

An Introduction to Racing

By Matt Winston (Go-Ride Coach for the North West)



Many young riders that have been attending Go-Ride sessions for a while, may feel like it's time to try something new. If that's the case, it could be time for these riders to try their hand at racing.

Young riders may be a little daunted because they don't know anyone who races. More often than not they will have nothing to fear. Speaking from experience, in my voluntary role as a Race Organiser, you don't always have the time to be that friendly face, but if you have been pre-warned by a club official or parent that it's a young riders first ever race, most organisers, including myself, would make a special effort to make sure that rider feels welcome and ready to go.

Before the rider gets to their first race there are some things that a club and parent can do to help make the experience more enjoyable. When a rider wants to try racing, it's certainly worth sitting down with them and having a talk about what it is they want to do. Once you have highlighted what the rider is keen on then you can go away and research the local races to find out what is suitable for your riders.

Locating a race

When searching for a race the best place to look is the British Cycling website. The different cycling disciplines are listed in a menu on the left of the screen. Each discipline home page contains lots of

different articles about up-coming races and reports on recent events. It might be worth reading some of these articles, especially the youth ones, to get a feel for what actually happens at these races. To find your nearest race, go back to the left hand menu and click on the 2007 Race Calendar. This will display all the races held across the UK - in every discipline, for every category of rider.

You can refine the search by selecting; Month, Region, Discipline, and Category (which I will explain below). For your first race it's probably best to ignore the Classification selector. Once you have completed all the information, click on the "GO" button. The page will then display every race that meets your criteria. If a particular race interests you then click on the link to find out more information.

What Race am I in?

Once you have found a race that is suitable, you need to find out your rider's category to make sure you can enter. Youth Racing has 5 different categories:

Youth A (U16) - From 1st January in year of 15th Birthday until 31st December in year of 16th birthday.

Youth B (U14) - From 1st January in year of 13th Birthday until 31st December in year of 14th birthday

Youth C (U12) - From 1st January in year of 11th Birthday until 31st December in year of 12th birthday

Youth D (U10) - From 1st January in year of 9th Birthday until 31st

December in year of 10th birthday.

Youth E (U8) - Until 31st December in year of 8th birthday.

So for example, if a rider turns 14 on March 25th, they remain an under 14 (Youth B) until December 31st that year.

Entering Races

Depending on which race you choose, there could be two different ways to enter; pre-entry or entry on the line (EOL). Pre-entry is only available where the race organiser has set a closing date, by which time you must have submitted a British Cycling race entry form. EOL is quite common for circuit races, where the race organiser only takes entries on the day of the race. This is really convenient and allows riders to just turn up, pay and race.

Some races offer both pre-entry and EOL, but there is usually a difference in price of a couple of pounds. Pre-entry is usually a little cheaper because the organiser feels more comfortable and can arrange the racing better if s/he knows how many entries to expect. If you pre-enter you will usually receive a race programme and directions to the race headquarters (HQ). For a rider's first race I would recommend pre-entry.

To pre-enter a race you can download an entry form from the British Cycling website, this can be found by clicking on the discipline link on the menu and then selecting the entry form option. Different disciplines have different entry forms and there may even be several forms within a discipline so make sure you get the one that describes you - if you're not sure, ask another member of your club or contact British Cycling on 0870 871 2000.

Mountain bike races are a little different. Regional Cross-Country races are mostly EOL, while Downhill races require entry in advance. A lot of MTB events have their own entry forms, which can be downloaded from the event website. Click on the event in the BC Race Calendar to find more info.

When filling in the entry form, it is important that you get all the details correct. More and more race organisers are e-mailing out race programmes, so it's important you get your e-mail address right. For first time racers, the section of past race results can either be left blank or you can write a little note to the organiser to explain that it's the rider's first race. The main point about the entry form is to get your rider to sign it, if they haven't signed it the organiser is well within their rights to send it back to you. This will only tend to happen if an organiser has a full field and has to reduce their numbers.

Once filled in, please send it to the organiser along with a cheque for the cost of the event. Take a special note of who the cheque is to be made payable to, it's not always the organiser's name or even the

club's name. You would be amazed at how many times organisers receive cheques with the wrong name on them.

What next?

Now your rider has entered their first race, you need to make sure that your rider is a British Cycling member because on race day they will be asked for a licence. To hold a British Cycling racing licence they need to hold a British Cycling membership at either Silver or Gold level.

If your rider isn't a British Cycling member and they'd like to try-before-they-buy, it is possible to get a "Day Licence" for around £2. With a day licence the rider cannot score BC ranking points if they attain a position within the top three and it is only possible to take out a day licence on three occasions per year. This is a good way for your rider to give it a try, but if they take to bike racing then they'll need to join British Cycling, this can be done either online or by contacting British Cycling's membership department on 0161 274 2000.

Gear Restrictions

Once you have worked out what category your rider falls into for race day, you must make sure their bike meets the gear restrictions. A youth rider cannot race unless they are on the appropriate gearing. This is put into place to create a level playing field and to stop riders becoming injured by pushing big gears. By keeping young riders on small gears it also helps them learn the art of pedalling efficiently. If you are not sure how to check the gears then you can ask a coach at your club or take the bike into your local bike shop.

The gear restrictions refer to the distance a bike can travel with one pedal revolution while the bike is in its biggest gear. The bike will be checked before the race and the race organiser will reject the bike if the gears do not meet the restrictions. The gears will then have to be lowered, or 'screwed down'. When young riders come to a race for the first time, this is the area that most riders have trouble with, mainly because they don't know about it!

The gear restrictions are shown below, outlining the maximum number of meters a bike can travel when the gear checker is 'rolling the bike out'.

Youth A	6.93m	e.g. 46x14
Youth B	6.45m	e.g. 46x15
Youth C	6.05m	e.g. 46x16
Youth D	5.40m	e.g. 46x18
Youth E	5.10m	e.g. 46x19

What to expect on Race day

Now that you and your rider have got everything in place you can look forward to race day. Once you receive your programme, carefully look at the start time for your category's race and at what time the signing-on desk opens. Make sure you arrive in plenty of time for your race so that

you can overcome any last minute problems that may arise. To sign on, your rider will need to take themselves and their bike over to the signing on area. The reason the rider will need to take their bike is that in most circumstances they will have their gear checked before they are allowed to sign on and race. If you arrive early please don't encourage your rider to go over before the signing-on desk opens as the organising team will be extremely busy.

Once your riders have signed on, it is good practice to put their numbers straight onto their kit before they go off to warm up. If other races are taking place on the circuit then it obviously can't be used for warming up. If the circuit is free then please check with an official that it's ok to send your riders off to warm up and familiarise themselves with the circuit.



Numbers should be pinned onto the back of the jersey on the lower back, usually at circuit races you will be given 2 numbers and they should both be worn at all times. The numbers should be facing upwards, so the top of the number is at the highest point. Numbers should be pinned down so that they don't flap around.

**What Should I Bring?
Your Race Day Checklist**

- A bike on the appropriate gearing
- Helmet (must be worn in all races)
- A Racing Licence (or money to take a day licence)
- Entry money (if not pre-entered)
- Cycling shoes
- Cycling Kit
- Riding gloves (mitts or full fingered gloves)
- Plenty of drinks in water bottles for race, plus spares in case it's a hot day
- Spare inner tube
- Multi-tool
- Pump
- Food – fruit, energy bars, cereal bars (especially if there is more than one race)
- Warm jacket for afterwards
- Towel
- Change of Clothes
- Spare safety pins (in case numbers do not have enough)
- Suitable kit bag
- Spare wheels (if club has them)
- Waterproofs

Before the racing gets under way there could be a riders' briefing, given by the organiser and/or the Race Commissaire. Make sure that your rider attends this briefing as it will hold key information about the race and the way it is going to be run.

Racing can be great fun but it's easy to get carried away and take it all too seriously; so relax and remember to enjoy it!

