

FAQs and General Guidance for Riders

Q. What makes Hub and Spoke Harlow led bike rides different to a cycling club and what should I expect?

A. Hub and Spoke Harlow is a Community Organisation that enables and encourages people to cycle and enjoy the health, social and general wellbeing benefits group rides provide. We are NOT a cycling club that focuses on cycling as a sport. We try to accommodate all riding abilities and preferences by having at a variety of rides every Saturday. Choose which ride you want to join on the day – so long as you are comfortable with the expected pace and distance. (Best to start with the Sculpture ride if you haven't been on a bike for a while)

- The **Sculpture Ride** – Up to 10 miles at a leisurely (8 – 10 mph) primarily on Harlow's cycleways with a stop or two at some of Harlow's sculptures (We are a "Sculpture Town!"). There is always a café stop and the opportunity to socialize.
- The **Intermediate Ride** – a distance of around 20 +/- miles at a 12-13 mph pace, venturing into the local Essex/East Herts villages on rural roads. Always that café stop.
- **Further and Faster** - The name says it all, but it's not a fast training ride as a cycling club would do. A minimum of 25 miles and up to 40 occasionally at about 15 – 18 mph – and of course the café stop. No one is "dropped" on any ride i.e. left to look after themselves.

In addition to group rides we also offer one-to-one "learn to ride" sessions for children and adults. Individual accompanied rides are also available. There are no membership or subscription requirements, though donations are always appreciated.

Bikes are available for hire and we have restored bikes for sale. Tubes, tyres and limited parts are also available.

Q. How are rides organized?

A. The day before the ride the Ride Leader puts a message on one of our WhatsApp groups that includes the destination, expected weather or other relevant information, and a poll for riders to select their preferred ride when they get to the museum. (There's a WhatsApp Group for each ride.)

- We meet at Harlow Museum car park where we have pumps, tools and experienced riders who can give your bike a quick check and make any minor adjustments and repairs, or advise if a visit to a bike shop is needed. We allow a maximum of 15 riders per group but prefer not to exceed 12. Each group will have a Ride Leader, who will have selected a route and put a poll on the ride's WhatsApp group.

- If numbers, preferences of those present or conditions allow we can adjust routes/destinations as needed on the day. Safety and accommodating all riders are priorities.
- Each ride will have a Ride Leader and a Ride Manager. The Leader will lead at the front, the Manager takes the rear position, and will remain aware of the position of the other riders. It is not unusual for the group to “string out”, so the Leader checks at every potential turning point that the Manager is in sight before turning, and all riders are accounted for.
- No rider is ever dropped i.e. left alone or far behind. Towards the end of the ride there are often alternative routes to individual homes that riders wish to take and should make sure the Leader knows before splitting off. There is a second item on the WhatsApp poll that riders are asked to check when they arrive home.

Q. Apart from a bike, what else do I need for cycling?

A. Start with these basics, in this order – ask a Ride Leader for advice.

- A correctly fitted helmet
- A spare inner tube of the correct size for your wheels
- Any tool needed to remove your wheels and tyres
- A set of lights
- A good cycle lock
- A bottle with drink and somewhere to put it (e.g. a ‘cage’ bolted to your bike).
- Your phone
- Don’t overload! It is preferable to carry your essentials attached to the bike – keeping the weight minimal and low. Backpacks are not recommended.

Q. What if I get a puncture, or other mechanical problem?

A. It happens to the most experienced of riders. We can sell you a couple of the correct inner tubes (subject to stock) for your bike before you ride. If you get a puncture during a group ride shout **VERY** loudly “puncture!” or “stopping!” and the group will stop, and other riders will help you out.

There are plenty of YouTube recordings you can watch to learn how to change an inner tube (such as [here](#)), so practice between rides (even if you don’t have a puncture!).



As you become more experienced you will also collect more 'kit' such as a pump, tyre levers, puncture repair kit, and a 'multi tool'. Again, we can advise you what to get, including an attachable bag to put it all in!

Q. What should I wear?

A. Firstly, a well-fitted helmet. You might also want to invest in some cycling or sports glasses to protect your eyes, if you don't normally wear spectacles.

Solid and grippy shoes.

Avoid jeans – activity trousers or sports leggings are a good start, and you can buy cycling-specific shorts when you decide to invest.

'Layer up' to match the conditions. Start with a light t-shirt (avoid cotton if you can), then an over shirt, then perhaps windproof or rain proof jacket. A gilet is a good idea for cooler conditions, as is a cap for under your helmet – to keep the sun out of your eyes.

Gloves are useful, even more so when it gets colder.

You might wish to invest in cycling-specific clothing as you become more experienced. The three pockets on the back of a bike shirt can carry everything you need.

Q. Is my bike suitable?

A. If you can ride it, it's suitable! It will help if it is adjusted so you can ride it comfortably. We can make basic adjustments for you before your ride.

Additionally, have your bike checked to make sure it is working properly and will be reliable AND safe BEFORE your first ride.

You can learn to check it yourself with [this video as a guide](#).

Q. I'm not very good at riding, and/or I'm unsure about using my gears.

A. Practice on quiet side roads, cycle paths or in parks where you are allowed to cycle. First, ride in a straight line and practice using your brakes, squeezing the levers slowly and equally, and putting your foot down as you slow to a stop. Next, try riding in a straight line, and taking one hand off the handlebars, swapping hands every so often. Then practice turning your head left and right but maintaining a straight line. Now, try cycling round in large circles, first one way, then the other, in a figure of 8. If you're feeling confident, try riding in circles with just one hand!

When you feel you have good control, play with your gears. The idea of gears is to keep you **pedalling** at about the same speed regardless of hills, so find a pedalling speed that suits you, not having to pedal too hard or 'spinning' too quickly.



Remember, if you have external gear change mechanisms (called derailleurs) you **MUST** keep pedalling to change gears, but ease off the pressure on the pedals as you change gear.

Start in the middle or smallest cog on the front gears (usually changed with the left hand changer). Pedal steadily, and go up and down the back gears with the right-hand gear changer, one gear at a time, feeling how they change the effort you need to pedal.

Find some gentle inclines, and practice using your right-hand gear shifter to keep pedalling at the same speed, up and down the hill. Use your left hand (front) gears if it becomes too easy or too hard to pedal and you run out of back gears.

Avoid “Cross Chaining” (See more in the “Tips for more Experienced Riders” section below).

Go out with an experienced cyclist and ask lots of questions. With time, gear-changing and control will become second nature. Keep that drive chain clean and well oiled.

Q. What do I need to know to be safe when riding in a group?

A. There are several points of etiquette to observe when cycling in a group, essentially maintaining communication with other riders and not doing anything unexpected. Keep these specific items in mind:

- Observe **The Highway Code** – the rules regarding pedestrians and cyclists have changed recently, establishing a “hierarchy of responsibility” based on vulnerability. It is important to remember that a bicycle is considered a “Vehicle” in law. The same rules apply for all vehicles as regards traffic rules, signs and controls. Cyclists have various accommodations recognising vulnerabilities in respect of motor vehicles. A link to the current version is here:

<https://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk/download-pdf.html>

- When group riding regard must be given to the road width and other conditions. There is no obligation, but impeding faster traffic is not desirable. On a road that is wide enough, generally with a centre marking, it is good to ride two-abreast so long as there is space for overtaking. It helps to keep close in line, so cars have space to overtake the group safely. Riding more than two abreast is to be avoided.
- When riding in single file keep close, but split into two or more groups, leaving space for overtaking cars between the smaller groups.
- If you are changing speed or direction, make this known to your fellow riders by voice or hand signals. (Shout “Stopping”, “Slowing” or “Turning (L or R)”. Use hand signals for turning as required by the Highway Code.

- Avoid “Cross Wheeling”. This is a dangerous manoeuvre to be avoided (see ‘spacing’ below).

There is more detail on road communication and positioning in the “Tips for more Experienced Riders” section below. Ride Leaders are always happy to discuss the subject but remember that you are always responsible for your own safety and other riders expect you to ride considerately and responsibly.

Q. Do I need insurance?

A. Hub and Spoke, as with most cycling groups and clubs, do not insure you or your bike on rides. We **are** insured for delivering events and mechanical services by qualified individuals.

Hub and Spoke Harlow is affiliated with **Cycling UK**, as a Community Cycling Organisation with **membership number: 90199674**. We are supported with training, information and various programmes intended to get more people cycling more often. We encourage you to join Cycling UK as an individual and enjoy the benefits, **including personal insurance**. A **discounted membership** is available for our riders, as well as good discounts on lots of cycling-related purchases!

You can check whether your bike is insured under your home and contents insurance, and they should be able to quote to cover your bike away from your home.

Q. What should I bring to eat and drink?

A. We always head for a café on our rides, so bring cash or cards for coffee and cake!

Bring water or squash to drink, ensuring you have enough liquid on hot days is especially important. Flapjacks, dried fruit and nuts make excellent on-the-road cycling snacks. For colder days, you could bring a small flask of tea or coffee.

Q. What are the next steps?

A. Longer rides, steeper hills.... Keep riding, and enjoy yourself!

Learn the basics of how to maintain your bike – cleaning, lubricating, pumping tyres up to the correct pressure, and perhaps even adjusting your brakes and gears. A little, regular work goes a long way to keeping you safe on the road and rewards you with trouble-free riding.



Tips for more experienced riders

Avoid Cross Chaining” to reduce stress and wear on the moving parts of the drive train. Cross-chaining is when the chain is on the largest front and 2 largest rear cogs, or the smallest front and smallest rear cogs. On a bike with 3 front cogs and anything from 5 to 12 rear sprockets there are very small variations between each rear gear. Remember what the gears are for: they allow the average human rider, who has about a 1/10th horsepower engine, to run at a more or less constant power on varying slopes by varying the ground speed, but keeping the pedalling speed constant – in a slightly inconsistent, but human, way. Unless the road is completely level and flat frequent gear changes help you maintain a steady pace over time and distance reducing effort. Play with those gears – they are there for a reason!

More on Riding in groups - ‘Etiquette’

Riding in a group requires concentration and practice but makes cycling much more sociable! There are some ‘rules’ that you should be aware of, for safety and for co-operation within the group.

Here are a couple of summaries of why and how to ride safely – and happily – in a group.

[Group Cycling: How to Ride Safely in a Group – Cyclescheme](#)

[How To Ride In A Group Of Cyclists – YouTube](#) (including some more advanced group riding tips)

Signals and shouts

Remember – SHOUT!

There are a number of signals that are near universal in road cycling groups. Some are obvious, some need learning and practice. Please see the link below for a guide.

[Essential guide to road cycling hand signals and calls](#)

As well as “car up/down” you might also hear “oil up/down” meaning the same thing!

Everybody is **EXPECTED** to repeat a call or signal to warn the riders behind of danger. The shout or signal should cascade from the front to the back, or from the back of the group if appropriate (e.g. if there’s a car behind).

And if you are finding the speed a bit fast, please shout “**EASE UP!**” – it is also your ride to enjoy too!



Spacing

Riders should **NEVER** ride with wheels overlapped – that is, with your front wheel overlapping on the nearside or between the rear wheels of riders in front. (Also called “cross-wheeling”). This is really important for safety, as any wobble or diversion (e.g. if you or the other riders hit or try to avoid a pothole) could easily result in contact and two or three (or more) riders hitting the deck, with potentially serious consequences.

Ride as close as you feel comfortable to but always behind the rider in front. The closer you are, the more air the rider(s) in front will push out of your way, saving YOUR energy.

Riding two abreast or single file

Groups ride two abreast for a few reasons, e.g. sociability, and to help avoid the group becoming ‘strung out’ along the road. On a wider road, this also makes it easier for drivers to pass safely – it takes less time to pass than a long, strung-out group, and often shows (if the group is riding well) that we are not to be intimidated!

Groups might be told by the ride leader (at the front) or ride manager (at the back) to “single out” – form a single line – on a particularly narrow road (of which there are many in Essex!). Drivers should still take care, passing only when it’s safe, and leaving a safe distance to ALL riders. If gaps form in the line, drivers may take advantage by filling a gap and hopping past each small group, so be prepared for this.

Horses and Pedestrians

In the new ‘hierarchy of road users’ in the Highway Code, cyclists must be particularly aware of and give way to horses and their riders. The British Cycling webpage below explains what cyclists should do when approaching horses, and all riders should follow this guidance.

[Encountering horses while bike riding](#)

Cyclists are also required to be aware of pedestrians, the most vulnerable road users, and give them due consideration.