

Going Strong at Gulf Coast Cyclefest 2018

This is one of Florida's premiere bicycling events. Truth be told it is really very simple to ride this event. Preparation, preparation, and then some more preparation as it doesn't matter what skill level one participates. The preparation starts with an inventory of what one has and what one will need.

Take stock and get any supplies that might be necessary. Get the bike to a local bike shop and have them go over the bike. Check the chain, gears, cables, breaks, and fittings.

One doesn't want these to breakdown on the ride. If there is time get a bike fitting. This will make the event far more pleasurable than riding on an ill fitting bike. There are routes for all skill levels as long as one matches their ability to a chosen route. So the more one can practice for the event the easier it will be to manage.

Proper Manners When Riding

A lot of riders bite off more than they can achieve. Remember that this is a fun, family friendly event and not a race. So pick the route carefully with your present riding ability in mind and then train for it.

A solo rider is going to be bombarded with many emotions. Among these emotions adrenaline is perhaps the one that will get a rider into the most trouble. Riders always seem to start off as if this was a race and away they go at a speed they are not able to maintain. As a solo rider try not to fall into this category and stay within your accustomed speed.

One can always try to get onto a line of riders that are going at your speed. Ask if you can join them. Remember that once in a line you are expected to take your turn up front even if this is only 30 seconds. Talk to the riders and ask what signals they are using such as when you wish to drop off the lead position. Most people in the club use a tapping of their right hip with the fist.

If you are not used to riding in a pace line remember that they are depending on you to observe certain basic rules. These are to call out road hazards, turns, slowing, stopping, car up, car back, car left or right, and anything that will cause a problem for the riders behind you. Find group rides at a speed you are comfortable with and practice riding with them. Talk to them prior to the ride and explain what you want to do so they are prepared for things you may do

In the beginning a slower group might be more beneficial. Again speak to the ride leader as to what you are attempting to achieve. They may or may not feel comfortable about this.

Don't overlap wheels! Bad things happen when your front wheel overlaps the front rider's rear wheel so don't do it. Keep a space between the wheels that you feel comfortable and can break in time to avoid an accident. Even when in the middle or rear of a line keep an eye out for what is ahead.

One of the more annoying habits that uninformed riders do is to weave back and forth from their position in the line. This makes all of the riders around you very nervous. If you are in a line and need a drink signal the riders behind you by holding up your water bottle and then move to the left of the line. Make sure that the road behind you is clear before leaving the line. Ride alongside the line until you are finished and then signal the riders that you are going to reenter by pointing to your spot in the line.

If you are new to riding in a line then understand the speed or pace is going to be a steady one. If you are in the rear it is easier to ride but as you get towards the front there is more effort necessary to maintain this speed. This takes time to get used to along with the idea of rotation of leader. Practice and more practice so that everyone will feel comfortable.

The Agony of the Saddle

Rides that are above the 50 mile mark have a greater chance for mental and physical fatigue. Sitting in the saddle for hours is monotonous allowing one to fall victim to hypnosis of the road. If one is an experienced rider at this mileage this should not be an issue. The most difficult ride is the century. A lot of riders like to cross this off their bucket list. It is not that easy and weather can certainly play a factor in this ride. Here mental fatigue, physical aches and pains across the neck, upper back, shoulder, arms, lower back and legs can become a major factor. This ride truly deserves the practice one should do before embarking on it. As with all rides it becomes important to stay hydrated but with these longer rides it becomes a must! Eating while riding is also going to be an important skill to master. Learning how to stretch on the bike is also important. This is not a task one would attempt without having spent time learning these moves. Practice these maneuvers alone until they become easy and assured.

The Route of the Problem

The routes are listed and shown on the club's website. Become familiar with your chosen one. Look for the rest stops and places where there are major turns. A better way to do this is to drive the route in a car a few times by yourself or with some of those riding with you. This is a better way to become more familiar with it and to see where potential problems may arise. Rest stops are important so locate the potential spots where they are going to be located.

Rest Stops

The best way to treat rest stops is to get in and out as quickly as possible. The longer one spends there the more the body will cool down. This means getting back on the bike will become harder and more taxing on the body as well as the mind. Refill any hydration system that you are using with either water or the sports drink that is supplied. Eat something or take something that can be eaten while on the road. This is not a place to try some food or energy bar that is unfamiliar to you. An upset stomach or worse is a great way to end a ride no matter its distance. Make sure that you visit the port-a-potty. An empty bladder and bowel make the ride so much easier. If there are mechanical issues see if they can be addressed here. If not ask for a mechanic. You don't want to wait until there is a problem on the road. Try doing some simple stretches before hitting the road. When you leave try and stay with your group.

Cramping One's Style

A few words about cramps as some riders are more susceptible to them. They can happen at any time at any stage of the ride. Most cramps are caused by overuse of a muscle such as the quads, hamstrings, or calves. They are extremely painful and debilitating to anyone. Once present they are very difficult to overcome them. The best thing to do is get off the bike and stretch and massage the area if possible. This may alleviate the problem temporarily but in most cases it will return. Try spinning instead of mashing gears. If it is a shorter ride you can slow down and hopefully make it to the end point. On longer rides you can try to finish but the style you are riding is going to have to change to a slower pace with higher rpms. It may be a difficult decision but hopping on a sag wagon might be the best option. Walking, stretching, massaging, and time should clear the problem. Training for the distance you have selected is going to be an important step to decrease the likelihood of this occurring.

The Long and the Short of this Event

The longer rides are the ones where most issues arise. Again pick a route that is within your range and not your expectation. The best judge of this is going at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the distance in practice than the pace you want. Adrenaline will only carry you so far. Stay away from groups that are faster than you are used to riding. Weather is another factor to take into consideration. The calendar may say November but in Florida that still means hot, humid, and windy days. Check with a forecasting service and see what the predictions are for that Sunday. The closer to the date the more accurate the forecast will be. Dress accordingly.

Most of all, try to remain relaxed and enjoy the ride. Remember it is a fun ride and not a race!

About the Author

Richard Chaykin is a retired physical therapist and longtime rider. With questions about this article please contact Richard at richardchaykin@yahoo.com.