



Racing 101

Do you want to try racing, love competitive group rides, and can hang with the fast kids but don't know where to start?

Racing can be fun, socially engaging, and a kick-in-the-pants. It can also be tough, humbling, and hard. You will race your way into better shape than ever, get better bike handling skills, and more confidence on the bike. Regardless, there are a few things you'll need to do and prepare for before you hit the starting line.

You need a bike (mountain, road, or cross). It needs to be in good condition. When you race, you won't need or want fenders, saddle packs, or other things that don't make you go faster on the bike. (You can't even have any aero bars except for time trials.)

Types of races:

The most common types of road races are: Road, stage, Criteriums and time trial.

Road Races: A road race mass start where all the riders start from the same place at the same time for a designated distance. The distance of each lap should be at least 5 kilometers.

Criteriums (crit): A Criterium is like a road race but on a small course usually closed to traffic. The distance of each lap is between 800 meters and 5 kilometers. The minimum width of the course should be 7 meters.

Stage Races: Stage races are run on consecutive days with a variety of races (Criterium, time trial and road). Overall cumulative time or points determine the results. Riders must successfully complete each stage to be eligible for the next stage.

Time Trials: Time trials are individual or team races. Courses may be out and back, around a circuit or one way. Each person or team is given a start time. Racers must report to the start before the designated time to ensure an on-time start. If you miss the start time, you usually will not be given a new start; you can

either ride, knowing you are at a disadvantage or forfeit. If a racer catches another racer, drafting is not permitted.

Categories:

Categories are ability-based designations given to all USA Cycling racers. All riders are assigned to one of the following categories where smaller numbers represent an increasing rider proficiency and ability.

Road and track categories for men are 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and for women: 4, 3, 2, 1. If you are just starting out and have never raced before, you will be racing either men's cat 5 or women's cat 4. Classes also have age groups to complete in. Pick an age group appropriate for you. You can select a younger group if you choose, but can't go older.

Upgrading Categories:

Moving classes from 5 to 4 is pretty simple. Complete at least 10 mass start events and you can move up to cat 4 from 5. You can upgrade sooner if you start achieving good finishes. Category 5 racing can be interesting as you may find yourself next to people that have never raced before but are really fast. Be careful in your first races and learn the ropes. You'll move up soon enough.

Licensing:

To race you need a license. These are issued annually by USA Cycling (USAC) and used as an identity document indicating name, license number, gender, state, birth date, racing age (based on December 31 of that year), category and USAC club and team. Always take this license with you to all races, without it you may not be permitted to race. In Colorado, a BRAC membership is also required. It's inexpensive at only \$25 for an annual member or you can purchase a one-day for \$5. You cannot race for a club with a one-day license. So what if you've never raced before and just want to give it a go without the annual commitment? The fee is \$10, so it's a cheap way to get your feet wet. (?)

Choosing a team:

Why would you want to? Cycling is a team sport. When you are first starting out, team support takes a different form. You'll learn from others, participate in team training and drills, and getting used to being in a pack. One of the primary reasons for joining a team is that racing together is more fun. You will also have support at races in the case of a mishap: people will take care of your bike, ensure you're medically taken care of, etc., and generally be supportive (if it's a good team). Teams often have different areas of focus. Some teams are training to win and expect to be in the results every week. Some teams expect a high level of commitment to racing and have higher numbers of races required to be on the team. Some teams are focused on higher categories, some lower. It is important to match your level of commitment, skill, and time to the type of team. Pedal Racing is geared more toward newer racers (cat 4/5) although we still train together and have a minimum number of races each team member is expected to participate in (our minimum is 3 races however, more is better). Our team

focuses on skill building through clinics and having a great team atmosphere. If you are a very established racer, there may be other teams that may fit you better. Regardless of what you choose, make sure the team goals, mission, and your teammates fit your goals.

Choosing your first race:

The first step is to choose a race. Pick something with categories and is not an “open” race where all categories can enter. These are usually early in the racing calendar and you could find yourself lined up against cat 3 or higher racers. If you find yourself in this situation, consider it a training ride and do your best. As a new racer, you’ll enter yourself in a cat 5 (men) or cat 4 (women) race.

What do I bring?

Here is a good list to start with:

- Your bike (in good working order). If you are unsure, take it to a bike shop and have it looked over.
- Your HELMET. You won’t be racing without it.
- A trainer to warm up on. (One of my friends actually goes for a hard ride though foregoing the trainer).
- A pump.
- Your tools for last minute adjustments.
- Safety pins for your number. (Most races have these, but it never hurt to have your own).
- Your race kit and any additional clothes you might want (vest, arm/leg warmers, etc).
- Bring a change of clothes to watch the other races. You’ll learn by watching too.

Pinning on your race number:

All racers will be given a race number. You must wear your race number. The number should not be folded or mutilated in any way including crumbling. It must be visible to the cycling officials; therefore it must be placed properly, hair cannot cover the number. Check with the promoter which side to pin your number. This takes practice to get right. Also, watch the other racers to ensure it is on the proper side, facing the right way, etc.

What to wear:

You must wear an approved helmet and a jersey that covers your shoulders (no sleeveless jerseys). If you belong to a club/team and that club/team has a jersey you must wear that jersey. You may not wear the kit of another club that you do now belong too. Do NOT show up in your replica Garmin-Sharp kit unless you race for them. If you’re unaffiliated with any club, wear a plain jersey and shorts. Wear gloves, preferably long finger, especially for Criteriums, as these will save your hands in the event of a crash.

Warming up:

Show up to the race early with plenty of time to warm up. The shorter the race, the longer you need to warm up. Shorter races are usually raced at higher

intensity than longer ones. Practice your warm-up, so you have an idea of what you want to do before you have to make it up as you go.

The Race:

For your first race, get to the race at least two hours prior. You'll have to go through registration, pin on your number, warm up, get nervous, calm down, etc. At the start of the race, the chief referee or designee will give you race instructions and announcements. He/she will then signify the start of the race with a gun or whistle. All competitors will finish on the same lap as the winner of the race. The chief referee or designee may request that lapped riders retire from the race, if you are requested to do so, please do it, even if you don't want to. The start will likely be fast, especially in the shorter races. Do your best to hang with the group, as it will slow down. (Before it surges again anyway©). Tactics are best learned by doing and by working with your own coach. A bell will be rung to announce any sprint laps or the last lap of the race. The chief judge is responsible for determining finish order.

Protests:

Once results are posted, there is typically a 15-minute protest period. It is the rider's responsibility to review the results. If you have a protest, approach the chief judge calmly and intelligently to explain your point of view. Be nice to race officials. They are more likely to listen to you if you're polite, calm, and considerate. Cursing, yelling, insulting, etc. won't get you very far.

Finally:

For your first races, keep your expectations low. Racing is not easy even if you are fit. The learning curve is steep. Take advice from riders who are more experienced. Remember, this is supposed to be fun, so that's your primary objective for the first few races.