



## Beginner/Intermediate Group

### HOLD THAT LINE

Riding in a straight line requires balance, which is dependent on a number of factors such as proper bike fit, practice, leg strength, practice, pedaling stroke and more practice.

#### BALANCE

Balance comes from the shoulders and arms, supported by a smooth pedaling action from the hips. So tension is the enemy here. Make sure you address the handlebars in a firm but relaxed manner. Squeezing too tightly will mean tension begins to rise up the forearms, where presumably it will meet stress travelling the other way because of a taut jaw exacerbated by tight neck and shoulder muscles.

Once all these muscles are rock hard, then even a relatively minor turn of the handlebars will have an exaggerated effect on the balance - and that's when the panicky attempts at correction usually lead to jerky turns of the wheel in both directions and the possibility of riding for a fall.

This is my systems check for cycling form.  
(by Rick Strauss)

#### HEAD

Relaxed and in a neutral position. Keep your face muscles relaxed, sunglasses help.

#### HAND AND FOREARMS

Relax, don't tightly grip the handlebars.

#### UPPER BODY

Unless you are climbing, you should be completely relaxed from the waist up. Any upper body motion is wasted energy, and most commonly results in poor "tracking." Tracking is your ability to ride in a straight

line. Ride behind a smooth cyclist and you will notice that the bike travels in a smooth, straight line, with no side-to-side movement. Ride behind a poor cyclist and you will see the bike move from side-to-side. Each movement away from a straight, forward line is wasted energy and speed. Most tracking errors are caused by excessive upper body movement. Try this drill: while you are riding, put both wheels on the white line on the right side of the road. Now try to ride on this line without looking at it. Looking at it will cause you to make constant small corrections. Simply ride in a straight line. As a variation, do this drill in the early morning while riding west away from the sun. You should be able to see your shadow and witness any upper body movement.

#### KNEES

Now look down. Try to keep your knees in close to your top tube. They should almost brush the top tube and look almost "knock-kneed." Your knees create wind resistance, so keep them in. Also, if your knees are stuck out away from your body, the transfer of power to the pedals is less efficient. I try to think about bringing my knees up to my chest, or almost touching them to my elbows, and almost crossing them over my top tube. Watch a slow motion video of the time trials in the Tour de France, and you will see the top cyclists keeping their knees tucked in.

## PEDALING

The most important part. People will often say that you should try to "pedal in a circle." In fact, the most powerful portion of your pedaling stroke is from about 1:00 to 5:00 on the down stroke. The difficult part of pedaling is how to smooth out the direction transitions at 6:00 and 12:00. At the six o'clock position, try to think of it as "scraping mud off your shoe." At twelve o'clock, imagine yourself trying roll the top of a barrel forward with your foot. I think that until you can smooth out these transitions, trying to apply any power on the upstroke with the small muscles of your hip flexors is a waste of time. Pedaling, cadence, drills and cycling power are a very involved.

## CYCLING IN A STRAIGHT LINE

Ride with your head up and keep looking one and a half to two blocks forward. Being able to ride in a straight line under varying conditions is the key to riding safely in traffic. Practice following a painted line as closely as possible at different speeds. With practice you can minimize wobbles. Riding in a straight line makes you predictable to other road users.

Also practice cycling in a straight line while looking over your shoulders, both to the right and to the left. This is not easy at first, but it is a critically important skill in traffic. A mirror does not replace the need to shoulder check in any circumstances.

Most of this material has been shamelessly lifted from the following resources:

<http://www.cyclingforfun.co.uk/RidingInAStraightLine.html>

<http://www.bikesense.bc.ca/ch4.htm>

<http://www.trifuel.com/training/bike/proper-cycling-form>



# Hold that Line!!!

El Paso Bicycle Club  
B/IG Training












## What are we talking about?

Maintain your speed *and* direction in a predictable manner.

## Why do we talk about it?

Riding a bike safely (alone or in a group) relies on having a good idea what will be happening around you. It has been likened to driving on a freeway; sudden braking or swerving or accelerating of the vehicles around your's can cause accidents. You depend on the traffic to act in a predictable and organized manner to get home safely. Do the same when on your bicycle.

## When can it go wrong?

-  When you reach for your water bottle (most people will instinctively stop or slow their pedaling)
-  When you look over your shoulder to see behind you (most people will slow AND drift in the direction their head is turned)
-  When you stretch
-  When you stop pedaling to rest
-  Looking to the side
-  Going around a corner
-  When you are tired
-  When you stand up to pedal
-  When you shift gears

## **Exercises/Tips to help your techniques**

- 🚲 Find a straight line and practice following it**
- 🚲 Find a straight line, follow it and practice looking over your shoulders (left and right) while trying to maintain the bike straight.**
- 🚲 Find 90 degree turns and friends. Stretch across the road and practice maintaining the same speed and spacing while you take the turn**
- 🚲 While riding along, practice reaching for your water bottle and keeping pedaling. Pay the same attention when replacing the water bottle**
- 🚲 Follow a friend's line through a corner; try to ride right over the imaginary line that they put on the street.**
- 🚲 If you are gaining on the bike in front of you try different methods to slow:
  - **Soft pedaling**
  - **Ease to the side to catch more wind**
  - **Sit up to catch more wind**
  - **Flare your knees out to the sides to catch more wind**
  - **Try to avoid using the brakes unless you are in danger of crashing into them.****
- 🚲 Relax your grip on the handle bars – Tight grip/straight arms will lead to jerky movement of the bicycle when it reacts to bumps or small direction changes.**
- 🚲 Wait till you are at the back of the group to drink**
- 🚲 Maintain a further distance when climbing, gives others the opportunity to stand or change their pace.**