

Gettin' Ready

By Joshua Barton, M.D.

The road racing season is now in full-swing. Riders are focusing on upcoming events and fine tuning the ol' race engine. Many racers, however, find the mundane issues related to race entry, travel, and packing quite daunting and overwhelming. The result is that many racers, particularly those just starting out, expend too much worry and stress on these issues. This affects race performance, and can even keep some riders from entering races all together. A little bit of planning can avoid most of these issues. What follows is a brief detailing of how to handle these issues.

1. Get a license

This seems obvious to many riders. If you are just starting out, however, this is a must. True, you can usually enter a race on a one-day license. On the other hand, obtaining a license gives you access to support from USA Cycling. This includes a ton of things like race schedules, email updates, and even travel and medical insurance.

2. Find a team or a group ride

Misery loves company. The support from fellow riders cannot be underestimated. At the very least, you'll find a group of like minded people with whom you can enjoy endless camaraderie. Typically, the more experienced riders are more than eager to share insight into training and racing. The training from good spirited group rides is a great introduction to the intensity and pack-related skills needed for actual racing. Sharing travel expenses and devising team racing schedules and strategy is one of the more practical advantages. Ask your local bike shop about good group rides to join.

3. Get a GPS for the car

This is a big plus if you are traveling alone or to new race venues. Many races, due to urban constraints and space, are often in hard to reach locations. Having a GPS saves the stress of dealing with printed out maps or race bible directions.

4. Make a list

Who hasn't forgotten SOMETHING to a race at least once? I know of a rider who forgot his shoes to his first race. Duct tape and running shoes worked...sort of. You can make an electronic check list for race travel that can be printed out again and again for each race. Think of everything: food, casual clothing, tools, directions in addition to the obvious things like a race bible, number or proof of registration, and riding clothes. This list will keep you from stressing out about what to bring from memory the night before or the morning of a race.

5. Check the weather

This is particularly important during spring races. Weather can change quickly. Pay attention to wind and cloud cover which can make the feel of the actual temperature MUCH cooler. Pack clothing accordingly.

6. Pre-ride the course

This is not always possible. Knowing the course, however, pays dividends when deciding how to apply strategy and energy. If you cannot pre-ride the course, try to map it out on one of the many mapping programs available on-line or as a software package. TopoUSA by DeLorme is a DVD-based software package that is commonly used for this. It provides a lot of details including elevations profiles and grades.

7. Get there early

How early? This is a bit of a personal choice but arrive at least 2 hours before your start time. This will allow an hour to register, get dressed, and prepare the bike and another hour to warm-up. Nothing amps up stress like getting ready hurriedly for a race.

8. Warm-up

The shorter the race, the more intensely you should warm-up. A good warm-up should be about an hour. This should include some significant intensity. Warming-up will prime the muscles for action by inducing blood flow, initiating metabolic changes that make your body ready to produce race intensity, and helps to insure that your bike is ready to go. Many racers who are just starting out fear that they will make themselves too tired before the race starts. A warm-up should not be this hard and, if done right, only improves race performance. There are a number of regimens out there; check out the internet, your favorite coach, or a book on training if you are unsure of what to do.

If you take these steps, your race days should be far more enjoyable. The motto is: "Plan more, stress less."

Joshua G. Barton, M.D.

Wenzel Coaching

www.wenzelcoaching.com

joshuabarton@wenzelcoaching.com

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