

## WHITE NOISE IN THE PELOTON

By Steve Lehman (from FB post, longtime SC bicyclist) \*Admin note: this is an opinion piece, one rider's view of group riding. Please use it as a starting point for discussion.

As a rider who has experienced all types of group-rides, I must talk about the overuse of well-meant warnings. Car Up! Car Back! Car Passing! Braking! Stopping! Gravel! Etc., etc., etc. I have observed that the more experienced the rider or group of riders the less the amount of such warnings. In an experienced group, if a rider hollers, there is an emergency.

Is the incessant hollering of these warnings in a less experienced group necessary? Is it helpful? Does it really increase safety for the group (as intended), or does it actually become "White noise?" I would suggest the latter. A warning should be a warning, not an observation that no one pays attention to.

If the group you are riding with comports itself as a proper vehicle on the road, that is riding two-abreast staying as close to the shoulder as is safe, what purpose is shouting, "Car back!" Do you give such incessant alerts as a passenger in someone's car driving down the highway? You would most likely be dropped off at the next corner.

Now, if a rider or riders in your group are not riding in formation and are approaching the centerline, then the alert is acceptable, as is a follow-up admonishment of the out-of-formation rider(s). If the group is in good order and observing rules of the road is the incessant warning of a car approaching at all helpful, or do the riders just become numb to it?

Is announcing you are braking and/or stopping at every intersection necessary, or, again, is it just white noise. Trust and predictability are the cornerstone of safe group riding and if you are predictable in your movements and trust the riders around you, are such announcements necessary, or are you telling those around you you don't trust that they are safely handling their bikes?

So, what can or should you do when riding in a group. First and foremost, provide a safe and predictable wheel to follow. Think of group riding as a dance and always think about leading the rider behind you. Don't make any radical moves, as the rider behind or next to you may be taken down by that move. When riding at the front announce and point out risks, such as holes, gravel, etc. Give these "risks" a wide berth and, again, be a good wheel to follow. If there is a car in your lane, then alert the riders behind and if necessary, bring the group to a halt. When crossing an intersection don't rely on following the rider ahead without clearing your own way. It may be clear for them, but just. Clear your own way through the intersection, safely. And, if there is an emergency, something unforeseen, announce it loud and clear.

So, there are my two cents. Unless there is an emergency that will imperil the group, don't be "the boy who cried, "Wolf!" Maybe in the next real emergency the group will not be listening, and that could be terrible.