

Rules of road racing: highlights and tips

BY CHARLES HOWE

1. **Check your equipment over the day before the race.** Are your handlebars taped, plugged, and securely tightened? Your tires in good condition and properly inflated? If you have sew-up (tubular) tires, are they securely glued? Are your wheels missing any spokes? Are they true and adequately tensioned? Are both brakes working properly and correctly adjusted? Are all quick releases, nuts, screws, and bolts securely tightened? All bearing assemblies properly lubricated and adjusted? Are your helmet and uniform clean and in good condition?

“Yes” to **all**? Good. *Now* you’re ready to leave for the race.

2. **Bring your license every time you come to race.** Don’t impose on race officials by asking them to accept entry information “on faith.” Here are some of the important details your license contains:

- Your racing age. This is how old you will be on December 31 of the present year.
- Class and category:

Class is determined by AGE and SEX, and thus is irrespective of ability. Riders 18 years and under are classed as juniors; they may “ride up” in class and race senior (18 and over) events. Riders over 30 are seniors too, but are usually referred to as masters, and may “ride down” in age to senior.

Women are classed separately from men. Men cannot enter women’s races, but women can ride in men’s races one category lower than their women’s category (2 cats. lower for Category 1 women). Cat. 3 and 4 women can race with men up to 20 years greater in age. For instance, a Cat. 2 woman can enter a race for Cat. 3-4 men, and a Cat. 4 woman aged 39 can enter a men’s 56-60 age category race.

Category is based solely on ABILITY. Riders cannot compete outside their category; for example, a Cat. 4 rider cannot enter a Cat. 1-3 race. USA Cycling upgrades from Cat. 5 to 4 may be made on experience (number of races raced, not including time trials) or results, but further advances depend on performance only (see the appropriate Racing Rules for latest guidelines); keep a complete record of all races you compete in, including date, location, race name and type, category and distance you raced, your placing, and number of competitors. Contact your Regional Coordinator and send in your results when you’re ready to move up.

3. **Wear your helmet at all times you are on your bicycle, including to/from registration and while warming up.** Is any further comment really necessary? It shouldn’t be, but consider: a) it’s not your speed, but the distance to the ground that causes the damage, and b) it’s the rule.
4. **Wear proper uniform. Keep it clean, neat, and in good repair.** T-shirts are okay to race in but must have sleeves (no bare shoulders), therefore, tank tops and vest-type jerseys are not allowed. It is not permitted in competition to wear the logo, inscription, or uniform of any club or team which you are not eligible to represent (including pro team clothing such as Quick-Step, High Road, Discovery, etc.) This applies to national team, national championship, and world championship jerseys as well; save such apparel for tours and training rides where everyone will think they’ve seen Tom, George, or Levi. ☺
5. **Know the race course and any regulations particular to the race.** Remember, you are responsible for staying on the course, so try to take one or several warm-up/preview laps *without* interfering with the conduct of the event – do NOT cross the finish line of another race in progress! Any questions? Officials are there to help, not to penalize! Let them know about any potential hazards you notice. This is also a good time to check your

equipment and make sure nothing was disturbed in transit to the race; a brief delay may be requested before the start to change a tire or take care of a minor mechanical problem.

6. **Don't fold your race number, and attach it in the correct position as designated by the Chief Judge** (called Chief Scorer if the race is ABR sanctioned). Failure to do so could cost you your placing. Use at least four pins (one at each corner); another four (one on each side) will help minimize air drag.

7. **Know the Racing Rules.** Their purpose is to ensure a safe, fair race, not to trip you up. Like traffic laws, you are responsible for knowing them – ignorance is no excuse for any violation. Here are some of the most important:

- Unless there is road closure, the “centerline rule” is in effect. This means that you must not move left of center where there is two-way traffic except as authorized by the Chief Referee (“Chief Official” at ABR races), usually in the final 200 meters of the race.
- Handlebars (or attachments thereto) that point forward or up, or have armrests, are for time trials only, and are not permitted in criteriums, road races, or any other type of mass-start event. This includes Cinelli “Spinacci” handlebars, but the Scott “Rake” and Cane Creek Speedbars are okay.
- Feeding takes place **only** at the direction of the Chief Referee, normally in designated feed zones. Since such zones may not occur in the first 30-50 km or last 30 km of a race, there is normally no feeding in races less than 60 km (36 miles). **NEVER** discard non-biodegradable materials unless you pass them directly to support personnel in a place safely distant from any bystanders, or in an area specifically authorized and designated for this purpose.
- In criteriums (a type of circuit race where the course is closed and between 800 m – 5 km in length):

At the decision of the Chief Referee, riders who are, or are about to be lapped, may be removed from the race. Otherwise, lapped riders finish on the same lap as the leader, and are allowed to work with riders in the same race who are on different laps, but should not lead out or contest primes or the final sprint. In some instances, the “field finish option” may be exercised, where a group of riders about to be lapped by finishing riders are directed to sprint (finish) early. Remember, race distance is determined by the lap cards, not necessarily what was announced or scheduled.

Always keep your hands on the handlebars in a close sprint; professionals are allowed a victory salute, but not mere mortals.

Primes are “races within the race” for any group of riders. You don't have to finish the race to be eligible for primes won while you were riding. Lapped riders are usually ineligible for primes.

A free lap may be granted for each **recognized** mishap, which is defined as a crash, puncture, or breakage of an essential part of the bicycle. All mishaps must be determined to be legitimate and be dealt with in the official pit area only (a crash caused by an improperly glued tire or insufficiently tightened equipment is not a recognized mishap), and being **delayed** by a crash is not the same as being **involved** in one. The “free lap rule” is considered to be in effect unless stated otherwise in the official race announcement. It usually does not apply to circuits over 5 km in length, and is suspended during the last 8 km (5 miles) of the race (the repair pit may be accessed after this time and mechanical assistance may be received, but free laps will not be granted.) If allowed by the Chief Referee, riders may cut the course to get to the pit, but may not ride against the race flow; if necessary, a rider may dismount and run back to a repair pit but must not present a hazard to the other riders in doing so. If the service pit referee grants the free lap and when repairs are complete, the rider is returned to the race at the **rear** of the same group of riders they were with when the mishap occurred, and is ineligible for sprint primes on that lap.

- In all mass-start events, riders in fields that start separately must not aid or impede each other.
- In time trials:

Arrive at the starting line at least 3 minutes before your scheduled start time and remember, there is never a grace period for late starters!

Keep your head up at all times and don't try to stay in your aero position through curves, turns, or down hills.

Taking pace is prohibited and is defined as maintaining a static position, either beside another rider, or at a distance of less than 25 meters (80 feet) behind. When you are passed, you must drop back to this distance. Once you close to within 25 meters of a rider ahead of you, you must overtake within a distance of 500 meters (0.15 miles) traveled, otherwise it is considered a failed pass attempt and you must drop back to 25 meters. There is no limit on the number of pass attempts allowed, but you must drop back to 25 meters after each failure.

- A stage race is a sequence of road races that may include time trials and criteriums, in which there are usually individual and team competitions that are decided on the basis of overall time. Individuals must complete each stage in order to be eligible to start the next. Each entrant is given a Race Bible, a complete set of regulations prepared by the organizer, which explains how each stage will be conducted.

Usually, only one set of numbers is issued to each rider, so be sure to keep them from one stage to the next. Arrive and sign in at the starting point of each stage no later than 15 minutes before the stage start.

The winner of the overall, or general classification (GC), is the rider with the lowest total time for all stages (road race and criterium stage finishers who come in within one second of the rider finishing immediately prior are given the same time as the preceding rider.) Other classifications may include team GC, and individual climbing classification, also known as King (or Queen) of the Mountains (KOM/QOM).

- An omnium is often mistakenly referred to as a stage race. The difference is that the various individual and team competitions are decided on the basis of points awarded according to place finish, rather than by time.

8. **If you feel that a mistake has occurred in the place or time assigned to you**, you must bring it to the attention of the Chief Judge within 15 minutes after results are posted . . . remember, these people are there to help, not as adversaries. All other protests should be directed to the Chief Referee, and may need to be in writing.
9. **If you are involved in any sort of crash or accident during the race**, report it to the Chief Referee even if you don't think you are hurt. If no report is made, you will not be able to file claim and collect insurance payment.
10. **For more information**, see the racing rulebook of the appropriate governing body: [American Bicycle Racing \(ABR\)](#), the [American Cycling Association \(ACA\)](#), the [Oregon Bicycle Racing Association \(OBRA\)](#), or [USA Cycling \(USAC\)](#).