

New Racers

Want to try your hand at racing a road bike?

Benga Sports knows that everyone has a 1st race! And, getting involved can be somewhat intimidating. Let's face it: no one wants to look foolish at a registration table. Starting out is easy to do, and there are plenty of opportunities to enter the exciting sport of bike racing. Here is some information that will help you get started.

1st Time Racers Race For Free at Benga Sports events!


Mention you are a first time racer to our registrar, or email sgoar@bengasports.com, and let us know before the race, and your first race is free!

Free New Racer Clinics at each Benga Sports event!

New Racer clinics are taught by Pro and Elite cyclist and are designed for those who have been racing for less than two years. Clinics focus on race preparation, bike handling in tight fields, pack dynamics, basic race tactics, and other issues pertinent to those wanting to learn more and move up.

Mass Start (Road Race, Criterium) or Time Trial (TT).

Bike races can be divided into two categories, mass start races and time trials. In mass start races, as the name implies, the riders all start at once and the first one to cross the finish line wins.



The majority of mass start races in Indiana are criteriums, which are run on courses from a half-mile to two miles long, often with several turns per lap. For men's category 5 and women's category 4, the distances are usually less than 15 miles. In road races and circuit races, the laps are longer, with less turns per lap.


In time trials, riders start one at a time, usually one minute to 30 seconds apart, and are timed over a specified distance. Drafting is not allowed. The rider with the lowest elapsed time wins. Time trials are considered by some to be a good way of getting your feet wet in bike racing, and measuring your strength as a cyclist against more experienced riders. Mass start races require good group riding skills-drafting, and cornering in a smooth, predictable arc -- and the ability to keep pace with surges in the group's speed.

Getting a racing license

All road bike races in Indiana are governed by the rules and regulations of USA Cycling, the national governing body for the sport of bike racing. To participate in a bike race, it is necessary to purchase a license. You can get an annual license go to www.usacycling.org, for \$70, or you can buy a one-day license for \$10 on the day of the race if you are unsure you want to commit to an annual license. License fees pay for liability and medical insurance and fund the activities of USA Cycling. Although most bike racers are members of clubs, you don't have to join a club to enter a race. Some races charge an "unattached" fee of \$5 or \$10 for riders who don't belong to a club. Joining a club is a good way to make new friends and gain the group riding experience you need to participate in mass start racing.

Racing categories

Bike racers are divided into categories by USA Cycling. The entry-level categories are 5 for men and 4 for women. Sometimes categories are combined, 4 and 5 for men, or 3 and 4 for women. For your first race, it's probably best to enter a race that is not combined. After obtaining experience racing in the lowest category, you will be permitted to upgrade to the next level. Some races are designated by age group, rather than categories. These masters races are



usually faster and more competitive than the entry-level races, so it's best to start in your numerical category.

Equipment

You don't need any special equipment to enter a bike race. A regular road bike is all that is required. You should have your bike checked over by your local bike shop before racing to make sure it is in good condition. Aero bar extensions, as used in triathlons and time trials, are not allowed in mass start races. USA Cycling rules prohibit sleeveless jerseys.

Finding a race

There are bike races in the Midwest every weekend from March through October, as well as mid-week races from April through August. You can find a race to enter by looking at the calendar on this website, or by going to Truesport.com, such as racelistings.com or cyclingcalendar.com. Mid-week races, called training races, are a good place to start your racing career, since they usually have a low-key atmosphere. The calendars will usually have a link to the flier for the race, which will contain important information such as start times, entry fees and directions. The fliers will sometimes have information about pre-registration, but most races allow registration on race day.

Racing Fitness

Racing in Cat 5 requires the ability to ride steadily at speeds in excess of 20 mph, as well as the ability to surge for brief periods in excess of 25 mph. It takes much less energy to achieve these speeds while riding in the draft of a group than it would on your own, so don't be discouraged if you are not accustomed to riding this fast. Interval training-riding short distances above race-pace-is a good way to prepare for the demands of racing. Do not be surprised if you have trouble keeping up with the pack in your first few races. With a little experience, you will improve rapidly.

Resources for racing

There are many books and magazines published on the subject of road bike racing. A local bike club is also a great place to learn about racing. Members usually welcome new racers and are happy to share their knowledge and experience.

