

A Main Cycling Team Spring Criterium Clinic

Crit racing style, fitness requirements, and tactics are much different than what's required in road racing. They're shorter, faster, more technical and often a lot more fun. We are going to teach you a few things to keep in mind while going around in circles for an hour:

1. Warm up!

- I cannot stress enough how important a good warm up can be. There are lots of different methods of warming up for a crit. Find one that works for you and for the course you are racing that day. A hilly course might call for a slightly different warm up than a flat 4 corner course.

- The first 20 minutes of a crit are the fastest. More riders get dropped in the first half than in the second half of the race. You can always tell who is warm and ready to go from the start versus those who are cold and not warmed up. You may not get dropped from not warming up but it sure is a lot easier to be ready to go from the start. The old adage is the shorter the event, the longer and more intense the warmup should be.

2. Starting Position

- Get to the start line early. In bigger crits starting position makes a big difference. If you are late to the start and roll out at the back of the field you could spend the first half, if not the whole race, trying to move up to the front. I find it easier to start at the front and stay there! Arriving at the start live 10 minutes before is a great rule.

- If you find yourself at the back for the start make sure to move up fast. When the start gun goes off move straight to the front. You might burn a match early but it's better than spending lap after lap working to get around everyone.

3. The Race

- The first 20 minutes will be fast and furious with attacks and breakaways. Rarely does the winning move come in the first 20 minutes. In most cases the race doesn't truly begin until the last half. Save your energy for the latter part of the race while everyone else is blowing themselves to bits.

- If for some reason you didn't get a good warm up in you can use the first half to get warm. Take a couple flyers or go with an early break but be conservative. It's ok to stretch out the legs or open the lungs up but don't go so deep that you can't recover.

- Attack like you mean it. Sometimes the "soft attack" works in road racing, but there's rarely such a thing in crit racing. Since the pace is fast, you need to attack even faster. Don't attack from 30 places down. By the time you hit the front of the peloton you'll be tired out. Never attack from the very front either. Attack from the top ~10 positions. If you can enlist someone to come with you even better.

- Read the Race. If you find riders are attacking but everything is getting chased down think twice about attacking. Every race has a vibe. Try to feel it out and go with it. Riders often

get frustrated and try to fight the race. Then they spend energy yelling and trying to make the race fit their agenda. Save energy and race the race of the day. If breakaways aren't sticking then get prepared for a field sprint. Change strategy and adapt to the race.

-Before considering bridging up to a break, take a good look at who's in it. Do the guys in it have a reputation at making a break stick? How many seconds ahead are they? Are the right combination of teams represented in the break? How far into the race are you? What is the body language of the rest of the peloton? Are the same guys doing all the work? Are they getting tired? One of the biggest parts of reading a race is reading your competitors.

- Move up or attack during the lulls. There is no sense trying to gain places when the bunch is strung out at 50km/hr. There's further to go to move up and it takes more energy to do so. Never take a pull at the front unless there's good reason to do so. Sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't.

-Stay *at* the front, but not *on* the front. In a hotdog-shaped crit, the magic number is top 20 (pending the size of your field). The further back you are in a tight circuit, the more pronounced the slinky effect is at the rear of the pack. In a fast, flowing crit it's good to stay in the top third of the bunch. Remember, if you're not constantly moving forwards, you're moving backwards.

-It's easy to get boxed in while you're hiding from the wind. Place yourself at the edges of the group so you can move up easily at the opportune time (preferably the downwind side). Placing yourself at the edges also allows you to catch a free ride with the swarms of riders as they come past and move up in the bunch.

4. The Finish

- Quite often the final sprint isn't to the finish line, it's to the final corner. Most crits will have a corner before the final 200-300m to the finish line. If you don't come into that corner positioned properly you'll have no chance at winning the sprint. The optimal position depends on the distance from the corner to the finish line. It could be top 3-5 it could be top 15. Crashes rarely come from the top 10 guys entering the final corner. They almost always come from the guys on 25th wheel who think they still have a chance at winning.

- Learn to "surf" the leadouts on the last laps. You don't need a whole team there for a lead out. You can use other teams as your lead out.

- Sprint all the way through the finish line. Often riders sit up if they aren't going to win or they just die out. Always sprint all the way through the line.

5. Cornering

-Always look where you want to go and don't fixate on the wheel in front of you. Never look where you **do not** want to go. It's a sure way of heading in that direction.

-Anticipate the speed for the corner and brake before the corner if necessary. **DO NOT** brake while in the turn.

-Approach the corner wide, cut to the apex, and finish wide. The apex is straightest line through a corner and allows you to maintain the highest amount of speed. A common mistake is cutting to the apex of the turn too early. Approaching the corner wide also gives you more options when exiting the corner in case something unexpected happens.

-Quickly scope out the 2 or 3 riders ahead of you who have already entered the corner. Note if they are pedaling safely through it and judge whether you should do the same. If it happens that your inside pedal hits the pavement, don't panic and don't over-correct. Over compensation is how most crashes happen.

-Put all your weight onto the outside pedal if you stop pedaling. This pedal outside pedal should be facing down towards the road. Lift your weight off your saddle slightly to get that weight on the outside foot, get over the front of the bike (see photo below), and roll up behind and into the slipstream of the rider in front. It's amazing how much speed you can keep and energy you can save by ducking right under the wind.

-If you are not pedaling through the corner and need to coast through (as in #5), once you have passed the apex of the corner begin to pedal again as soon as possible and accelerate out of the corner.

-Braking while cornering. Most crashes happen on corners. The most common thing that happens is the front wheel washes out and before you know it you're sliding along the pavement. The biggest thing to remember is not to suddenly grab your brakes while in the middle of a corner. When braking, the weight of the bike and rider moves forward and the front tyre makes the transition from unloaded to loaded. Making this change too quickly won't allow the front tyre cope with the sudden requirement for additional traction. Progressively using the back brake settles the rear and affects how the weight is distributed during braking (which should only be done in a straight line).

All of your braking should be done **before** you enter the corner while you are upright (not leaning). If you arrive at corner and suddenly recognise that you are going too fast, straighten the bike and feather the brakes (more rear than front) and get into it again.

-Changing your line in the middle of a corner. This comes back to entering a corner at the correct speed. When you decrease the radius of your turn, you'll increase the amount of force pushing you to the outside of the corner. This is when your front tyre can potentially wash out.

-Too much tyre pressure. This is one of the biggest mistakes made by new cyclists. There's a misconception that more tyre pressure is better and makes you faster. It's astonishing how many people pump up their clinchers to 140psi, the road gets a little bit wet, and then someone comes-off though a corner. I have an entire post that I've been meaning to publish on tyre pressure coming in the near future.

- Riding differently on wet roads. The same rules apply on wet roads as they do on dry roads, however you need to be extra careful and let down your tyre pressure. I have no problem with riding at 90 PSI on wet roads. Many people will change their technique on wet roads. The only difference between wet roads and dry roads is that flaws in technique will be amplified and potentially dangerous.

There are many things you have no control of out on the road, but recognizing which situations to stay away from and how to handle your bike properly are the first steps to staying upright

-Slinky Effect: When riding in large groups such as criterium racing you'll experience what's called the *concertina*, *accordion* or *slinky* effect. This happens when the front riders slow down to enter a corner which compresses the pack together. The last rider in the bunch has to slow down the most. By the time the front riders are accelerating out of the corner the riders at the back are still slowing. This means the riders at the back have a lot of catching up to do and have to go faster than the riders at the front in order to catch up again. The further back you are, the more this surging effect is propagated towards the rear of the bunch.

The trick to avoiding this constant surging is to **find your position at the front quarter of the bunch**. You don't want to be at the front doing all the work but you want to be close enough to the front so you can carry your speed through the corners and respond to any attacks or surges. This also enables you to read the race and see what's going on up front.

-Coming Underneath "Chopping a turn": This is an etiquette and safety thing. What "coming underneath" means is when someone passes everyone on the inside of the corner while going through. This is a mistake on two counts:

1) You could get cut off very easily by the rest of the group apexing the corner and you won't get through. Your exit line will be over before it's begun.

2) If you do manage to come underneath the through the inside of the corner you will disrupt the pack's fast moving line since you will most likely swing wide through the corner. You'll have the riders say a few colorful words to you at the end of the race. Hard to explain but hopefully you get the picture. Do it once and let the guys you just "chopped" *politely* explain it to you.

Brennan's Crit Warm up:

20-30 min easy spin slowly bringing heart rate up from 90bpm to about 140-150bpm

2x5min tempo/threshold (165-170bpm) Let heart rate drop to 120 between sets

5x30sec sprints (try to spike heart rate) let heart rate drop to 140 between sets

Total time 45-60min (can be done on a trainer or but I prefer finding roads around the course)

Ryan's Warm up:

10 min easy spin

3x3min threshold; easy spin between sets

60 sec effort to get heart rate up to 180bpm (about 5% over threshold)

Easy spin for a few minutes

Total Time 30-40min preferably on a trainer (All bottles are filled, food is in pockets, everything packed away that needs to be packed. When Warm up is done all you have to do is put helmet on and roll the start line)

Anthony's Warm up:

15-20 min gradual warm up to zone 2 (out of 5)

Slowly ramp up over 5-10 min till last 60 sec is max effort (zone 5)

recover 2-3 min

2or3x30sec sprints

5-10 min cool down

Total time 30-40min preferably done on a trainer (Best done while listening to motivational music, visualize the race, drink a pre-race drink mix, slam a gel and a 5 hour energy)