



Getting Started Racing – What You Need to Know

USA Cycling's Coaching Education Manager, Sam Callan, and Junior Programs Manager, Benjamin Sharp, have compiled the following information to help recreational cyclists prepare for competitive racing.

Benefits of Racing

- **FITNESS:** The increased speed and intensity of racing results in better fitness. Depending on your size, riding at 12.5 miles per hour on a flat road can burn about 283 calories per hour, or 3.5 calories per minute. Did you know that during the Tour de France, riders expend on average about 6,500 calories per day?
- **SOCIAL:** Cycling is a social sport. Athletes typically train with groups or clubs. Because of the nature of the sport, you constantly ride with others.
- **ADVENTUROUS:** The race circuit provides an opportunity for cyclists to travel to different locations to compete.
- **LIFESTYLE SPORT:** Cycling is a lifestyle sport. Racers don't tend to just "do" a race and then move on as in other sports. Instead, cycling becomes a part of their everyday life.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Cycling is an easily accessible sport as it can be done virtually anywhere.
- **COMPETITIVE and MEASURABLE:** The sport of racing is competitive in nature. Racers can continually see how they stack up against other cyclists.
- **PRIZE MONEY:** Racers can win prizes and money!

Training Tips

- **COACHING:** USA Cycling helps its members locate a coach to help them optimize physical fitness and tailor a training program to meet specific needs. [Click here](#) for a searchable database of coaches on USA Cycling's Web site.
- **PHYSICALLY FIT:** See a physician and get medical clearance to compete.
- **INTENSITY:** Step up the intensity in your rides. Racing requires a much faster pace than a recreational ride. Enlisting a USA Cycling certified coach can help tailor a training program to prepare specifically for racing based on the cyclist's needs.
- **MAINTENANCE SKILLS:** Ensure that you have basic maintenance skills, such as how to fix a flat.
- **CLUBS:** Join a local club and be sure the group consists of riders at your same ability and age level. [Click here](#) to find a club in your area.
- **PRACTICE:** Get a feel for what it's like to ride in a group for long distances at sustained speed – this is a much different dynamic than in recreational riding. In races, you are in very close proximity to other cyclists, and it takes some getting used to. Be able to safely take your water bottle out of its harness and put it back at a high rate of speed.
- **BE PREPARED:** [Get a one-time Category 5 license from USA Cycling](#) for only \$10 and sign up to compete in a local race. Make sure you know the length of the race and that you are capable of covering that distance.

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- **CONTROL:** Remember to focus on the things you can control, such as diet and race arrival time, versus the things you can't control, like the course conditions or the weather.

A Racer's Checklist

It's a misperception that an expensive bicycle and all the best gear are necessary to be competitive in a race. While there are certain items cyclists must have for competition and safety, the overall requirements are minimal.

Gear:

- **PROTECTION:** First and foremost, cyclists are required to wear an approved helmet.
- **EQUIPMENT:** A bicycle that is in good working order and safe. It is recommended that a certified mechanic check the bicycle to ensure it will not be a hazard to the cyclist or other competitors.

Fuel:

- **WELL-FUELED:** For a couple of days leading up to the race, eat well and load up on carbohydrates.
- **HYDRATE:** Cyclists lose a lot of fluid during a race. Drink plenty of fluids before and during the race.

Knowledge:

- **THE RULES:** Know [the rules](#) before going out. A club environment, mentor or coach can help you become familiar with the rules – written and unwritten.
- **PERSPECTIVE:** Don't be intimidated – the competition level is higher in cycling than with other endurance sports. Keep perspective, ride your own race and do what you need to do to finish the best you can.

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