

The Buddy System

The **Buddy** system is typically used for smaller groups of riders. It may also be favoured for groups of experienced riders of similar pace and for routes involving motorways or lots of town riding. The Buddy system tends to produce more compact groups than the **Drop Off** system. It allows a group of riders to follow the same route *without having to remain in constant view of each other*. Thus, we can all can **ride our own ride**, enhancing safety.

The Buddy group consists of a **Leader**, the **Riders** and a **TEC** (Tail End Charlie; some groups call them the Sweeper). The Buddy system is so-named because *each rider looks after the rider directly behind them – making sure that that rider takes the same turns*. It is useful to consider the rider directly **ahead** as a Buddy too; i.e. you have a **Buddy Ahead** and a **Buddy Behind**.

Before the ride begins the **Leader** will brief the group and ask all riders to provide **ICE** (In Case of Emergency) contact details – these are necessary in case of incidents or if the group gets broken up. They will also point out who the **TEC** is, and which bike they are on. Take note of this: eg, the TEC's bike's make, style or colour; or their kit and helmet colour. As you are setting off, also take similar note of who your **Buddy Ahead** and **Buddy Behind** turn out to be.

During rides your **Buddy Ahead** may progress out of sight. This is ok – you *do not* have to keep him/her in view. Your **Buddy Behind** may also disappear from your view; that is also fine. You **do not** have to see other riders all the time: you can **ride your own ride**. The only time you **need** to see your **Buddy Ahead** is when you arrive at a *junction* where the group has turned: they will be positioned to indicate such turnings. As you approach, s/he will **move off**. You now become responsible for ensuring **your Buddy Behind** makes the turn.

Not all junctions need to be marked. The *default direction is straight ahead* – so we don't have to mark every four-exit grid-road roundabout in MK for example, nor most mini-roundabouts. Complex junctions such as six-exit roundabouts do need to be marked though.

In built-up areas and on multi-lane roads, **Riders** should aim to compact the group *when safe and suitable* by filtering up at traffic lights, riding in staggered formation and safely overtaking traffic to group up. For example – if, as you slowly approach red lights, several of your group are a car or two behind you, can you unobtrusively create and 'reserve' a gap, allowing those riders to filter up?

Because of the importance of knowing your Buddies fore and aft, **overtaking within** the group should be avoided. You may overtake *other* traffic of course but always ensure you do not simply follow other riders through overtakes - use **The System**. If you are concerned that you may hold up more experienced or swifter riders, it may be worth positioning toward the rear of the group initially.

Junctions are **Hazards**. As you approach, use **The System** to consider all available Information ('Ahead, Spread, Behind') and form a **Riding Plan** which will help your **Buddy Ahead** move off, allow you to take their place, and ensure your **Buddy Behind** will see you. Considerations may include:

- Is the rider marking the junction *actually* your **Buddy Ahead** - or are they an unrelated rider from a different group? This is why it is important to know who the rider **ahead** of you is.
- Is it possible and helpful to signal your **Buddy Ahead** to move on *before* you reach them? Can you help to create time and space for them to move safely away?

- Did your **Buddy Ahead** stop in a safe, legal and visible position? Should you wait in the same place or plan to stop elsewhere?
- Do you actually *need* to stop? Not every junction needs marking – ‘straight on’ is the default action at *simple, unambiguous* junctions. This said, riders can become nervous after long stretches out of sight of others – so consider such factors and use your judgement.
- Where is your **Buddy Behind**? There is no need for **you** to stop or slow if they are directly behind. If they are close but obscured (or may become so), then slowing down may be sufficient. If they are out of sight you will need to stop and mark the junction.
- Is there *other traffic* behind you? Might you need to signal if you are slowing or stopping?

Use **The System** and **IPSGA** to help you manage all this safely and courteously. Information is key: **Take; Use; Give**. Your **Positioning** is vital to help your **Buddy Behind**.

Having stopped to mark a turn, watch for your **Buddy Behind** arriving (and for any developing risks). As a bike comes into view, check it **is** your Buddy, not an unrelated bike. Your Buddy may take some minutes to arrive. Do not panic and do not move on; groups may spread out on country roads.

When you see your **Buddy Behind** approaching, communicate if safe, practical and helpful. They may signal to you that they see the turn. If you are **sure** this is so, consider a confirmatory nod or wave and use **The System** to safely set off. It is now that rider’s job to mark the turning for their Buddy.

Buddy Summary

- Provide **ICE** (In Case of Emergency) contact details to the ride **Leader**. If you are new to the Group, or to Group riding, let them know and they can help settle you in (they may advise you to position towards the rear of the group for example).
- Note who the **TEC** is and, as you set off, note the **Riders** directly **in front** of and **behind** you.
- As soon as junctions come into view, look for your **Buddy Ahead** marking turns (simple, unambiguous junctions might not be marked: in such cases go **straight ahead**; similarly, you need not mark such junctions for your **Buddy Behind**).
- Use **The System** (IPSGA) to form a **Riding Plan** which will help your **Buddy Ahead** move on and allow you to safely take their place.
- If your **Buddy Behind** is not in plain sight behind, stop in a safe, legal, visible position. It is vital that you stop in a place where you are **clearly visible** for your Buddy to see at normal riding pace.
- When you stop to mark a junction, watch for your **Buddy Behind** arriving. Once you are *sure* they understand the turn use **The System** to move on safely. *That* rider will now mark the turning.
- **Don’t panic** if no one arrives for a few minutes, and don’t leave! Weight of traffic, town riding, country roads and rider variations can lead to gaps of several minutes.
- **No overtaking** – it would mix up who is whose **Buddy**.
- You **do not** need to keep **either** of your Buddies in sight: **ride your own ride**. However, take safe opportunities to keep the group compact in built up areas and on multi-carriageway roads.

- Keep coming on social rides! They are an enjoyable way to improve and maintain your skills.
- If you have any questions, ask an Observer.