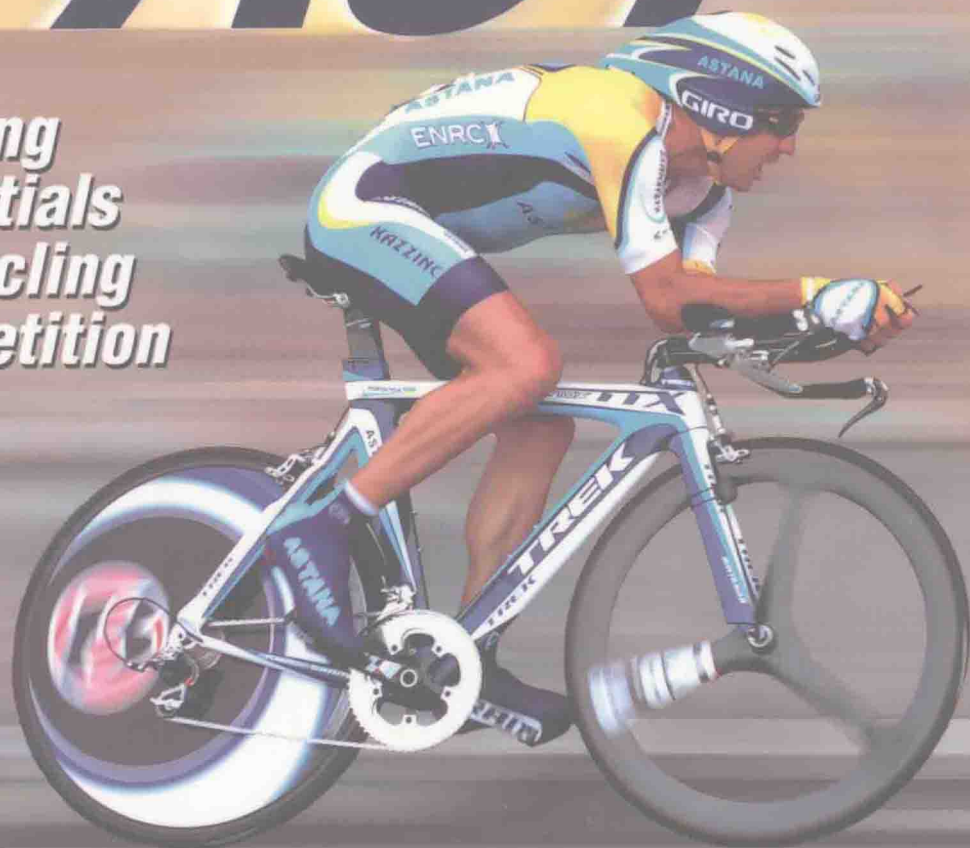


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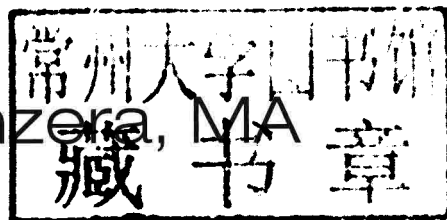
*Winning
essentials
for cycling
competition*



Robert Panzera

Cycling Fast

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Cycling Fast

Preface

If you're reading this first sentence of *Cycling Fast*, congratulations—you've just taken an important step in improving your racing ability!

Across all ages and categories, bicycle racing is one of the fastest-growing sports. Masters racers (those over 30 years of age) and racers in their 20s are the true impetus behind the growth of the sport.

If You Race Bicycles, Or Want to Race Bicycles, This Book Is for You

Cycling Fast is for racers in men's categories 5, 4, 3, and 2 and women's categories 4, 3, and 2. If you are a beginning racer, this book will give you the edge on the competition and enable you to prepare for racing intelligently and confidently. If you are an experienced racer looking to sharpen your edge, this book will help you fill the gaps in your racing knowledge and get a jump on your competition.

Through a systematic review of all racing aspects—equipment, nutrition, strategy, and tactics—this book will help you attain your start or improve your season in bicycle racing. Each chapter provides information that is easy to read, easy to understand, and even easier to apply. You will be amazed at how changing only a few things in how you train, how you race, or how you prepare to race will improve your performance dramatically.

In addition to the common topics of nutrition and physical training, this book tackles ideas such as mental training for racing, goal setting, skills training, and choosing the right team. As a bonus, keep an eye out for special sidebars and boxes throughout *Cycling Fast*, which feature true-life stories from seasoned professionals.

What You'll Find Inside

Chapter 1 lays the foundation you'll need in order to find teams that suit your needs and tells you what is expected of you when you join a team. This chapter encourages beginning racers to think as a team and to enter the sport of cycling with the team in mind.

Chapter 2 covers racing equipment and general bike fit to ensure you have the proper gear and the correct position for racing.

Chapter 3 covers the USA Cycling category system, procedures for entering races, and the types of races that exist.

Chapter 4 details the physical aspects of race training as well as workouts for improving fitness. Practice makes perfect, but this chapter will teach you that *perfect* practice makes perfect.

Chapter 5 gives you information on handling yourself in the pack, whether you're a new or a seasoned racer. You will learn to control your bike with simple drills, control other racers with proper positioning, and prepare for the more intense portions of races—sprints, hill climbs, and fast corners.

Chapter 6 is a precise overview of race strategy and tactics, which you can execute with a team or even as a solo racer without team support. In addition to in-depth information on analyzing courses for improving performance, you will find tips that are illustrated for clarity and easy to execute in the rolling chess match of racing.

Chapter 7 provides the tools for mentally preparing yourself before the race, during the race, and after the race. The physical part of race training is the easy part; the difficult part is clearing your mind and focusing on goals before and during a race.

Chapter 8 covers some basic nutrition strategies for race training. You can race well only if properly fueled during training and racing and, more important, during recovery.

Chapter 9 covers what to do in the off-season to prepare for the next season.

Chapter 10 explains the theory behind a five-year training outlook. Goal setting is also covered in chapter 10 and is the keystone to successful racing in the long term.

Thanks for choosing *Cycling Fast*—your first big step toward more effective racing in the upcoming season and beyond.

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Chapter 1

GETTING STARTED

There's a feeling that you can only get from racing and finishing—the feeling of pushing yourself beyond what you're capable of doing in training. It's about achieving the ultimate physical accomplishment—and you can't feel that on the sidelines.

—Ned Overend, Mountain Bike and U.S. Bicycling Hall of Famer

When we watch the sport of cycling, the coverage usually focuses on the endeavors of the individual: the inspiring escape of a solo rider toward the mountaintop finish, the daring maneuver of the sprinter as he powers past his competitors in the last 500 meters of a race, or the fear-inducing descent of a rider trying to gap his competitors in a bid for the finishing line. However, the team endeavors that go into making those stunning moments possible are often overlooked. For success in this sport, a cyclist needs to have team support on the road, coach support in the lead-up to the race, mechanical support throughout the year, and familial support to make chasing a dream possible.

Competitive cycling is an exciting undertaking that can also be very social—a cyclist will train with coaches, travel to events with teammates, and race against known rivals. The first chapter of *Cycling Fast* will help you find the support you need in order to properly prepare for racing. For many, this support will not be on a professional level, but rather on a personal level. Finding the teams and coaches that fit your style will help put you in the right frame of mind and on the right training path for racing. Topics covered in this chapter include finding the right club or team, finding a personal or team coach, understanding the organization of entry-level racing, and acquiring a racing license.

Finding the Right Club or Team

One misconception that many beginning racers bring to the sport is that cycling is a sport for the individual. Beginning racers often think that they are capable of winning all types of races under all types of race conditions without being a member of a team. This naïveté may be part of what initially



Group rides can provide racelike elements, like this simulated sprint to the finish.

rides are truly the heart and soul of cycling, and they provide experiences that endear many people to the sport. An example is a weekend group ride that includes some racelike elements: sprints for town signs, races to the top of well-known local climbs, or hard-tempo areas where riders may be dropped. The participants in these local rides often include both racers and nonracers, providing a competitive atmosphere and a gateway experience for those who want to start racing. For some, this weekly group ride may be their "racing" experience. Others will take this experience and make the immediate leap into the world of organized bicycle racing.

The Value of Finding the Right Team

When you are first starting out in cycling, finding the right team can be incredibly valuable. Cycling teams can provide

- camaraderie,
- opportunities to help teammates win,
- opportunities to help you win,
- training partners,
- insight into local racing and training, and
- race support.

Fred "Pop" Kugler, coach of several national champions and founder of the Tour of Somerville, said that the most important aspect of being on a team is the ability to train with similar-minded and similar-bodied

drives the individual to the sport of cycling; however, an early foundation in the team aspect of the sport is essential to overall cycling success. Although many beginning racers choose to go it alone and ride "unattached," the benefits of belonging to a team far outweigh the freedom one may feel on his own.

Many cyclists who are interested in racing start out by participating in a competitive group ride in their local community. These rides include situations that simulate those that occur in a race. Competitive group

individuals. According to Pop, riding with a team provides the following benefits:

- A support network in case of on-the-road emergencies
- A network of individuals by whom you can gauge your progress
- A controlled forum where pack-riding skills are learned
- A controlled forum in which to test your limits and then regain group contact to test them again

As an amateur racer—whether or not you have had experience in other competitive sports—you will not know all the nuances of bicycle racing. A team may be your greatest source of guidance and help as you get your feet wet.

How Not to Find a Team

Many beginning racers align themselves with the teams that they ride with on their local group ride. You will likely find it easy to connect with other participants in the group ride. You may even hang around after the group ride and receive riding and training tips on the fly. This may not be the best approach for entering racing or finding the right club or team. The camaraderie and comfort may trump constructive thoughts about your own skills, abilities, goals, or desires.

Participants in weekend group rides sometimes have very little interest in organized racing. Many will focus on only a few local races a year, and these races may not involve the execution of team plans before or during the race. When looking for a team, the beginning cyclist may be best served by focusing on teams that *act like a team*—as opposed to a team that only wears the same jerseys.

Fellow cyclists who perform like a team—that is, a group of cyclists who train together, show up to race with a team plan, and support each other in races throughout the season—may help the beginning cyclist improve overall.

How to Locate Clubs or Teams

In most areas, locating a team or club is easy, especially with the increasing interest in the sport of cycling worldwide. Resources that can help you locate a club or team include local bike shops, the Internet, and the USA Cycling Web site. Local bike shops usually fully sponsor their own teams, or they may partially sponsor other teams. The local bike shop is also a good social network for finding rides, learning about equipment, or simply making friends. Most teams and clubs now have Web pages advertising their membership fees (usually less than US\$50, but team or club clothing often costs extra), training rides, and races sponsored. A quick Internet search on your geographic location along with keywords such as *cycling*, *teams*, and *clubs* should yield Web page results for the teams or clubs in

your area. The USA Cycling Web site lists all teams that are in current good standing (usually with links to the team Web site), categorized by geographic location.

The terms *team* and *club* are often used interchangeably. This is because many clubs, which are made up of both racing and nonracing cyclists, have a team of licensed racers attached to them. The club is usually the unofficial gateway to the team for those interested in racing. The club often supports the team via sponsorship or increased benefits for team members from regular club sponsors. Normally, teams are registered with an official racing body such as USA Cycling, while clubs may have no affiliation with any local, regional, or national associations.

Know Yourself to Find Your Team

Many teams appear similar, but the focus, vibe, and general conduct of each team may be widely varied. Teams are often started by an individual or a small group of individuals; these teams may continue to focus on the principles of the original founder or founders. In this way, teams have personalities. You should try to find a team environment that matches your own cycling personality.

To find out your cycling personality, you need to ask yourself what you expect from competitive cycling. The 10 questions in the sidebar may help you identify your cycling personality. This will help you better understand the type of team that will enable you to function at your best.

Identifying Your Cycling Personality

Consider the following 10 questions to help discover your cycling personality and the best type of team for you:

- 1.** Do you want to work toward yearly, monthly, and weekly racing goals?
- 2.** Are you willing to work for others at races?
- 3.** Are you only looking for camaraderie at races?
- 4.** Are you only looking to meet others with a similar competitive spirit?
- 5.** Are you interested in joining a team solely to obtain free or discounted gear?
- 6.** Are you looking for a social outlet in which you can burn off some stress?
- 7.** Are you interested in various bicycle racing disciplines (i.e., road, track, cyclo-cross, mountain biking)?
- 8.** How much time are you willing to invest in the team?
- 9.** Do you expect your teammates to be focused on local, regional, or national racing?
- 10.** How much structured team training do you seek?

Many types of teams are covered in the subsequent sections. Most of these teams display a combination of the general team traits reflected in the 10 questions.

Types of Teams

As stated earlier, many clubs or teams focus on the principles of the original founder or founders. It is impossible to classify all club or team types, or place any club or team in a specific category. It is possible to provide general categories into which clubs and teams fall. Knowing and recognizing these general categories will help your team or club selection.

Club-Oriented Teams In general, the club-oriented team may provide an outlet for social networking, race camaraderie, and training instruction. Club-oriented teams usually focus on what benefits the club, as opposed to what benefits the racing individual or a group of racing individuals. One advantage of this type of team is that it provides a large base of riders who may be involved in varied disciplines of racing (i.e., road, track, cyclocross, and mountain). Plus, the club-oriented team may have a variety of group rides and structured group training available to the beginning cyclist. Club-oriented teams usually have clinics on general racing skills—pacelining, pacing, race-day warm-up, and so on. Large club-oriented teams may even hold intraclub races.

Many club-oriented teams are structured around the social aspects of group riding and racing. These teams are usually not focused on entering races and planning a race season based on individual racers' capabilities. In addition, this team may shy away from developing sponsorships or race-specific reimbursements. It may also avoid providing monetary remunerations to its racing members (for race fees, travel, lodging, and board). As mentioned, this type of team may hold the idea of "what's best for the club" over "what's best for the individual racer."

As a member of a club-oriented team, you may find one of your teammates at any given local race. Although you may not have a team plan, you can usually count on team camaraderie before, during, and after races. Club-oriented team members sometimes race for smaller teams and only opt to train with the larger club. In many instances, club-oriented team members will ride exclusively in intraclub races, without venturing into interclub competition.

Club-oriented teams are a good choice for those who are new to competitive cycling or new to competition in general. If you want to enter only a few events each year, this may be a good option. Very little race-related time commitments are placed on team participants. Conversely, a club may require volunteer hours in the form of social events or help in putting on intraclub or interclub races.

These clubs can be very large and may have a few hundred or even a few thousand members.

Race-Oriented Teams On a race-oriented team, members will focus their time and training on goals that are determined by the team's seasonal racing calendar. Race-oriented teams usually select a few local and regional races, and team members train with the goal of being at their peak for these events. These teams are usually very competitive on the local group ride and local racing circuit.

The race-oriented team develops camaraderie based on the drive of competition. Team members are usually not required to commit much personal time for social activities; however, they are expected to spend a large amount of time in training to prepare for races.

Race-oriented teams usually offer little structured race training, but they do provide information via a team coach or a mentor. Coaches may be hired, or they may volunteer their time. Mentors are usually seasoned team members who are willing to invest personal time in developing new members. A race-oriented team is often led by someone who has the vision to develop a team and to plan a race schedule.

Race-oriented teams are becoming more prevalent and are filling the gap left by club systems. These teams may be small; they may have fewer than 20 members. Some race-oriented teams will ride with larger clubs to round out their social network.

Club Subteams In major population centers, some clubs may have a system of subteams. Essentially, you can be a club member only or a club member who races for a subteam. Larger clubs often hold intraclub races where subteams challenge each other and practice against each other to improve their racing for interclub events.

Clubs that offer subteams are becoming more popular as the sport of cycling grows. In this system, members are usually asked to volunteer at the intraclub races. Subteams may also be expected to find their own sponsorship and to pay increased dues to the overall club.

Club subteams may be a good option for beginning racers because these clubs provide a general arena in which to experience racing. Initially, you may be able to observe how the subteams race. Many subteams perform very well in interclub races on a regional level. With the support of the overall club, the subteam may not have to administer club operations and can therefore focus on sponsorship, rider development, and racing.

It may be easy for a subteam to begin within a larger club, so the beginning racer needs to be careful. Beginners should heed the words of Peter Ward, a former national-level rider with a storied past in Britain. Peter states that there is a tendency for small teams to persuade too many inexperienced riders to join in order to build a roster. He adds that these small teams may not be equipped to look after their new recruits.

The Alternative: Riding for a Club, Racing for a Team The luxury of having a large selection of teams to choose from is not always available. A good option may be to join a club and race for a separate team. This is

allowed in most jurisdictions, but some clubs frown on this method. Check with the club before choosing this route.

The Other Alternative: Riding Unattached Although this alternative is not recommended, some riders choose to ride unattached. You are not required to be on a team to race in the United States. As unattached riders move up in racing category to more advanced fields, they usually see the benefits in finding a team. Starting out early with a team that will help you grow is the recommended route for the beginning cyclist. Riding unattached may mean missing out on opportunities early.

What You Can Do for Your Team

As you are looking for the right team, you should keep in mind that teams are also looking for the right type of members. Focusing on your personal racing desires is important; however, you must also be sure to support your team with time, energy, and possibly monetary funds.

A team is only as strong as its individual members. When joining a team, you may forfeit some of your training time to assist other team members. You may forfeit your chances to win races so that other team members can win. In addition, you may need to have an active voice in the team administration. Participation is key, and it comes on many levels—from providing car pooling to race sites to assuming the role of sponsorship coordinator. The more you invest in the team, and the more you encourage your teammates to invest in the team, the better the outcome for all members in racing and training.

Teams that do well in races are often the teams that grow outside of the actual race. In other words, teams that are active in their communities (e.g., hosting races and setting up structured group rides) usually fare better in racing and training.

Finding the Right Coach

A beginning racer will usually benefit from finding a qualified coach. Having a coach is not necessary for racing, but the investment may prove invaluable. Coaches can lessen the time spent on trial-and-error methods, explain racing nuances and forms of cycling etiquette, and provide succinct training protocols. Coaches may be a source of guidance to help manage your time and abilities for better performance. The time and energy needed to undo poor training and racing habits will far outweigh the costs of attaining good coaching from the start.

Cycling coaches can provide the following:

- Training plans
- Constructive criticism
- Motivation

- Skills orientation
- Race selection
- Support
- Identification of strengths and weaknesses
- Time management

A Pro's Experience

Neil Shirley (Kelly Benefit Strategies Pro Cycling Team)

Neil Shirley has raced bicycles for over 15 years. He has spent 8 years as a professional, racing nationally and internationally in numerous grueling and competitive events. His specialty is climbing and stage racing, so he knows the value of having a cohesive team to help achieve race goals.

Throughout his career, Neil has had his fair share of teams and team changes. He says, "Shopping around for a team is just like anything—the more experience you have, the better decisions you can generally make." Still, Neil indicates that in order to get that experience, you will have to pay your dues a time or two along the way.

Neil started out as a mountain biker and was looking to make the transition to a professional team in road racing. This is not an easy jump, and pro contracts for road racing are limited and very competitive. Initially, Neil had an opportunity fall into his lap. A new pro team was starting up in San Diego, California, where he was living at the time, and the team was looking for strong, young riders who could be signed for "cheap." Neil explained, "That sounded great! At least *cheap* meant that you get paid something, right? That would be better than anything I got from racing mountain bikes!" After one meeting with the owner of the team's title sponsor, Neil was hooked. The deal sounded very promising, with talk of grandeur and prosperity. The reality set in soon enough when the budget that the sponsoring company had promised was cut. Paychecks were late from the beginning. And things never got better. By midseason, Neil and his teammates were pretty much on their own.

The adversity of this situation provided the groundwork for some strong bonds between Neil and his teammates. Neil acquired good friends through the poor team experience. He says, "I learned a lot that season, mostly about not trusting talk of grandeur, abundant promises, and impossible deliverables." He also says, "Although I value the great friends I made through that initial team experience, now I am a lot more discerning when talking with teams and their directors."

What Can You Learn?

Although Neil's experience is on a professional level, his message is applicable to all amateur cyclists who are seeking a team (or even a coach): Watch out for empty promises, situations dominated by only one individual, and unattainable goals. It's true that friendships can be found in these situations, but the main goal is to find a team or coach who can deliver on your racing expectations.