious, and if the person provided an emergency contact phone number, call that number immediately and calmly explain what happened. If the rider is conscious, he or she can decide who to contact and when.

If someone was seriously injured, call the club president and the ride coordinator as soon as possible.

### **Hypothermia**

If you're riding in cold or wet weather, keep an eye on all of your riders to ensure that no one is suffering from hypothermia. Mild hypothermia is characterized by shivering and can be treated by getting the person out of the cold and into dry clothes. If there's nowhere to get out of the cold, try sharing body heat. More severe cases are characterized by confusion and lack of coordination; in this case you need to get the person to medical care.

### **Heat exhaustion and heat stroke**

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are far more common in our area and are caused by riding in hot weather or by dressing inappropriately when riding in cooler weather. Cyclists need to dress so heat and perspiration can be dissipated. In addition, riders need to drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.

*Heat exhaustion* is characterized by pale, clammy skin, profuse perspiration, and extreme tiredness or weakness. The person may have a headache and may vomit. With heat exhaustion, the person's body temperature is approximately normal.

The treatment for heat exhaustion is rest. If the person is alert, offer oral fluids, preferable water or sports drinks. Don't give the person coffee, tea, or alcoholic beverages.

*Heat stroke* is far more dangerous. The body's temperature control system has stopped working, so the person doesn't sweat anymore. Body temperature may rise so far that brain damage may result.

The symptoms of heat stroke include hot, red skin; no perspiration; extremely high body temperature; dizziness; nausea; headache; rapid pulse; and confusion, disorientation, or unconsciousness.

Get the person out of the heat immediately and cool his or her body quickly. Soak the person in cool but not cold water or pour water over the body. Stop and observe the person for 10 minutes, then cool some more if the person's body temperature is still above 102°F.

If the person is alert, offer oral fluids, preferably water or sports drinks. Don't give the person coffee, tea, or alcoholic beverages.

If heat stroke develops, the rider will need medical care, possibly including intravenous fluids.

### **Road rash**

If one of your riders falls and leaves some skin on the pavement, the person should clean the wound thoroughly, apply some antiseptic cream or ointment, and cover it with clean gauze. If there isn't a nearby source of clean water, using water from water bottles is better than not cleaning the wound at all. If the edges of a deep cut won't fit back together or if the wound is in a place where motion will prevent it from healing, the rider should get medical attention as soon as possible. For open cuts or abrasions, the rider should seek medical care if he or she hasn't had a tetanus immunization in the last five years.

### **What to carry in a first-aid kit**

If you decide to carry a first aid kit for the occasional minor injury, here are some suggestions on what to include:

- Large gauze squares for cleaning road rash or as protection from further harm.
- A roll of gauze for covering larger areas of rash.
- Non-adherent sterile pads.
- Antiseptic cream or ointment.
- A roll of tape to secure bandages.
- Band-Aids® for small cuts and blisters.
- Second Skin for open blisters.
- Ibuprofen or Tylenol® to minimize swelling or general minor pain.
- A triangular bandage.
- Antihistamine, in case someone has an allergic reaction.
- Latex gloves.

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**Note:** If you have first aid training, you may want to add other items to your first aid kit. For example, Epinephrine® is good for severe asthma, as well as for bee stings or any other anaphylactic reaction. This depends on your level of knowledge and your willingness to carry extra weight.

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### **Getting first-aid training**

If you are interested, first aid training is readily available. **The club occasionally offers ride leaders courses in first aid,** and many fire departments and employers offer free CPR training. For information, you can call your local Red Cross chapter.

Some technical colleges or nursing schools also offer excellent first aid courses, which are taught by experienced emergency medical technicians.

## HANDLING OTHER PROBLEMS

Here are some problems that you may encounter on your rides and some suggestions on how to handle them.

### *Riding in the rain*

In a light rain, you can probably keep riding, but you need to be especially careful on downhills, mud, and railroad tracks.

In a rain that's heavy enough to affect visibility, you should consider stopping *off the road* until the rain slows. However, standing around somewhere while you're wet and cold is a good way to get hypothermia, so you need to weigh the odds of getting run over against the odds of freezing to death.

In a heavy rain, you're probably best off finding a nice, warm café or bakery until the weather improves. However, be sure you have the permission of the proprietor, be careful not to inconvenience other customers, and be sure you and your riders all *buy* something. Also, recognize that the weather may not improve before sunset and that you may have to set off in the rain again.

### *Avoiding lightning*

If you happen to encounter lightning, use the flash-to-bang method of measuring lightning distance. This is the amount of time that elapses between when you see the flash and when you hear the thunder. For each five-second count, lightning is one mile away, so at 25 seconds the lightning is five miles away. At a count of 15 seconds (three miles) take immediate defensive action:

- Where possible, find shelter in a building or in a fully enclosed metal vehicle such as a car, truck, or van with the windows closed.
- Avoid water.
- Avoid metal objects such as bicycles, electric wires, fences, machinery, railroad tracks, tent poles, and so on.
- Don't stop beneath small open-sided rain/shade shelters or isolated trees.
- Avoid hilltops, open spaces, ditches, and depressions.

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**Important!** If you need to take shelter, make every effort to keep your riders calm. You don't want folks crashing into one another in a mad rush to get away from the lightning.

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If your hair is standing up, you have a tingling sensation, the count between flash and bang is less than five seconds, or lightning is striking nearby, you should:

- Remove all metal objects.
- Crouch down and put your feet together and your hands on your knees.

- Avoid direct contact with other people.

### **Dangerous drivers**

If you have trouble with a dangerous driver, get everyone off the road and wait until the driver goes away. Don't antagonize the driver in any way. In addition, get the vehicle license number and a description of the *driver*, and contact the police. If you can't describe the driver, the owner of the car can simply claim not to have been driving the car at the time of the incident. If someone happens to be carrying a camera, this might be a good time to use it.

### **Dangerous riders in your group**

If you have a careless rider in your group, and the person continues to be troublesome after you've spoken with him or her about being more careful, insist that the rider leave the group. If necessary, stop the group and wait until the rider leaves before you continue.

### **Mechanical problems**

If someone has mechanical problems, you can:

- Check with your riders to see if anyone has the parts and the expertise to make the repair.
- If there is a nearby bike shop, car repair shop, or hardware store, you might take the group on a detour. You could also suggest that the rider go alone and provide instructions on how to rejoin the group later, if possible.
- Suggest calling home or calling a taxi.
- If on a bus route, suggest the bus. Local buses are now equipped with bicycle racks.
- Send someone back for a car.

Some problems are not as severe as they might seem:

- *Broken spokes*: Generally, if you don't have too far to travel, you can just ride with a broken spoke, if slowly. If you can, remove the parts of the spoke, otherwise tie or tape the broken parts to adjacent spokes. If breaking the spoke also affects the true of the wheel, you may also need to loosen the brakes. Emphasize that the rider should ride slowly and avoid potholes as much as possible.
- *Broken chains*: If someone has a chain tool along, you can simply remove the bad link and put the chain back together. Because the chain will then be shorter, the rider should avoid using the large chainring (in front) or the large gear (in back).

- *A hole in a tire:* If you have a small hole in a tire, you can keep the inner tube from bulging out through the hole by slipping something inside the tire to cover the hole. A dollar bill works fine, and a section cut from an old tire works even better, but it's a temporary fix. The tire should be replaced as soon as possible. If the hold is in the sidewall, take extra care because a sidewall cut can cause the tire to fall off the rim. Use this trick just long enough to *slowly* limp home or to a bike shop.

## **MAKING A RIDE MORE FUN**

Consider choosing a theme. If you live for sweets, lead a ride that takes in several bakeries or candy shops. If you are fascinated with planes, lead a ride to the War Eagles Museum at the Santa Teresa Airport.

Key into special events. For example, you might want to lead a ride to a balloonfest, to bicycle races, to a street fair or community festival, to a music festival or to some similar gathering. However, if you've never been to the event yourself, you probably should ask around to ensure that the crowds and traffic won't interfere with safe riding.

Have fun with the ride description. People will be more inclined to show up for a ride whose description captures their imagination.

Do something out of the ordinary. Ride through back roads, cross bridges, meander through parks or visit interesting viewpoints.

Wave at *everyone*, talk with kids as you ride past, *stop* and talk with kids who seem unusually excited about what you're doing and visit with bike tourers who are just passing through.

Take a break at some little out-of-the-way place where the food is especially good and the proprietors grateful to have the extra business.

Be playful. Bring a bag of Tootsie Rolls to share.

Take some pictures and post them on the club's website or the club's Facebook page. Be sure to include a caption that names the ride and the folks in the picture.

## **TIPS FOR SAFE RIDING**

### **Helmets**

Always wear a CPSC-, ANSI- or Snell-approved bicycle helmet. Helmets are required on all El Paso Bicycle Club rides.

### **Traffic regulations**

- Observe all traffic laws. Your bicycle is legally considered a vehicle, so you are subject to the same traffic laws as the drivers of motorized vehicles.
- Use hand and voice signals when turning, slowing, or stopping.
- Ride with traffic. Motorists don't look for bicycles going the "wrong way".
- Don't wear earbuds while riding...not even one. Traffic and verbal signals can't be heard.
- When riding at night, you should have, at a minimum, a white front head lamp and a red rear reflector or blinker light. Reflective clothing and safety vests increase visibility.

### **Hazards**

- Make eye contact with drivers so you know that they've seen you.
- Cross railroad tracks at a 90° angle.
- Look ahead for road hazards (glass, potholes, wide cracks, metal grates, gravel, and so on).
- Check for traffic for yourself. Scan the road in front of you, behind you, and around you.
- Watch for car doors opening in your path.
- Use voice and hand signals to communicate with other riders, especially when you are riding close together.

### **Courtesy**

- Take a full lane when safety dictates.
- If you stop for any reason, move yourself and your bicycle *completely* off the road.
- Pass on the left and verbally alert others that you are passing.

### **Other good ideas**

- When there's traffic behind you, ride single file so cars can pass.
- Limit pace lines to eight or fewer.
- Before every ride, make sure your bike is in good condition.

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- Bering a pump, spare tube, patch kit, tire levers, and at least a full water bottle.
- Eat before you're hungry, drink before you're thirsty.

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*Items yet to be completed.*

## **DAY-OF-RIDE CHECKLIST**

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**