Why Cyclists Ride Two Abreast – Because it's Safer!

To quote Wiltshire Police *"It is legal to ride two abreast on a road. The benefit for cyclists is increased visibility and the length of the obstruction for a driver is shortened when passing large groups.*

Rule 66 of the Highway Code says you should never ride more than two abreast, and ride in single file on narrow or busy roads and when riding round bends.

Cyclists should factor in road conditions and on narrow or busy roads and around bends, should go into single file."

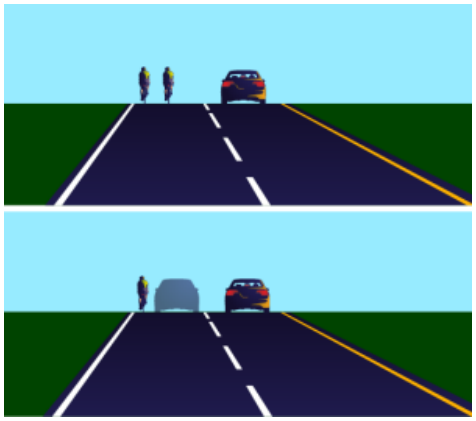
The default formation we use in our club rides is two abreast. Compared to single file, a two abreast formation makes the group more visible from behind and in front, and shortens the length of the group by half. Watch this video for a demonstration it's a real eye-opener.

However when the road narrows cyclists should immediately single-out to prevent collisions with oncoming traffic. In addition when conditions are safe to encourage passing on wider roads cyclists should single-out as a courtesy to other drivers.

In a typical width minor road, there isn't enough room for a vehicle to pass a cyclist on the same side of the road. Motorists must move into the other side of the road to pass safely. This means that the motorist must look for and give way to other traffic before passing, and must be prepared to slow down and wait for an opening on the other side of the road.

By riding two abreast cyclists make it clear to motorists from a distance that a pass is not possible on their side of the road forcing motorists slow down earlier and plan their overtaking sooner.

Riding two abreast is very conspicuous, making it easy for same-direction motorists to slow in time.

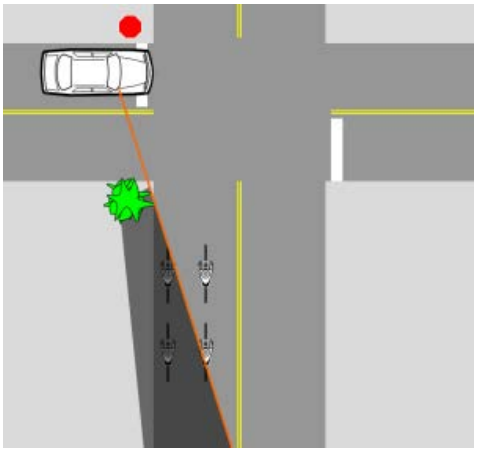


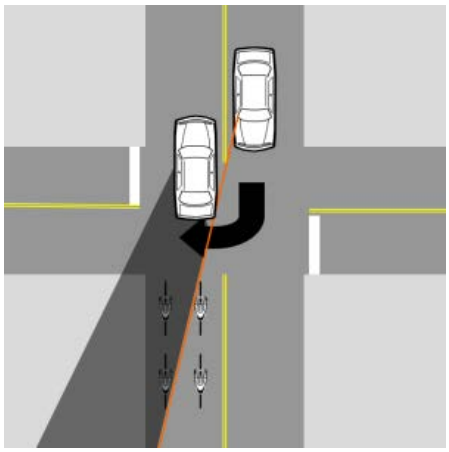
Motorist perception of cyclist position and available passing space.

Contrary to what some cyclists may believe, most motorists don't want to hurt cyclists and riding two abreast helps motorists make the right decision when overtaking. The image above depicts what a motorist sees when approaching cyclists from behind. Single line cycling encourages motorists to imagine passing within the same side of the road before they are close enough to judge the space accurately. Riding two abreast makes it clear from a long distance away that there isn't room, so motorists can start planning safe manoeuvres early.

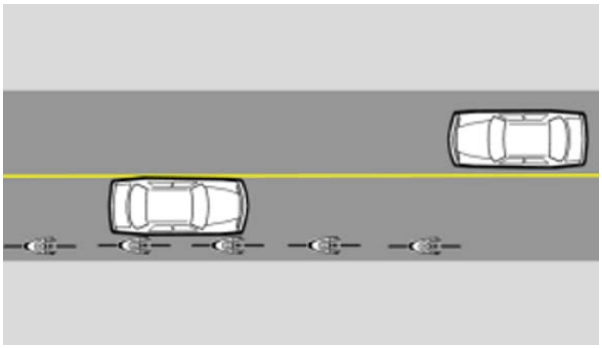
Visibility and safety at Junctions

Because cyclists are narrower than cars, they can be less noticeable to other drivers, especially if the cyclist is traveling outside of a driver's normal line of sight. A cyclist can also be screened by other traffic and clutter in the road environment. Riding two abreast makes a group of bicyclists wider, in fact as big as a car, and therefore makes them more likely to be seen and noticed.





Riding two abreast also makes it impossible for motorists to overtake when turning left or approaching a T junction.



Drivers who attempt to pass a line of cyclists riding single-file may misjudge the distance required to pass or the available width on their side of the road.

Perhaps the least championed reason for riding two abreast is that it's sociable! You can talk to your fellow riders. ☺