



Bulletin # 9

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with additions and comments
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☛ Riding ☛ Collecting ☛ Restoring ☛ Research ☛ History ☛

Parade Riding

From the beginning, Wheelmen rode in groups, riding with clubs and venturing onto dangerous and uncharted country roads only with a guide and with friends to pick up the pieces after headers. A bugler rode beside the club captain, perhaps like a cavalry troop, perhaps just the link between coaching horn and bulb horn, but a part of the Wheelmen scene.

In 1880 at Newport, Rhode Island, 133 Wheelmen paraded to commemorate the founding of the League of American Wheelmen. In the years that followed at Boston, Chicago, New York, Buffalo... the annual parades became great spectacles that brought national attention to the need for better roads. We read of five thousand Wheelmen parading, each division headed by its commander, pennant bearer, and bugler. Immense "barges" drawn by many horses carried the bands so that the parades might move at a livelier clip in keeping with the speedy new bicycles.

It is, therefore, quite fitting and proper that today's Wheelmen should parade, not just to show funny old vehicles, but in a revival of the old spectacle, a show for cycling and, as then, a plea for safer roads for bicycles.

POLICY ON PARADES

We will parade for fun, to boost bicycling, to educate the public, or to entertain people. Whatever other purpose it may serve it must be fun for our riders.

Sometimes there are honorariums* and these are used to defray club expenses (no payment is to be made to participants even for their expenses) in making the parade better and more fun. The balance is turned over to our treasurer to support needed services. It must be looked on as a gift by the riding members who have surely spent more than the honorarium in getting to the parade.

Only the state captain may commit us to a parade. He must not overburden his riders. However, he should provide his members with suitable opportunities to parade.

Above all we must not waste our temporary novelty on just any good cause, but where possible must throw our

support to safe roads. That is the cause in dire need of our support. That is our historic role.

PREPARATION

Before you consider Captaining a parade you should participate in as many different parades as possible. Observe them with a critical eye and make written notes about what was done well and things you feel could have been improved. Each parade has its own character and will provide the prospective Parade Captain with different perspectives.

Scout the route from start to finish: cobblestones? rail tracks? hills too steep for mounting? too narrow for circles? must ban parked cars? obstructions and other hazards, such as storm grates, chuck holes, etc.? How is their crowd control? Observers allowed to cross the parade route can be a particular hazard for us. Unfortunately, bells and horns are of little value in all the commotion. People usually remain oblivious to us.

Try beforehand to determine the pace of the parade. It would be best if you could observe one of the parades, before you commit to riding in it. Does it move at a good even pace or slowly and haltingly? Does it move steadily or make frequent stops (very bad for high wheel bike riders)? Do they have units stop and perform before the judges? That makes for repeated stops on the route.

Also select a route to pedal back to your cars. Spot the TV and reviewing stand locations and pace off the space available for fancy formations. Find a meeting point a little away from the parade start, perhaps a school or church yard where our riders can park together and prepare in peace.

Plan to have *all* your riders arrive at least an hour before the parade's announced formation time, so you can practice your formations and make your riders feel at ease with them. A very successful way to blend riders of varying experience is to walk through the formations (with their bikes) several times before trying them while mounted. Ride together to the start, if crowd conditions permit safe riding.

Check with the parade chairman on details. Be sure noisy bands and whistling fire engines are not so close as to drown your signals. Arrange for a press release and TV releases. Be sure the parade announcer knows what to say about The Wheelmen as you pass the reviewing stand. Our Prospectus and Bulletin #12, "A Short History of Bicycling in America" will help here. Be sure that the releases make it clear that The Wheelmen is a national (even international) organization and not just a group from our Captain's home town.

Notices to members should include advance notice to our quarterly National Newsletter for broader national participation and local notices (including adjacent states) a month ahead. (Ours is a very peripatetic group. Folks from thousands of miles away have been known to show up for "local" events.) Include times, meeting place, uniforms, and your name, phone number, and address. Ask them to let you know if they are coming. We like to encourage and accept everyone, but in special parades the Parade Captain may have to limit riders according to ability or appearance. On extremely important parades he may accept only the four man teams who have practiced together and competed for "parade-fours" honors at meets.

Decide on uniforms. (See Bulletin #5A for "official" state uniforms.) Will you have special caps or ties for this one? Perhaps each four in slightly different uniform? Will you fly state pennants or ride a Wheelmen banner? Any tandems, boneshakers, or other types? Will trick riders dress differently? As the returns come in, plan your formations.

Some people believe you should have all types of bikes and ride helter-skelter, each man for himself. We, however, consider it all one entry, a reenactment of an old time bicycle parade, a unified spectacle instead of a hodgepodge. Typically we have tried to ride in order of the age of the bikes. Since it is unusual to have Boneshakers/Velocipedes in parades, this usually puts the Ordinaries and high wheel safeties up front, followed by tricycles, and hard tired safeties, followed by early pneumatics, with children (with escorts) bringing up the rear. One advantage of this order is the opportunity to use non-high wheel bikes to form a buffer before the following parade unit. This formation

will make sure there is enough room for the Ordinaries, etc. to maneuver and do their formations.

Tradition, both on the part of the The Wheelmen who may have participated in this parade before, and the requirements of the parade promoters, as well as the level of experience of your riders, may restrict your opportunities to innovate. But be imaginative and you'll be able to improve on the best.

AT THE START

Confusion reigns at the start of a big parade, particularly in a city like Philadelphia or New York, as bandsmen toot, sound trucks blare, and a miscellany of people swarm through your assembly area. Don't be dazed; be prepared. Assign riding numbers and have riders stack bicycles two and two in your order of march. Put talented and handsome riders on well restored machines to the fore. Riders who may have difficulty mounting (perhaps including huge wheels, Stars, and Eagles) should be toward the rear. Stunt riders should probably bring up the rear. Call a huddle to review your plans. Remind them that we work together for overall effect, that each rider must follow accurately behind the one ahead and dress lines to the right. They must trim lines quickly after a dismount and hold formation while standing as while riding. Although repeated mounting and dismounting can be exhausting, particularly for novice, weak, or older riders, they are real crowd pleasers, particularly when done in unison. Decide beforehand how many non-emergency dismounts you will have. Too many with tired riders could be dangerous. Describe formations; you may even have them walk formations without bikes. (If you have anything other than a group who have *all* ridden together many times before, the walk through of formations, with and without bikes, should be mandatory.)

SOME FORMATIONS

Incorporating some formations is a good way to keep your riders mounted and moving at a reasonable pace. Our Bulletin #2 notes "Remember that the slower you are moving... the more precarious your balance." Also you should remember that you may have some riders with very limited experience. Keep the riding pace up with circling, formations, etc. With crowds lining the parade route, it is no time to ride too slowly and thus have precarious riders.

Two abreast is a standard starting formation. Historically the captain rides #1 position at the front right, the bugler the #2 position at his left. Sometimes the pennant bearer rides #2 and the bugler #3. The right column is odd and the left even. When they go single file they go in

numerical order. (Some parade captains make the left column odd so they can peel into left circles more easily. To avoid confusion, however, it is best to keep to the standard.) For four abreast the second row splits and moves up, on the outside of the first row. Changes in formation should be done as quickly as possible for appearance. The crowd likes to see how you get off, and on, and this looks best done in two or in four abreast formation.

CHANGING PACE

It is important for you and your riders to know the effect on pace of moving in and out of formations, particularly when changing the number of columns (single, double, by-fours, by-eights, etc.). As you increase the number abreast, the lead riders should slow down while following ranks catch up. When coming out of large number columns, the lead riders should pick up the pace to allow sufficient space for the following riders.

Don't overlook the hat wave and smile on signal; Wheelmen of old used to salute the reviewing stand in this way.

Circles are effective because they allow speeds greater than parade walking speed. The bicycles are graceful when banking and the faster, the nicer. If you maintain a circle very long you must make it move forward at parade speed; each bike goes farther forward before it turns and cuts the rear shorter. (See Figure 1)

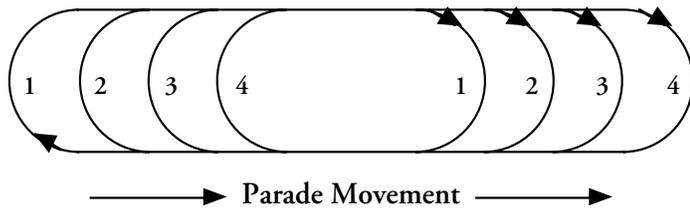


Figure 1. The "Rolling" Circle

It is unwise to hold circle formation very long because of a tendency, particularly with a large group, to keep elongating the circle until you are hogging more than your share of parade length. It is best to break quickly into a figure of eight. Riders must space themselves evenly and only one rides through each hole in the crossing line. It may be safer for them to cross when going almost parallel to each other rather than at right angles. (See Figure 2)

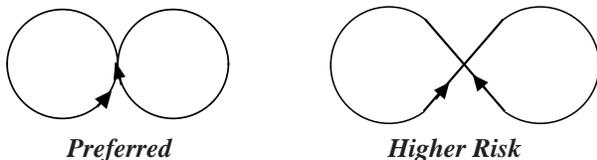


Figure 2. The "Safer" Figure Eight

You had better quit after one full figure of eight and go back to two abreast. Otherwise someone fouls it up and everyone must seek his two abreast position from an utter confusion. (Independent, non-following riders can tangle up any formation.) Even the best run parades stall and when they do you keep your show moving by breaking into circles and figures-of-eight or by dismounting in formation, and giving the stage to your trick riders.

OTHER FORMATIONS

Some other simple formations, that look more difficult than they are and thus are a hit with the crowds are: the Crossover, Disher Twist, and Double Twist.

The Crossover is entered into from a column of twos which separates. Each line rides close to the edge of the line of march. On command, each side crosses over to the opposite side, continuing in the same direction. Each "right side" rider crosses in front of his "left" partner. This is where establishing your riders' positions beforehand pays off. If each rider knows his own "partner", following a fixed rule that the "right always goes first" means each rider need only concern himself with doing the correct thing with his partner. (See Figure 3)

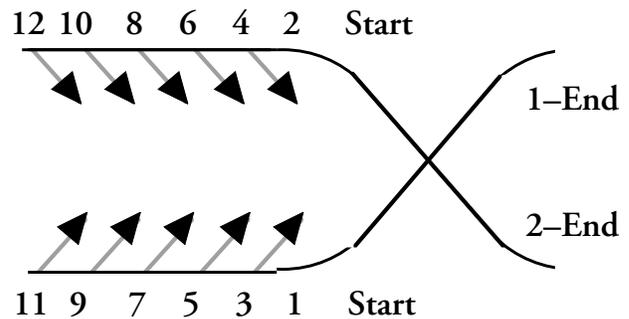


Figure 3. The Crossover

The Twists are entered into from a single file, riding at the edge of the line of march. On command, all riders make a simultaneous "U-turn" to the opposite side and wind up riding the opposite direction. On another command they do another "U-turn" and wind up going the original direction. (See Figure 4) The Double Twist is essentially doing the above in one motion (a full 360 degree circle), without the need for a second command.

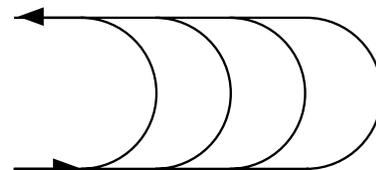


Figure 4. The Disher Twist

Particularly when you have several riders, it may be advisable to delegate the “execute” command for your formations to a “lieutenant” taking up the rear, so he can be sure all riders are in line and ready. Communication between Captain and Lieutenant is critical.

HAND SIGNALS

With the noise and hubbub that usually accompany most parades, voice signals are often not very successful. Whistle signals might be used. Two note whistles can simulate some bugle calls. Remember, however, other parade units (or someone in the crowd) may be using whistles too and could cause confusion. Having a skilled Bugler is a big help. But if you do not have one, you may want to use hand signals to give your commands. (See Figure 5) Even with riders passing along verbal commands, they are not very certain, and they take a fair amount of time, so the Captain may not be sure when everyone knows the formation to be executed. Preplanning a specific order might help, but parade circumstances may mess that up.

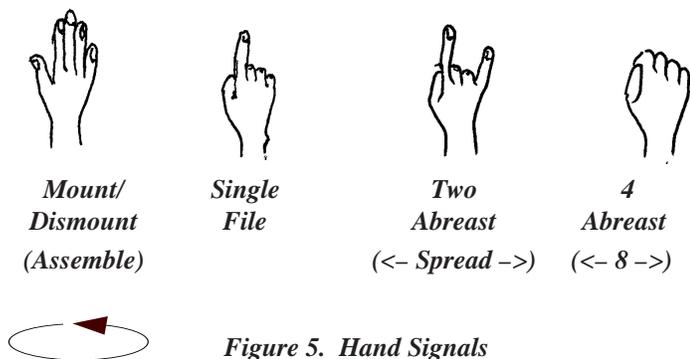


Figure 5. Hand Signals

TRICK RIDING

By their very nature, our “trick riders” tend to be free spirits, and they are crowd pleasers; however, the Captain *must* exercise control over when and how they may perform to minimize the inherent dangers to their fellow riders and the public. Before the parade, it must be agreed who will be allowed to perform, what, how, when, and where. If there is more than one trick rider, a protocol must be set as to how many may perform at one time, the course to be followed, the order of performance, etc.

Tricks our members do include legs over handlebar, coast with hands in air, legs over handlebar dismount, standing on seat, lying on seat with feet in air, pedal mounts, jumping into saddle and off again, stationary mount, Eagle “wheelies”, and a variety of other Eagle and Star tricks. Earlier issues of this Bulletin listed “specialists” for the various tricks. These, of course, change over the decades, so we suggest you ask around for someone who does the trick you are interested in. Although keen in their

competition, Wheelmen are usually very happy to share their expertise, often providing “hands on” coaching.

For more than one rider there are the stationary shoulder braces, which should be mastered in pairs before trying four abreast. The Wheelmen banners, on twelve foot poles, are carried by two riders and can be ridden, stopped, circled, or pivoted. Learn first on fixed wheel safeties, then try it with Ordinaries. (The trick is to start with one end of the pole on your saddle, mount quickly, and snatch the pole into the air with one hand before it fouls your steering and balancing.)

Group poses in the old style can be effective. They can be built around the banner and a shoulder brace of four. You must get into and out of this formation quickly for it to be effective. Having an old time photographer, complete with his old “view” camera, film holders, tripod and, of course, his trusty black “dark cloth” could add to the effect. It might even result in some fine photos of the occasion.

STRATEGY

You should go through your whole repertoire every block so all onlookers will see your whole show. This means do each formation briefly and be on to the next. (This is a worthy objective, but is often difficult to achieve.) When the parade stalls you may decide to do circles and figures of eight for a bit, then dismount in two lines down the sides to leave the center open for trick riders. One object is to form a barrier so no trick rider can spill into the spectators.

Decide how much parade length you deserve, or how much the parade director wants you to have. The longer space you occupy the longer the people must watch old bikes. The TV people may get bored and put on commercials. So pull your tail in and occupy no more of the street than you should, and keep your show lively and fun to watch.

INSURANCE

Wheelmen events are covered by our liability insurance. It covers only the possible liability that might be incurred through injury to non-Wheelmen caused by a current Wheelmen member, while participating in a scheduled Wheelmen event. The insurance does not cover injury to Wheelmen members, nor does it cover liability for damage done by non-Wheelmen participating in a Wheelmen event. It does not prevent such participation, however. Captains should take care to inform all participants of the policy’s limits. Documentation showing this coverage will be supplied as needed by our Insurance Chair. See Bulletin #15 for additional information.

FIRST AID

We do not like to think about it, but every time we ride these old machines there is some chance of someone getting injured. There were good reasons for calling the machines that followed the Ordinaries “safeties”. Check with all of your parade participants to learn if any of them have medical, nursing, EMT, or first aid qualifications. Let their fellow riders know that they will be our own First Aider, until the official parade team arrives.

These are only a few ideas to get you started. You will think of more ways as you gain experience. The novelty of massed high wheels is dimming and we must put on better and better shows still within historic authenticity. With those shows we will plug biking, boost safe roads, and have fun.

Hints for Better Parades

1. Plan Ahead! (Coordinate with Parade Marshall.)
2. Assemble early and “walk through” formations.
3. Always YIELD to rider on the RIGHT!
4. Adjust to parade conditions.
5. Take no more and no less space than you need.
6. Don't ride slow! Use circles and formations to keep a good pace.
7. Adjust pace going into and out of formations.
8. Keep circles, etc. moving forward. Don't stretch out!
9. Ride in general order of age of bikes (adjusting for rider capabilities). Keep high wheels together, high wheel tricycles next, etc. Single riders, children, and their escorts last.
10. Set and enforce rules for Trick riding (who, what, when, where, and how).
11. Communicate with your riders, well in advance of the day, but also before, during, and after the parade.
12. Ask parade promoters for a donation to The Wheelmen. Make no payment to riders for their expenses.

* Since a fair amount of The Wheelmen club budget comes from parade fees, you should at least try to get something for the club for your participation. But do not let the lack of payment deter you from participation, if it serves other purposes. See the following “Proposed Schedule of Fees” for suggested donations.

Ohio Wheelmen—Suggested Donations (early 1990s)

*PARADE RIDING**:*

- 1 or 2 riders on high wheels \$ 50.00
- 3 or 4 riders on high wheels \$100.00
- 5 or more riders on pre-1900 “wheels” (at least 4 high wheels) \$150.00

HISTORY OF BICYCLE DEMONSTRATION:

- The evolution of the bicycle shown and described using numerous bicycles manufactured in 1918 or before (approx. ½ hour) \$150.00

TRICK RIDING DEMONSTRATION:

- High wheel trick riding (approx. ½ hour) \$100.00

MEMORABILIA EXHIBIT:

- Displays of antiques relating to the Golden Age of Bicycling (requires secure indoor table space) 4 to 6 hours \$100.00

NOTICE

Dates must be scheduled well in advance of the event and are subject to availability of participating Wheelmen members and equipment.