



Cyclo-Cross (Guide for new racers)

Tony Cassidy 2011

Introduction from British Cycling:

Cyclo-Cross is one of the most accessible forms of cycle-sport, where virtual beginners can find themselves racing against national champions. As long as you are riding in your correct age category, at club level events you will be pitched in with a wide range of abilities.

Local races have a relaxed, informal atmosphere and entries are normally taken on the day. Mountain bikes are welcome at most races and the non-technical nature of the courses means that almost anyone can take part and enjoy a race.

There are often separate races for younger riders (Under-12 and Youth of Under-16 categories, usually), usually with a reduced entry fee or no entry fee at all. For older riders (over-40) and women, races are often shorter. Even senior races rarely last more than an hour, so to taking part doesn't require a mammoth commitment to hours of training.

Cyclo-Cross bikes often make excellent winter training or utility bikes, with their wide range of gears, so forking out for one often increases your cycling options. Many Road and Mountain Bike competitors use Cyclo-Cross to maintain their fitness during the winter and there is considerable overlap in riders in these disciplines.

Local Races:

The "London league" is our local championship and runs between September and February, with races are scheduled throughout London and the Southeast. Races are run on most Sunday's with youth start times of around 11:00am. Details on venues and start times can be found at www.londonxleague.co.uk as well as on British Cycling's event pages www.britishcycling.org.uk/events?discipline=4

Preparation:

As you'd expect, the better prepared you are the more successful you'll be, therefore try to "Control the controllables".

Make sure you know where the venue is. Quite often these can be in fairly remote places and Sat-Nav coordinates may not be accurate. Leave more than enough time to arrive and allow time to find difficult to find places as stressing before a race isn't the best motivation.

Ideally you'll arrive at least an hour before the race – this will give you time to park, unpack, sign on, attach numbers and pre-ride the course.

Get a check list together of things you need to take such as extra clothes, snacks, drinks, licences, spares, tools etc



Clothing

Hands, feet and ears can get particularly cold on a frosty morning. For the feet it's well worth investing in some waterproof overshoes to keep the wet and cold out. Ear warmers are also handy and can be bought cheaply from stores like Milletts. A good set of waterproof gloves (not mitts) can be combined with thin "under gloves" to provide an additional layer (also available from camping stores).

Layers! – As the season runs throughout the Autumn and Winter, it's usually cold and wet. Multiple layers are much better than big coats and will allow you to fine tune the number of layers to suit the temperature.

The extremities will always get colder, but kids might also overheat once they start racing so you don't want big thick coats (though you do need to protect their chests). You'll always see the experienced riders sitting on the start line with a coat over their shoulders until the last few seconds on very cold days.

Make sure all of the kit is pre-packed and ready the day before. Again you won't want to be running round trying to find missing kit on the morning of the race. Get the kids involved in organizing themselves and getting used to taking some responsibility.

If the race has been wet and cold, you'll need to pack a complete change of dry, warm clothing to change into as well as some hot chocolate!

Bike fit and preparation

Talk to one of the coaches about bike fit (when they're not coaching). Bike fit is about getting the bike suited to the rider in terms of cleat positioning, seat height/position, handle bar height/position. This can be something that can take some time to perfect, however we can give you some pointers which can make a huge difference to rider comfort, performance and handling.

Spend some time checking that the bike is all working correctly. Check the operation and indexing of all of the gears and check that the brakes work ok. There's nothing worse than traveling miles for a race only to encounter avoidable mechanical issues. Tyre pressures are an individual thing and need to be low enough for grip, yet high enough to avoid pinch flats and punctures. Start on a standard pressure and then vary it to see the difference, and talk to other competitors.

It's worth taking some spares with you, particularly spare tyres/tubes in case you get a puncture prior to the race (don't forget the pump and tyre levers too).

Nutrition

A good breakfast is recommended but make sure you leave a good couple of hours between eating and racing otherwise you won't get the nutritional benefit and are more likely to throw it up!

Make sure you're taking on fluids (sips not gulps) for the race, and remember that if you wait till you're thirsty, it's too late and you're already dehydrated.

The races for U10 and U12 are quite short and you probably won't need to bottle on the bike for the race. U14 and U16 will be longer and a bottle may want to be carried.



Pre-ride and warm up

It's very important to arrive early enough to pre-ride the course so you're not riding it for the first time in the race.

Gently ride at a pace that will warm you up and elevate your heart, but without exhausting you for the race. Take note of ground conditions, other riders "lines", boggy/slippery sections etc as well as potential passing places.

Try to keep legs turning right up until the start of the race.

The race

The most important thing is to enjoy it!

At this level, do the best you can, try to get a good start, remember what worked and what didn't and learn from it and shake hands with your opponents afterwards.

Post race

Get changed into dry clothes if wet, and extra clothes if cold (even if you don't feel cold) and re-hydrate.

Cross bikes can get very muddy, and will need to be properly cleaned and lubricated after every race – if you don't do this they **will** fail. Remove the wheels and give them a good clean to remove all of the mud – check the tread for thorns and stone chips that could cause a future puncture. The transmission (pedals, chain ring, chain, front/rear mechs and cassette) will need thorough cleaning and re-lubing. A chain cleaner is a very worthwhile investment. Clean the frame, seat etc with clean soapy water.

Advice

There is lots of friendly and experienced advice in the club, so make use of it by talking to the coaches and other parents.

British Cycling Video on getting into Cyclo-Cross

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly3mIDxcjYY>

This site is where you will find out about Mosquito Bikes London and South Eastern Cyclo-Cross league. Results standings and race dates.

<http://www.londonxleague.co.uk/>

British Cycling is the National Governing Body for cycling in Great Britain, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

<http://www.britishcycling.org.uk/cyclocross>

Cross specific news and reports

<http://www.cross-crazy.com/>