



Know the Lingo: Cycling Terms

Like most sports, cycling features unique terminology. Below is a list of the most commonly used words and phrases in the sport of competitive cycling.

Attack: A sudden attempt to get away from a rider or group of riders.

Berm: An embankment on a BMX track.

Biff: Another term for a crash.

Black Line: A five-centimeter-wide line at the bottom of a velodrome track, which defines the length of the track.

Blocking: When a rider impedes the progress of another rider, usually done as part of a team strategy to slow down the main field when a team member is ahead in a breakaway.

Blue Band: The section between the racing surface on a velodrome and the infield. Technically, it's not illegal to ride on the Blue Band, but it is illegal to advance one's position while riding on it.

BMX: Abbreviation for Bicycle Motorcross.

Bonk: When a rider completely runs out of energy.

Breakaway: A rider or group of riders who have separated themselves ahead of the main pack.

Bridge the Gap: When a rider or group of riders attempts to advance from a group of riders to one further ahead.

Caravan: The line of cars that typically follow a road race; including team cars, race officials, media, medical, VIP and neutral support vehicles.

Chasers: Riders who are attempting to advance to a rider or group of riders ahead.

Chicane: A series of tight, technical turns.

Criterion: A multi-lap road race on a course usually a mile or less in length.

Director Sportif: The traditional name for the team manager.

Domestique: A rider who typically rides in support of a designated team leader.

Drafting: Riding in the slipstream of another rider ahead. A rider drafting off another generally expends 30 percent less energy.

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Drop: To leave another rider or group of riders behind by attacking.

Echelon: A line of riders positioned behind one another to receive maximum protection from the wind.

Endo: A crash which results in a rider going over the front handlebars.

Espoir: A French term used to describe the Under-23 category of riders aged 19-22.

Etape: A French term for a stage of a stage race.

Feed Zone: A designated section on a road course where riders can receive food and water from their soigneur.

Feeding: When riders receive food and liquids throughout a race, usually from a team car that follows the race or a soigneur positioned in the feed zone.

Field: The main group of riders, also known as the Pack, Peloton or Bunch.

Field Sprint: The final sprint between the main group of riders in a race, not always for first place.

Gear Ratio: The combination of gears used between the front chainring and the rear gear cluster.

Granny Gear: The lowest gear ratio on a multi-speed bicycle, smallest chainring in front and largest in back.

Hard-Tail: A mountain bike which only has front suspension.

Hole-Shot: Taking the lead position out of the starting gate going into the first turn, used in BMX racing.

Jump: A sudden acceleration, often at the start of a sprint.

Kick: The final burst of speed in a sprint.

Lanterne Rouge: French for Red Lantern, as found at the end of a railway train; used to describe the last-placed rider in a race.

Lead Out: A team-oriented move in which one rider begins a sprint to give a head start to a teammate riding in his draft.

Moto: Used to describe a heat of a BMX race.

Musette: A bag filled with food, water and energy drinks distributed to riders in a feed zone.

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Neo-Pro: Cycling's term for a rookie at the professional level.

Peloton: The main group of riders during a road race.

Prime: A mid-race contest in which riders sprint for points, cash or prizes during a criterium, sometimes used to animate a race.

Prologue: A short individual time trial at the beginning of a stage race; used to assign a leader's jersey for the first stage.

Pull: To take a turn at the front of a paceline and block the wind for other riders in the pack.

Pull Through: When a rider moves to the front of a paceline and takes his turn blocking the wind at the front.

Pull Off: When a rider moves to one side of a paceline to allow another rider to pull through.

Sag Wagon: A vehicle that follows a race and picks up riders who are unable to finish.

Singletrack: A narrow off-road trail which is only wide enough for bikes to ride in a single-file formation.

Sitting In: When one rider refuses to take a pull and break the wind for a group in which he's riding.

Slipstream: The pocket of air created by a moving rider, just as in automobile or motorcycle racing.

Soft-tail: A mountain bike that has both front and rear suspension.

Soigneur: A French term for cycling's equivalent of a trainer. A soigneur usually looks after the physical health of a rider and gives massages.

Sprint: The sudden burst of speed before the race's finish or an intermediate sprint point.

Sprinter's Lane: The space between the Black Line and The Sprinter's Line on the velodrome. A rider leading in this zone cannot be passed on the inside.

Sprinter's Line: A five-centimeter-wide line 90-centimeters above the Black Line.

Stage Race: A multi-day event that combines several races. The rider with the lowest cumulative time is declared the winner.

Stagiaire: An amateur rider who gets an opportunity to compete with a professional team during the season in order to gain experience at the pro level.

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Tech Zone: A section on a mountain bike course where riders can exchange parts or receive mechanical assistance from others.

Take a Flyer: When a rider attacks the main pack and creates a solo breakaway.

Time Trial: An individual or team race against the clock.

Track Stand: A technique used in track racing in which competitors come to a complete standstill in order to force their opponent to take the lead.

Velodrome: An oval, banked cycling track used for track racing.

Wheel Sucker: A derogatory term used to describe someone who rides in a pack without taking a pull at the front and blocking the wind.

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