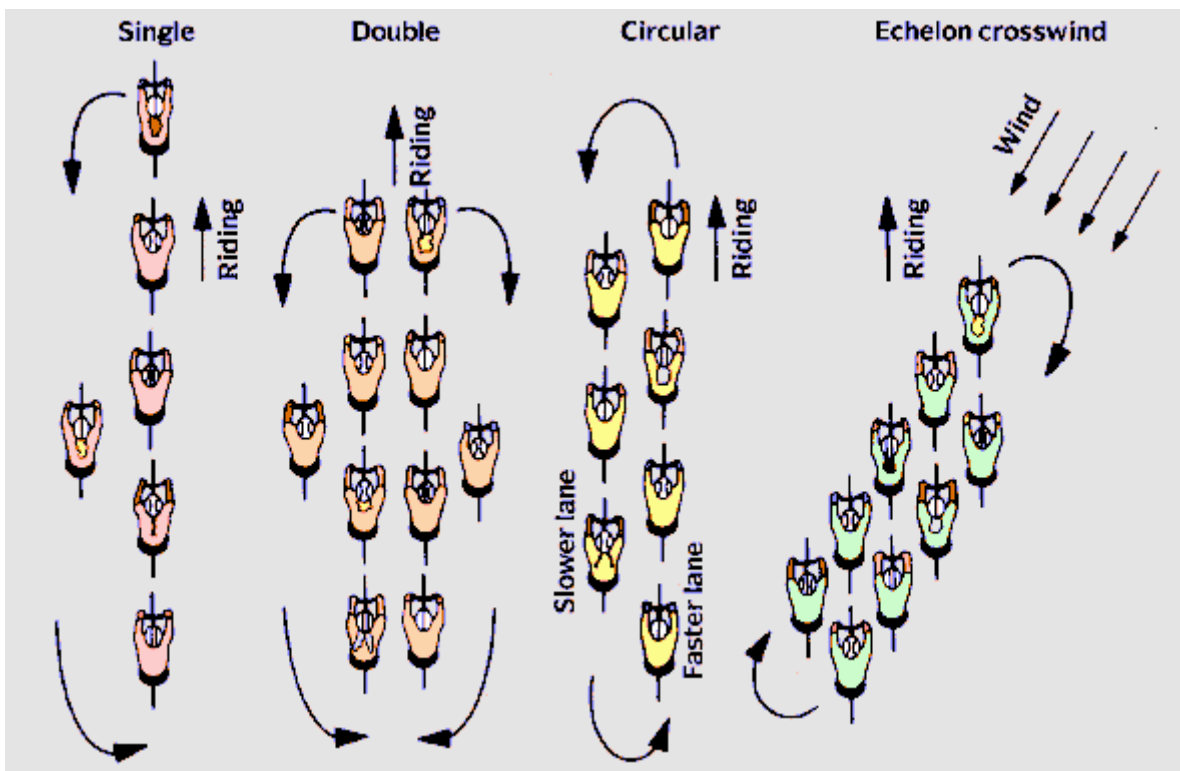


Riding Pace Line

This is about riding in a group; a happy, social, gabbing, schlepping along the road riding group. I believe a pace line is the essence of group cycling. It allows a cyclist to travel fast with less effort than if traveling alone, due to the decrease in wind resistance. When I've been in a well-organized pace line I've had the feeling that my bike and body were one and we were functioning as part of a smoothly operating unit, doing more than we ever could individually. The feeling is hard to explain but wonderful to experience. However, pace lines are inherently dangerous and the need for communication is heightened since a small miscommunication can cause a multiple crash, normally at a pretty high speed.

Pace lines operate simply, cyclists are arranged closely behind one another to take maximum advantage of the "drag" effect of the cyclists to the front. The cyclist in the front travels at the group pace, when no longer able to do so, pulls off to the left and drifts back to the end of the pace line. The new lead cyclist increases effort SLIGHTLY to maintain the group pace. The hallmark of a good pace line is smoothness. A good pace line is built on trust. All the riders have to be confident that the others in the group will communicate well and ride safely. Not slowly, safely.

Two cyclists can function as a mini-pace line, taking turns at the lead. This is a great technique to use if you are dropped by a larger group and trying to get back. If you find yourself in this situation, ask the other cyclist(s) if they want to take turns pulling up to the group. If they do, take the lead and allow the other cyclist(s) to draft for a short time, then let them know you are going to pull off to the left. Drift back to the end of your group, pull in to the right and increase your effort to stay with them. Above all, communicate with them, by working together you can almost always get back to the main group.



Four types of pace lines. The two at the left are relatively easy, but the two at the right require a well-coordinated group of expert riders.