

Flying Ferrets



Biking Group

Ferrets' Ride-Outs

How they Work

The Flying Ferrets, and earlier as the Northern Cloggers, have been arranging ride-outs for members of the group for a few years now. Over this time a pretty effective system has been developed that enables riders of different riding experience to have loads of enjoyment whilst at the same time promoting their safety. This guide is aimed principally at new attendees, although it may still be of use to those who have already been out on one or more of our rides. It will explain how the rides are organised and what to expect. This should then put your mind at rest that your day with us will not only be fun, provide a wealth of exciting roads, excellent scenery and convivial company but also that you won't be pressurised into riding 'out of character' or be bored senseless as part of a parade of bikes. Above all else, our overriding concern is one of safety, but we certainly cannot be described as 'boring old farts'.

Firstly, if you don't want to ride as part of a group, and you know the route we'll be taking to the next stop then all we ask is that you let us know that you'll be 'cutting loose'. Then we won't be wasting time and effort trying to account for you. However, if you do want to ride with everybody else then this is how it'll work:

All our group rides have a leader, a sweeper and whippets. The leader knows the route and is in constant radio contact with the sweeper and the whippets. **There is only one golden rule regarding the leader and that is that you must not pass him at any time.** If you do, and are then ahead of him when he makes a turn at a junction then the whole ride has to be brought to a halt whilst the whippets are sent to chase after you!

The sweeper remains at the rear of the ride and has the task of ensuring that nobody is left behind, and that everybody is accounted for and on-route. **There is only one golden rule regarding the sweeper and that is that you will not be able to fall behind him.** In fact, if you were to pull over, for whatever reason, then the sweeper will just pull in behind you. This would then have the effect of stopping the ride, as the leader would be immediately notified by radio.

A number of Ferrets who will lead, sweep or be whippets are either RoSPA or IAM trained, so this should give you some reassurance that the rides are sensibly organised and competently conducted.

The whippets will be positioned somewhere mid-group, and it is their job during large group rides to relay radio messages between the leader and sweeper when the group has got so strung out, on the faster sections, that direct sweeper to leader radio contact is lost. They may wave you past or overtake you at times in order to maintain their mid-group position. During stops it is their task to agree the duration of the break, to monitor the time and to notify people when the next ride section is about to start.

To give you an idea of what is likely to happen during a ride let's describe a typical section from start to end, as seen from your standpoint:

You've just arrived at a stop and have dismounted, removed your helmet and are starting to chat to someone. Within a couple of minutes the whippets will announce how long this particular stop is going to be for. You now know what time you have available for that drink or when you'll need to find the loo or whatever. The aim of keeping people informed of how long the stop is going to be for is so that everybody can get done what they need to do and be ready for the off in good time. Before the end of the stop the whippets will announce that we'll be setting off again in 5 minutes time. In this way everybody can be done with the essentials, like a loo visit or another fag, and be ready to leave on time.

Finally, the whippets will call for everyone to mount up for the off. The leader will position himself at a convenient point for the group to follow him off but will wait there for the signal from the sweeper that all are ready to leave. It is the sweeper's job to position himself where he has a view of the whole group and can monitor everybody's readiness. As soon as everybody is ready he will inform the leader who will then move off.

Where you position yourself in the group is not immediately important, although it is worth noting that the nearer to the sweeper you are, then the slower the overall pace will be. Although it is an acknowledged fact that those who bring up the tail of a group-ride generally have to work harder and adopt a faster pace in order to keep up, the way in which we manage our group rides actually turns this on its head. As the leader can rely on the Sweeper reining him in in time for turns, it allows him to 'make unhindered progress'. Hence, on our rides, the nearer to the leader you are then the faster the overall pace is likely to be. However, you are free to position yourself anywhere within the group at any time but we do ask that this is done with due consideration for the

other riders. If you wish to fall back in the group then do so by waving the rider behind ahead of you. Likewise, if you wish to move up the group then do so carefully making it clear to the rider in front what you are doing. **Racing is NOT allowed.**

So, let's assume that you're a few bikes back from the leader. You'll notice that the leader adopts a slow pace to begin with as he is waiting for confirmation from the sweeper that the whole group has got out onto the road and are running. In all probability the ride will be starting on a speed-restricted section of road, either in a village or town, so the leader will sit at the posted speed limit of 30mph, say. Our rides religiously respect all posted limits excepting the national speed limit. So, you'll find that the ride becomes a 30mph crocodile with everybody more or less grouped together. Ahead you can see the edge of the village and a national speed limit sign.

The leader will pass this sign and may increase speed a touch, but will remain at a relatively low speed until the sweeper reports that he has now also passed the same sign. At this point the leader will take advantage of the higher limit and will adopt a speed dictated by the road conditions. From this point onwards, and until the next posted speed limit, **the golden rule is that each individual rider adopts the speed that they are happy with, irrespective of what anybody else in the group is doing.** It may be that the road has bends that you're only happy taking at 50mph. If so, then take them at that speed. Please do not feel pressurised into going at a speed that you are unhappy with. If the leader and the other bikes between him and you do vanish into the distance there is absolutely no need to be concerned. **You cannot get lost.** All that you have to do to stay on course is to follow the road that you're already on. Whenever there is a need to turn at a junction you will find that, at whatever speed you've ridden, the leader and the other bikes ahead of you will come into view before the turn.

Let's assume that you're now one of the bikes up with the leader. You're all blatting along nicely, getting into the groove and thoroughly enjoying the twisties at an exhilarating pace when the leader slowly starts to knock off speed. Unless there's any other obvious reason for this then the chances are that a turn at a junction is coming up. If the group has got particularly spread out then the leader will slow the pace well in advance of the junction to ensure that the ride can re-group in time for everybody to know that a turn is happening and which way to go. Occasionally it may be necessary for the leader to stop in order to allow the tail-enders to catch up, if they've been caught by earlier traffic lights or the like. If this happens then the leader will choose a place where the entire ride is able to pull up in-line behind him. When this happens please do not dismount as the leader will need to be able to set off again as soon as he is informed that the tail is within sight.

Again, for a short time after making the turn the leader will continue at a slower pace until the sweeper informs him that the whole ride has completed the turn, after which the leader will again adopt a pace suitable for the road conditions.

So, you can now see that our rides are held together only for turns at junctions and the like, and that in between each rider in effect rides individually, at their own pace and in the manner that they most enjoy. In practice we find that clusters of like riders form so that the group becomes a series of knots of riders held between the leader and the sweeper. As we are very careful in planning routes that have decent stretches along a single road these individual sessions can take up sizeable portions of the ride.

Finally, the leader will drop the pace in time for the whole ride to re-group before reaching the next stop.

There are a few other things that we would encourage you to do or be aware of during the rides:

- Position yourself, on straight sections, so that you are not directly in line with the rider in front. By keeping a staggered arrangement you're improving forward visibility for each other and extending the breaking distance available. Avoid following too close behind the rider in front as this can be very unnerving for them, as well as dangerous for yourself.
- Double-up at junctions so that you are able to make the turn in pairs, if you feel confident in doing this and the situation allows. This greatly reduces the chances of the group getting badly split up by other traffic and helps keep the ride making good progress as less time is spent by the leader waiting for the sweeper's clearance report. However, this is best done once you are familiar with the other riders, so those who have not been on the rides before would certainly not be expected to do this from day one. And if you just don't like doing this then please do not worry, just come out solo.
- After doing any overtakes, please be aware that there are following riders who may benefit from space being created for them to move into behind you. If you're entering a gap then keeping to the left makes life a bit easier for any bike following you into that same gap.
- Always think for yourself! Do not be drawn into manoeuvres by the rider in front. If he's just overtaken a car do not assume that it's automatically safe for you to do the same. Make your own assessment.
- **Please ensure that you join the start of the ride with a full tank of fuel.** Usually the start point will be at or near a petrol station. So, even if you've still got $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tank please top this up to full. Then we know that

all riders have the same range and repeated individual fuel stops, and the time that they waste, can be avoided. The ride will be arranged so that fuelling opportunities are at appropriate stops. We do have members and visitors riding bike's other than Birds, with dramatically different fuel ranges. If you are on a different bike then please let the leader know what range you normally get out of a tank of fuel so that the fuelling arrangements can be altered to accommodate you.

- Sometimes the leader can make an error of route, usually overrunning a junction. If this does happen, then just follow on through the U-turn that will result, and smile at the leader as he passes by!
- Do not rely on the presence of brake lights to indicate that someone in front of you is rapidly decelerating for a bend or junction. There are some riders for whom the brake is only ever normally used for coming to a halt. This applies to a number of the Ferrets, but in particular Clive.

Now, please don't get the wrong impression! Although we're being very careful that we explain how the system works, we are not doing this because we're control freaks. Quite the contrary, we are extremely laid back and free & easy but we have learnt through hard experience that there does have to be a minimum of management of these events to ensure that everybody has a great time.

Well, we hope that this explanation will have made it a lot clearer how the rides operate and will have provided you with some reassurance. However, if there is still anything that you're not sure about, or any concerns that you would like to discuss, then please feel free to contact us before the ride, or have a chat on the day.

In practice you'll be aware of very little of the management that goes on, as your principal concern is just to enjoy the event.

Pillions

If you were wondering whether or not to include your partner on the ride-out, and were perhaps concerned that it may be a lads-only event, then please reassure yourself, and your partner, that this is far from the case. In fact, we typically have around 70-80% of the bikes carrying lady pillions. We also have one lady rider. So, if you are a lady pillion or rider then you'll find that you will be most warmly welcomed by all, and will not be in a minority.

Pillions are an integral part of the events and consideration is given to their particular needs. When the group is preparing to set off special attention is paid to allowing the extra time that rider/pillion attendees need for two people to saddle-up, connect into their intercom systems, and the like. The sweeper will be well aware that these attendees are likely to be the last to be ready for the off. So, please don't worry that you'll have to rush to keep up, as this is just not the case. The ride will not set off until **all** are obviously **fully** ready.

When the leader plans routes, the needs of the pillions always play a large part. Generally pillions are more prone to stiffness and fatigue because of their relative immobility. So each section of the ride will be kept to a reasonable time limit, where possible.

Distances and Times

So that you can get some idea of the distances that our typical rides cover, and how long they last, we've presented a few examples of previous runs:

One-day ride out: Start at 10:00 and finish at 16:00 covering 180 miles.

One-day themed ride-out : Start at 09:00 and finish at 18:00 covering 260 miles.

Two-day ride-out, with overnight stay: Start at 10:00 and finish the following day at 18:00 covering 580 miles.

A typical ride section (stop to stop) will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes covering around 30-50 miles, although there may be rare sections that reach 70 or so miles.

How the Routes are Planned

Although every ride-out is unique and has its own particular aims, it is fair to say that there is an imperative to include excellent biking roads, naturally enough, that deliver a wide variety of road types, from sweeping high speed bends to torturous twisties. But, this is not the be all and end all. It is important that the route takes us through the splendid scenery and beautiful countryside that the North has to offer. After all, we do also want to cater for the interest of our pillions as much as for our riders. Some of the sections will purposely take low speed routes to allow particularly notable views and features to be taken in by both the riders and pillions. A case in point is the 'B' route up the side of Malham Cove in the Dales, or any of the Lakeland passes where taking in the view is as high a priority as the low-speed excitement of the roads!

Complete routes are rarely, if ever repeated, but favoured road sections will often crop up. We always try to make each ride a fresh experience irrespective of how many ride-outs you've been on before. We are very keen to pioneer new roads and locations, always in the search for those hidden gems that are so surprisingly numerous in the north. To this end we are always on the lookout for suggestions from members of the group.

The routes are usually designed and implemented by the leader, either from his long experience of biking around the country or from suggested destinations or events prompted by other people. Recommended route sections will be included wherever possible and local knowledge is always sought after and eventually acted upon. Sometimes routes are decided upon purely from what looks as though it may be interesting from the map – usually this pays dividends, but not invariably! It has been known for groups to 'enjoy' unintentional short green-lane sections, although this is fortunately quite rare!

For the big events, such as the Flying Ferrets' Annual Ride-Out weekend, strenuous efforts are put into organising them around a theme. 2004's event was a Coast to Coast run, for example. Many one-day outings are also themed, such as the Teddy Bear's Picnic, or take their purpose from other events such as the Rossendale Bike Show or the Thundersprint races.

Routes are usually devised and then added to the Calendar in broad outline. It may be no more than the wish to ride within a certain area, or to visit a particular venue, and a date will normally be suggested but not always. For big events there will be a few weeks notice, but there are many times when a good weather forecast has prompted a ride and for which there may only be a few days notice. We have recently introduced a notification system that delivers warnings of planned events by email to those members who are registered. This should then mean that you get to know about all rides, including the very short-notice ones, even if you don't check the Calendar regularly. A list of attendees and an itinerary of the day's ride will be added as soon as it starts to firm up, as will route maps.

As interest is shown, the fine detail for the route will gradually be added. The location of those members wishing to attend can have major impacts on the form of the final route. We are very keen to make our rides as convenient as possible for as many as possible of the attendees. An important aspect of all rides is the location of the start meet-up and any subsequent meet-up points along the way. When these have been arranged exact details of them will be added to the ride-out's Calendar entry.

If you want to see how a Ferrets' ride-out develops, and the information provided, then have a look through some of the old entries on the Calendar.

The Calendar will also contain unscheduled rides that are used as a 'store' of potential events given the right weather forecast or interest from Ferrets. If any of these particularly interest you then let us know.

Ride Paces

We have already described how our ride system manages to cater for quite a range of paces, but it does have to be said that there are some rides, although by no means all, where a minimum rate of progress is assumed, and where the timings of the event critically rely upon this expected pace. It is not so much the pace adopted over particular sections of the ride that are critical, more the overall pace achieved during the entire event.

So that any potential attendees are completely clear what kind of overall paces have been assumed during the planning of an event, we now include this indication on the individual event's pages. You can find it at the top right hand corner of the description box, just under the event's title.

For a full explanation of the pace terms used, you can just simply click on the word 'Pace:' and you'll be taken to the relevant page. You can also get to this page directly from the Calendar, where the link is provided towards the bottom of the page. This explanation provides a fuller background as to why we have adopted this approach.

Communications

For those of you who are equipped with bike-to-bike radios; we operate on channel 6 with no coding. The main use of this is for ride management so please take care not to interfere with this essential task. Although a number of Ferrets are equipped to take mobile phone calls whilst riding, this cannot be relied upon, so any call you make may be delayed whilst any voice message you leave gets picked up later. Do rest assured though, that all messages will be replied to.