

Surviving Your First Road Race

By TRP Staff

You're lined up, warmed up, have your number on the correct side and right side up. You answered the roll call, taken the last drink of water and have one foot clipped in. The whistle blows. Now what?

You're in your first race and there are things you can and should do to make it as positive, if not down-right enjoyable and safe as possible. This article will give you some insight as to how to make that happen. The real objective is to make your first race, NOT your last race.

Racing is different than any riding you've done. You may have been in fast packs before, or maybe, you've done a whole bunch of rallies or T-shirt rides. Yes, philosophically I will argue they are "races." Yes, they are. No they aren't. A USCF / USAC sanctioned race has a format, a set of rules and is, by definition, a whole lot more intense / serious /big time – you pick the word – maybe just more intimidating. In all the other "racing" events, there can be many reasons for entering – in a sanctioned race the underlying reason for everyone paying their money and putting on their number is to see who can get to the finish line first. At the finish line they pay money or give recognition to those that get there first

and after a couple of places after that, nobody cares where you finished. It is not achievement, it is competition.

Sounds pretty bleak, doesn't it. It's not. If you're in the Cat V men or Cat IV women's event that means that everybody is just like you and have decided to take the next step up. For men, this means that most of the guys with you have had 10 or less mass start events – which means NOBODY is really all that more experienced than you. They may be faster, but regardless of what people sound or act like – nobody in these events are experts.

All this dramatic lead up is to say, sometimes in races the intensity is a bit high, people's passions are running on a bit more caffeine than normal and perhaps the testosterone level is just a bit over-tweaked which means, roughly, that interactions between participants can be crude, loud and abrupt. Racers can be rude. Consider it part of the game and take it in stride. I have a personal friend of almost 20 years whom I met by calling him a "Euro-wannabe" and he demanding I "pull through or go to the back." (There were some other words in there, but this is a family magazine.)

Another over-riding rule is that – in gen-

eral – bicycle racing is about conserving energy until you actually need it; using it when you have to, and being in a position to use energy to exploit situations whereby you can defeat your opponents. This means that any expenditure of energy not directly helping your cross the line first IS part of the process of you losing. Second, this means save energy at all costs because when the time comes you will need as much as you can get. You must "use" your competition to win – they will use you for them to win. Simple truth – never taste the wind (ride in undisturbed air) unless there is a good reason for you, personally, to do so. Doing one's fair share CAN be a good reason, but often isn't.

So, the whistle blows and you're off. The first thing to do is to clip-in quickly and move forward with definite purpose. Being new and nervous, sometimes clipping-in can be troublesome. If you don't make it on the first try, don't stop, but use the foot that is in to move forward in a steady manner, you will get it on the next revolution or the one after that. This happens. Don't panic, stop or whatever, simply keep moving till you get the foot and pedal together.

Place yourself in (continued on page 26)

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