

## **A Beginner's Guide to BRAG, Part 5**

### **By Fitz Miller**

#### **RIDING ETIQUETTE, SAFETY, PACE LINES**

Most all riding safety and etiquette is common sense. There are some riders whose attention lapses (usually because of fatigue or distraction) and so will do something without thinking. But the usual transgressors are those who think they are too experienced or fast to have to follow the "common folk" rules. If you want to ride BRAG just to show the rest of us how "real cyclists" ride or generally be a "hot dog," stay home and impress your like-minded friends.

The BRAG safety pledge and safety video should be taken seriously. These were developed by people with WAY more experience than you or me.

#### **RIDING ETIQUETTE BY DIANE LOUPE**

Pull OFF the road if you stop. If you whip past somebody on the left, SAY "on your left." If you see a pothole or other road obstruction, point to it. If you see somebody ahead of you pointing at something in the road, that means there's something to be concerned about. If somebody crashes, stop your bike (off the road) and walk around them. Assist somebody who needs help changing a tire (as long as you KNOW how to change a tire, of course). The biggest violators of road etiquette are, surprisingly, the riders who ought to know them better than anybody, the speed demons. Somehow they believe that if they are riding 20 M.P.H. or faster, they are absolved from having to be polite to anybody. Au contraire! They should be the examples. Of course, if they're going that fast, nobody's going to catch up to them to chew them out. C'mon speed demons, just say "on your left" when you whip by us to keep us from soiling our shorts!

#### **MORE RIDING ETIQUETTE BY FITZ MILLER**

You will get a plastic name tag to mount to your bike. Print your first name in big letters. Mount the tag so overtaking riders can read it. When you pass somebody give them a big "Good morning Ed!" At the least just say "On your left." Or get a cool sounding horn or bell and use it.

We all know about automobile operators who just cannot stand being delayed for 30 seconds so they endanger us, but there are some techniques for these people too. Generally, always ride on the right edge of the road; this is especially applicable when in towns. But this is where the debris is just waiting to flatten your tire. Ride in the right 1/3 of the lane but watch to the rear for cars. When they come up on you, move to the right edge. The motorist sees this which indicates to them that you know that you are in their way and have done something to expedite them getting past you. So now that you have done something, they will feel compelled to also make a cooperative effort for you both to achieve the same goal. Just this little gesture on your part may give them the patience they need to wait a moment longer and select a safer opportunity to pass you.

#### **RIDING SAFETY**

What is a cyclist called who does not wear a helmet when riding? - Organ donor! Do you really have to be told to wear your helmet? We've all seen the pro riders without their helmets, but it doesn't make sense. Remember, it's mandatory to wear your helmet on BRAG at all times while you are on a bicycle, even in camp.

Wear eye protection both to keep debris out of your eyes and also to protect your eyes from ultraviolet (sunlight) damage. Polarized glasses cut more glare but many bicycle computers have polarized faces that will appear black when viewed through polarized lens.

Gloves may not seem too important until you fall and attempt to catch yourself with your hands on asphalt.

Do not use earphones while riding.

### **PREVENTING ACCIDENTS ON BRAG--JERRY COLLEY, BRAG RIDE DIRECTOR**

Safety is, or should be, everyone's Number One concern on the Bicycle Ride Across Georgia. And yet, every year accidents happen, usually cyclists running into each other, or individual cyclists running off the road. Car-bike accidents are rare on BRAG. With 2000 riders on the road, motorists are forced to pay attention to us.

Why do cycling accidents happen on BRAG? Consider these points: Riding with thousands of people is different from riding with your friends. It's also different from riding with your club with hundreds of people. You must be extremely cautious with bicycles around you all day.

BRAG is a fun event. SAG wagons, rest stops, route markings and lots of people around make riders feel very comfortable. Some riders get caught up in the fun and forget about the serious issue of safety. They are surrounded by friends and fun and they get lulled into a false sense of security. They forget the first rule of cycling which is to always Stay Alert to everything around you.

BRAG also attracts many inexperienced riders, children, and newcomers. These riders may not know the dangers inherent in riding in large groups.

BRAG attracts many seasoned veterans. Experienced riders are not used to riding with inexperienced riders. They assume everyone has a high experience level. This is a very bad assumption.

BRAG attracts some "hot dog" riders who think everyone should get out of their way. This is extremely dangerous.

BRAG continues even in bad weather, rain or fog, which makes visibility poor. Roads can become slippery, and most brakes do not work well.

Everyone gets somewhat dehydrated in the hot Georgia sun. One of the first symptoms of dehydration is a loss of basic common sense.

Not all bikes are well maintained. Brakes don't work, handlebars come off, pedals fall off, tires go flat. Lack of proper maintenance can cause accidents.

Riders get tired. They ride all day, every day, and they may not be sleeping as well or as much as they should. One of the first symptoms of fatigue is a lack of paying attention to the details.

Crossing railroad tracks is extremely dangerous: rough tracks, bad angles, cars and other bicyclists all around you. Add in rain, and the tracks become as slick as glass. Riders forget that BRAG's country roads are still open to cars and trucks. What can we as riders do to prevent accidents? Adhere to the BRAG Safety Pledge.

Experienced riders should adopt a mentor-like attitude on BRAG. You are an example, for good or bad, to all those around you. Be the best, safest example you can be! If you are a "hot dog" type rider, stay home. We don't want you on BRAG endangering those around you.

If you stop for any reason, get completely off the road. This means you and your bicycle.

Never pass up a rest stop. Drink before you get thirsty. Eat before you get hungry. Rest before you get tired. If you do decide to pass up a rest stop, at least slow down. There are people stopping and starting their bikes, and standing in the road ready to start. They do not expect to see someone flying by.

Get yourself and your bike tuned up before the ride.

If the weather is bad, or there is bike or car traffic around you, ride more cautiously and slower than usual.

Remember, your bicycle is a vehicle under Georgia law. You must obey all stop signs, yield signs, and traffic signals.

When you ride in a pack, you are at the mercy of everyone in the pack. If one goes down, you all go down. Spread out.

Slow down crossing railroad tracks. Cross at a 90 degree angle. Walk across if it is raining. Stop, Look, Listen. (Note: all railroad tracks on the route are noted in the Route Description). Never attempt to turn or brake on wet railroad tracks.

Get a map holder or clip for your handlebars. Keep the Route Description in front of you. Busy intersections are noted there.

Slow Down. BRAG is not a race. If everyone will follow these simple procedures, BRAG will be the safest ride in the nation, in addition to being the best ride.

## **PACE LINES**

Never ride in a pace line with anyone you have not ridden with many times before. BRAG is not the place to find new pace line riders.

Pace lines are where two or more riders form a single file and follow each other very closely; usually the clearance between the tires is less than one foot. The lead rider pushes the air while the rest ride at the same speed using much less effort: "drafting" in other words. When the lead rider tires, he or she relinquishes the lead letting the next rider become the new lead rider who now does most of the work. By constantly rotating the lead, a pace line's average speed can be several miles-per-hour faster than those same riders working alone. On up-hills where the speeds are below 14 MPH, pace lines are not advantageous.

The way the lead is changed is the front rider moves to the left and allows the entire line to pass on the right (this is the ONE EXCEPTION to the "never pass on the right" rule). While the former lead rider is to the left, be sure to complement them on their "pull" as you move ahead. When the last rider passes the former lead rider, the former lead rider jumps in at the end and is now the last rider. If you are the number two rider and the lead rider moves to the left, be sure that the lead is actually being passed to you. The lead rider should give some signal that you are to take the lead. A typical crash scenario is when a lead rider moves to the left (daydreaming or avoiding a road hazard) and then moves back to the right into the front wheel of the number two rider that is attempting to take the lead. If you drift back from the rider ahead of you, your speed will dramatically reduce and the riders behind you will pass on your left. This is the ultimate pace line insult.

Except for the lead rider, everybody is essentially riding blind so communication is important. The lead rider should point at obstructions left or right. The lead rider should verbally communicate what is up ahead, for example, if the pace-line is about to overtake slower traffic, the lead rider should call out "biker up ahead" or just "bike up." When slowing, show the flat of your hand to the riders behind you and call out "slowing" or "stopping." If you are the last rider in the line and a car is coming up from behind call out "car back." When you hear a verbal communication repeat it to the rider ahead or behind you.

When the line gets more than four riders, it takes on what might be called the "slinky effect." This is when somebody in the line is not riding at a constant pace and so those behind him or her are constantly speeding up and slowing down. Because of the inherent time lag between when each rider adjusts speed, the cumulative effect on the end of the line is so severe that the gain from drafting is lost due the extra energy expended from the repetitive accelerations.

If one rider goes down, everybody behind them is going to crash. And sometimes they manage to take out the rider in front of them, too. If your goal is to get from point "A" to point "B" as fast as possible and body injury and bike damage are of no concern, then jump on the end of the pace line and try to keep up. Remember that your only reward for finishing ahead of most of the other riders is that you get to unload the baggage truck. If, however, you think you might want to look at the scenery, say "hi" to other riders, or just enjoy yourself, then a pace line is not a good idea. You must stare at the wheel in front of you and concentrate; relax and you will quickly become a menace to everyone around you. Looking at the same butt for 30 minutes gets very boring!