

TTIPS VOL. 17/22 – TECHNIQUES FIVE CRITICAL SKILLS FOR ALL ROAD RIDERS

What the cyclist says: "I do all my own bike maintenance."

What the cyclists means: "When I squeeze my front brake lever, my bike shifts gears."

INTRODUCTION

Many of us KABC riders like to participate in different riding disciplines such as mountain biking, gravel racing, trail riding and many more. It seems however, that all of us enjoy road riding as our primary focus. If I'm right, then this article applies to all riders in our club.

There are many skills involved in bike riding. Of them, there are five essential skills that every road rider should be able to do and if possible, master, ESPECIALLY IF RIDING IN GROUPS. Doing so will add to their enjoyment of the sport, improve their confidence on their bike, and generally will make them safer, more competent riders.

Please look at these and assess your own riding skills. If you think you might like to improve on any of them, do so on a quiet road, away from traffic and road hazards, and work on them one at a time. If it's your first time, take it slow, build up to it, and don't be frustrated if you can't immediately learn it on day one. Just practice periodically and they will become second nature

FIVE CRITICAL SKILLS FOR ALL ROAD RIDERS

Braking

Riding out of the saddle

Cornering

Riding one-handed

Observation

BRAKING

If you have a road bike you probably have handbrake levers, and likely, at some point, have had nightmares about braking so hard that you go over the handlebars. No worries. There are some easy-to-learn tips to keep you safe and keep the rubber side on the road.

You want your braking to be controlled, effective, and safe. The first thing to remember is that your front brake is typically stronger than your back brake. That said, one rule of thumb is that you should never apply only your front brake without simultaneously applying the rear brake. As you apply increasing pressure to your front brake, feather your rear brake (apply light, tapping pressure). Try not to skid and try to NOT let your rear wheel leave the ground. To keep your rear wheel on the ground, body position is critical. If you move your body towards the rear of the bike, there is almost no chance of going over the handlebars merely because of braking. The more pressure you apply to the front brake the more you should move your weight to the rear of the bike. Sliding your weight back will also help to keep your rear wheel from skidding. Your pedal cranks should be parallel to the ground. and you should drop your heels slightly.

When riding in a pace line you almost always need to make fine speed adjustments to maintain safe distance from the rider in front of you. You can do this by feathering your brakes rather than applying steady or sudden pressure. As noted above, feathering is lightly tapping your brake levers to bleed off speed.

RIDING OUT OF THE SADDLE

You may wish to ride out of the saddle for several different purposes. You may wish merely to give your backside a rest if you have ridden a long distance in the saddle. You may wish to stretch your calves and hamstrings by standing. Also, standing and pedaling can allow you to apply maximum pressure to your pedals in a sprint or difficult climb. Finally, some riders stand while descending because it allows more bike control in certain circumstances.

If you are climbing out of the saddle, you likely will want to place your hands on the hoods. While sprinting, it is generally accepted that you should place your hands "in the drops" which is the lowest part of your drop bars. Also, before you stand to start your sprint, you should shift one or two gears harder at the top of your pedal stroke, otherwise you may find that you will be pedaling too fast when you simultaneously stand and apply pressure.

CORNERING

Riding a bike around a corner at speed can be uncomfortable for some. But doing it well is great fun. It's a skill that is simple to learn but easy to get wrong. For the purposes of this article, we will assume that the corner is dry, free of gravel, sand, other loose material, and any hazards.

First, look well ahead, scanning the corner and choosing the line you want to ride. Your body and your bike will follow your eyes. Second, stop pedaling and position your pedals so that the pedal on the side of the turn is at the top of the pedal stroke. For example, on a left turn, as you lean left, your left pedal is at the top of the stroke and the right pedal, obviously, is at the bottom of the stroke. Positioning your pedals in this manner prevents the left pedal from contacting the road (causing you to fall). As importantly, it also allows you to place downward pressure to the right pedal which helps the rear wheel remain in firm contact with the asphalt and track steady through the turn.

RIDING ONE-HANDED

Riding one-handed is a skill every rider should have. It is essential if you want to eat and drink without stopping your ride, and it allows you to signal other road users with your hands.

This is probably the easiest of the skills to practice. On a quiet road with no other riders, practice briefly lifting on hand from the handlebar, and then quickly put it back. Continue to do this, gradually increasing the time your hand is off the handlebar. As you get more comfortable, try grabbing your water bottle from the water bottle cage and replacing it. Then grab your bottle, drink from it, and replace it.

OBSERVATION

In road riding it's important to watch out for unexpected hazards and events. Scanning the road ahead, especially if you are the lead rider of a group of riders, is extremely important. Ride safety depends on your powers of observation. And the more you ride and practice observation, the better you will be at predicting hazardous conditions, avoiding them, and helping your fellow riders avoid them.

Once you are adept at these, you will have built a solid foundation for safety, enjoyment, and confidence in your rides.

Okay riders, that's it for this week. Until next time,

Make Every Ride Epic,
Darryl