

So You Think You're Ready To Race

By TRP Staff

Okay ... you've finally got the gumption up to do a USCF race. You've been hitting the rallies and doing pretty good. You may have joined a team, got the jersey and been hanging on the training rides. They all seem to treat racing like it's no big deal. But, the first time, well the first time you get a number without a T-shirt to go with it ... well, that's different.

1st - things first. Believe it will be fun. Confusing, frustrating, weird, scary, intimidating ... but fun. It will be. You've probably already put more hours in the saddle with others and alone than most of the Free-world with bicycles. Just by being willing to don the number, you're in the upper 1% of people who have a bicycle. You may be a little lacking in the skills, the experience, maybe some of the race smarts and probably the conditioning ... but you've got the important thing ... the heart and mind to be willing to compete. You can't wait forever on the sidelines or watching the Tour ... you've got to start somewhere and this race is it. It will be fun. You'll remember it forever.

2nd - get your stuff together. Assume the venue will have nothing you need. Get a bag or a box for race stuff. Maybe even go the distance and create a check list. Make sure you bring: Your jersey (if you don't have a team jersey, bring a PLAIN one - all the fancy pro look-alike stuff is both illegal (technically) and frowned upon. You're not the world champion and you don't ride for Discovery. Make sure it has sleeves - sleeveless are illegal for USAC events. Include every other piece of clothing you may possibly need for the event accounting for a 20° temperature change and/or rain. This should also include every tool you may need to make repairs (okay you're not going to overhaul a bottom bracket - but you might have to tight-

en just about everything). Bring extra tubes or, if you're wearing sew-ups, an extra tire and some rim-glue tape - which will work in a pinch. If you're able to bring an extra set of wheels, do so. A flat 2 minutes before the start

can be easily dealt with using those - they will also be handy in the wheel pit (for Criteriums) or the Wheel Truck for Road Races when you flat during the competition. Bring your floor pump. Remember the stem extenders. Face it; till you get a bag where you keep this stuff, you'll need a list. Somehow get yourself about 10 extra safety pins. If the race is being stingy and giving only four, you'll want them to secure your number. Bring a small roll of toilet paper. Bring your license or an extra \$10 bucks and while we're at it; bring cash - most races don't take plastic. Remember Rule Number 1: It is better to have, than to need.

3rd - find out where you're going. Using the flyer or, failing that, contacting the promoter or a friend, find out exactly where the race is. More importantly, find out the specific location for the parking and registration. Promoters provide, usually, their email and phone - if you can't find it any other way - use them. Don't wait till race morning or even the night before - but find the places you need well before-hand; go to Mapquest (or Yahoo or wherever) and map your route. Plan to be an hour and a half early for your event. When stuff happens that morning, you'll still be cool.

4th - Okay now your there. You've registered on line and picked up your number or you've stood in line, paid an extra \$5, filled out the registration form clearly and they've handed you and number and said something like "Left Hip."

[Note: If you've arrived early make sure you use the inside facilities or the porta-potties while you can. You should have been hydrating for the past few days and probably had some extra liquid that morning or afternoon, so you'll need to use the bathroom, maybe more than once.

Rule Number 2: Never postpone a trip to the bathroom. Stuff happens and you can't hold it an entire race and you're not good enough to do it on the bike no matter what you do on a training ride and whatever you've seen or heard about the P12s and you have other things to think and/or worry about.]

Placing the number is important and doing it right can avoid all sorts of issues. If you're alone spread the jersey out in front of you. If you've convinced someone to accompany you on this adventure, it will be much easier. DON'T crumple the

number like the experienced real-races do. [Supposedly it makes it more aerodynamic and doesn't flap as much. No. What it does is possibly destroy the chance of a clear image on the video camera. As an Official, I can't tell you how many times I've had to figure out who was who by which jerseys we knew versus the number, well placed but nearly indistinguishable.] Use six or eight pins. Lay the number where you want it which is clearly visible while you are in the tucked position from about 15 feet and slightly elevated (ie the bed of a pick-up truck.) Forget about the four holes always in the corners. Thread the pin through the paper and the fabric, goe about 3/8s of an inch and bring it back up through fabric and paper - close the pin. Use two on the long sides and one or two on the short sides. Attached in this manner, the number should lie flat and not flap. Make sure you can get into the pocket and you haven't snagged your undershirt. Make sure it's right side up and on the correct side. It is embarrassing to have the official stop the race to re-pin your number.

5th - Put your water on your bike and your food in your pocket now. Rule Number 3: There is no such race as one in which you will not need water or food. See rule 1.

6th- Warm up. Do it. There will be a lot of psychological pressure to ride around aimlessly and/or line up very early. Fight those thoughts. If you have a wind-trainer or similar device, use them. For a road-race spend at least 30 minutes on the trainer - more if you have time. Work your way up to your anaerobic threshold at least twice and recover fully or ask your coach what their opinion of the best warm up for you should be. Don't putter around on the bike and talk to people unless you have a specific purpose for doing so. Bike racers are, frankly, not the friendliest folk before a race and are often at their worst in terms of idle banter. Put the time to good use and warm up thoroughly. Make sure, though, you're warming up in ear-shot of the start area. If the officials are forming your event a little early, they'll announce it on the PA and you'll need to hear it. If none of this is possible, warm up till 15 minutes before start time and try to stay limber while you wait. Warming up can make the difference in sticking in the first few minutes or being blown off the back as soon as the whistle blows.

7th- Line up in the first third of your event. All too often newbies cluster in the back. There is no reason to start from a place you're going to avoid like the plague when you are racing. In the back is where the accidents and problems are. Stay away from this group at all costs. You're going to want to be in the first third of your event, so line up there. Just because it's your first, don't worry about bothering anyone. Be there.

8th - Answer your name when called by the official. Don't worry about anything because nothing else but the race matters now. You're about to join your first real peloton. Focus on clipping in, remember it will be fun. Smile and when the whistle blows, start racing.

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