

Wanna Lead A Good Road Ride? Start Here

By Jeff McNeal

You Are The Ride Leader You have decided you would like to plan and lead a bicycle ride. Your goal as ride leader is to organize a bicycle ride that targets:

- 1) a particular fitness level of cyclist
- 2) skill goal (such as hill climbing).

You are also willing to lead the ride in a competent manner that ensures the cyclists all complete the ride safely and return within the projected time frame.

And lastly, you want everyone to have fun riding together.

Who's Coming? Who are the cyclists you want to participate in your ride event? (For this article we'll discuss mainly fitness level.) A good rule of thumb is to plan a ride event targeted at cyclists who ride around your fitness level or below. If you are a "C" level rider it wouldn't be in your best interest to plan a ride event for "B" and above fitness level cyclists. By all the cyclists being in a close proximity of fitness level, it will minimize your group having to wait for slower cyclists or continually trying to keep up with the fast ones.

Route Choice The route choice is based on several main factors. These include:

- 1) the fitness level of the cyclists you want to participate
- 2) terrain that is appropriate for the fitness level of the cyclists
- 3) distance that is appropriate for the fitness level of the cyclists
- 4) the time frame you project for the ride

If you have an ideal event time frame of two hours, and you assume an average speed the cyclists can ride your route, then you can figure ideal miles for your route within the two hour time frame.

Example: You want to lead a two hour ride targeted at beginner level cyclists. A two hour event ridden at a 10mph average equals a 20 mile ride. However, this doesn't include rest stops, waiting for slower cyclists, etc. So, you might want to plan your route length to be 15 miles to allow for a rest stop, slower cyclists, challenging terrain, etc. You should then be able to complete your ride event within two hours.

On the flip side, if you are targeting advance level cyclists who might average 20mph, you can plan your route to be 35 miles (2 hours at 20mph = 40 miles and then factor in time for a rest stop). You should then be able to finish 35 miles within the same two hour time frame.

There are also rides you might plan based on the type of terrain you want to ride to target areas of improvement such as a hill climbing route. In this case time frame is of less importance because the terrain is your primary focus. Or you might want to do a speed ride that targets VO2max level improvement, or a slower endurance type ride.

With this in mind, the fitness level, terrain and distance should be planned accordingly.

Cue Sheets the ride leader should provide clearly written cue sheets for the cyclists and ask each cyclist to take one. In my experiences as a ride leader, there have been a number of times when a rider has gotten separated from the group and ultimately lost because they opted to not take a cue sheet at the beginning of the ride event. The other cyclists may also be inconvenienced by having to locate the cyclist who has gotten separated from the group.

Accessories As the ride leader, it is always a good idea to make sure you (or someone in the group) have a multi-tool, a tube, tire tool, CO2 pump (and cylinders) and patch kit with you. Most cyclists carry these items, however, don't assume this when you lead your ride event. Optional items to bring might be a first aid kit and cell phone.

Safe Riding Safe riding must be stressed. This means riding in a paceline, obeying traffic laws, using proper hand signals and calling out potential hazards as you ride. This is each rider's responsibility to every cyclist in the group.

Safe riding also means that you make sure each cyclist has brought along proper hydration and eatables such as energy bars, gel packs, etc. Don't assume there will be an open store to get these items. And, if you have to stop to buy supplies, it reduces your ride time frame. Smart cyclists will have these items when they arrive for the ride event.

A Sweep Ask one of your participants to be a sweep. This is a cyclist who is willing to drop back and check on folks that may be falling back or experience a problem. The sweep makes sure that nobody gets left behind or is has to ride alone. If someone gets separated from the group the sweep is willing to stay back with them and make sure the rider is doing alright.

Rest Stops I have found a good rule of thumb for rest stops to be every 10 miles for beginner level cyclists and every 15-20 miles for advanced cyclists.

I like rest stops to be brief if the ride is an intense level. This minimizes the amount of heart rate drop. If the ride is at a more casual pace a longer rest stop has minimal effect on your heart rate due to your heart rate not being at elevated levels.

The End of the Ride Make sure all cyclists have arrived at the end point safely. Make sure all cyclists have finished and are feeling well. Please address any issues of importance such as any negative feedback about the ride.

Go eat!