

How to Ride a Double Pace-Line Tour de France Style —

Riding the perfect double pace-line is a combination of skill, technique, and equal team work. No one rider should stand out as stronger than the rest, but rather each rider performs an equal amount of work.

If you have ever watched a Tour de France flat stage, you will surely have seen a beautiful double pace-line performed as the pack chases down a breakaway. Many cyclists are never taught the correct way to perform a double pace-line. When performed correctly, a double pace-line will go much faster and with less effort compared with a group of cyclists who are not working well together.

A double pace-line is when a group of cyclists of at least 6 or more work cohesively together by forming two lines side-by-side with each cyclist in the draft of the cyclist immediately in front. The two lines of cyclists in a double pace-line consist of an accelerating line (cyclists moving towards the front) and a decelerating line (cyclists moving towards the back).

The accelerating line is moving at a slightly higher speed than the decelerating line. Each cyclist, when reaching the front of the accelerating line, takes a brief turn breaking the wind on the very front of the double pace-line, before moving over to the decelerating line and allowing the next rider to pass. The only time a rider is in the wind is the brief period spent on the front of the double pace-line before moving over to the decelerating line.

In essence a double pace-line can be compared with a chain where each cyclist is linked to the next cyclist by drafting.

Double Pace-Line Rules and Tips

Drafting – A rider should always be in the draft of the rider directly in front, at a safe distance, but close enough to be receiving a significant advantage from drafting. Riders who are not comfortable with drafting at close proximity can be a danger to the other cyclists and should develop their drafting skills first, before attempting to join high speed double pace-lines which require a high level of skill.

Short turns – The only time a rider is on the front is the few seconds it takes to pass the rider who was previously in front and who has now moved over and joined the decelerating line. In other words a rider only pulls on the front until his/her back wheel has safely cleared the front wheel of the rider on the front of the decelerating line.

Smooth – The pace should be smooth with no sudden accelerations or braking. This is achieved when riders keep the speed steady and all riders are drafting at similar distances.

Wind – If there is a wind blowing across the road, the decelerating line always shields the accelerating line from the wind. So riders who have finished their turn on the very front of the double pace-line move into the wind and shield the upcoming accelerating line of riders. The only time pulling out of the wind is a good tactic is when you are a part of a single pace-line or on the front of the pack and are at your limit. In this case you will need every bit of shielding from the wind to be able to stay in contact with the group, so pulling out of the wind – even if not technically correct – is the smart thing to do.

Communication – The rider on the very front of the double pace-line should communicate clearly to other cyclists all upcoming turns or road hazards. A rider who has finished his/her turn on the front and moves over can communicate “clear” to the next rider passing once it is safe to move over to the decelerating line. At the back of the line a rider can communicate “last wheel” to signal to the last rider on the decelerating line that once you pass, he or she must move into your draft and join the accelerating line.

Cornering – Riders should hold their position while cornering, going single file if necessary. Then it is the responsibility of the rider on the front to first make sure everyone is together after the corner, and then resume the pace-line once again. The front rider should observe the wind direction and change the direction of the rotation if necessary.

Attentive – Take note of who is in front of you and who is behind you in the pace-line. Then when you are falling to the back of the pace-line, you will know ahead of time when to move across to the accelerating line.

Skipping a turn – When a rider needs a break from rotating in the pace-line, he or she can sit-on the back, and at the same time open up a small gap when each rider descends to the back to indicate that they should rejoin the accelerating line. Verbally communicating that you are sitting-on is also a good idea to limit confusion.

Common Mistakes

Pulling too hard – When a rider takes his turn on the front and immediately accelerates, thereby stringing out the line. This makes it very hard for the rider on the front of the decelerating line to get in the draft. It should be noted that it is the rider on the front of the descending line’s responsibility to accelerate up to the rider pulling too hard so to maintain the double pace-line for everyone.

Dropping back too quickly – A rider who has finished his/her turn on the front and moves across to the decelerating line but sits-up and loses the draft of the next rider passing. This will cause the double pace-line to become a single pace-line.

Pulling out of the wind – When accelerating line riders are shielding the decelerating line from the wind, thus working doubly hard. The riders in this case are pulling out of the wind when moving over to the decelerating line.

Cornering – After a corner the rider on the front accelerates hard, stringing everyone out into single file and hurting those on the back of the line, causing gaps to form.

Braking – Sudden sharp braking should be avoided. When there is a slow-down in the line, riders should use a combination of feathering the brakes with moving gently to the right or the left of the wheel directly in front (where there is enough space).

Going too hard – The more riders contributing to the double-pace line, the better. Often the stronger riders will push the pace too high for weaker riders, eventually making the weaker riders unable to contribute. This reduces the number of riders rotating in the pace-line, and with fewer riders rotating the double pace-line will slow down.

Too few riders – Sometimes 4-5 riders will try form a double pace-line. In this case however, it may be more advantageous to form a single pace line where each rider pulls for 10-40 seconds before falling to the back of the line. A double pace-line with too few riders is not efficient as each rider has very limited recovery time before having to take their turn on the front again.

Gaps – If the riders in the ascending and descending lines are too far apart, the benefit from drafting will be reduced. Ideally, the two lines should be as safely close as possible depending on the skills of the cyclists. Riders who are not comfortable with drafting up close may cause a gap in the pace-line to form, which can lead to a yo-yo effect.

With practice and by following these simple tips, you will take your double pace-line skills to a new level of speed and fun!

