

TTIPS VOL. 12/22 – Insights The Rules - Part One*

People ask me, “why do you like bicycling so much?” My response: “because it’s never too late to have a happy childhood.”

INTRODUCTION

Cyclists are an interesting and often peculiar bunch, especially road bikers. They can be unusually fickle about the smallest things. I am both a mountain biker and a road biker, though I have yet to locate suitable mountains in the Low Country. At any rate I started as a full-fledged mountain biker and then slowly took up road biking and I love them both.

When I started mountain biking, I quickly noted the drastically different cultures between the two sports. Each group has its own set of unofficial rules. Mostly you learn them as you go and it’s rare to find them listed in writing. The other thing is that you often learn “the rules” the hard way, which is to say, when you unknowingly break them. Learning them as you go can be embarrassing too. Worse than that, often road bikers will not say anything, but will let you continue to break “the rules” all the while exchanging knowing glances with each other communicating silently that you are a “nube” or “noob” meaning that you clearly are an uninformed person, new to their beloved sport. This isn’t necessarily always indicative of an air of elitism, but rather a quiet warning to “be careful riding with this person until we know that they know what they are doing.” Actually, “the rules” are mostly tounge-in-cheek self-deprecating humor. Even so, they are worth knowing and obeying, mostly.

Here’s a few things I’ve noticed along the way. It’s important to remember that in road biking, it’s better to look good than be good except when it’s time to be good. Huh? Ever notice that the bike is a temple. If you have a choice between a better car or a better bike, clearly you choose the bike. When a road cyclist crashes, and there is obvious evidence of a compound fracture, and half their skin is embedded in asphalt, and their helmet is flat on one side, and they are showing signs of severe cerebral concussion, and blood is leaking from their ears, the first thing they say is, “is my bike OK?” Then the next thing they say is, “no, I don’t need to stop, I can keep riding.” I could go on and on....they are a rugged bunch.

In the next two TTIPS issues I will cover “the rules.” The list is that long. In some cases, you will note words in brackets like [this]. In those instances, I have removed the original colorful (possibly offensive) wording and replaced it with a more tasteful substitute. Use your imagination combined with the certain knowledge that road bikers are mostly a foul-mouthed group (present company excluded of course) and you likely will come up with the original meaning. Knowing that you are all grown adults, at least chronologically, I was tempted to leave

the colorful wording in place, but I feared the club officers would put me in the corner and make me skip the next five Saturday rides as punishment.

At any rate, here is the first half of the list. I recommend that you read them while enjoying a cold beer, cuz “beers and gears” go together. A second acceptable choice is a glass of your favorite wine. Remember to enjoy them with good humor. For gosh sakes, don’t be offended by any of it. If you are tempted to feel offended, read rule 43 first which states in part, “we are all brothers and sisters on the road.” If that doesn’t work, see rule 5. Okay, let’s go.....

The Rules

1. Obey The Rules.
2. Lead by example. It is forbidden for someone familiar with The Rules to knowingly assist another person to breach them.
3. Guide the uninitiated. No matter how good you think your reason is to knowingly breach The Rules, it is never good enough.
4. **It’s** all about the bike. It is, absolutely, without question, unequivocally, about the bike. Anyone who says otherwise is obviously a [knucklehead].
5. **Harden the [heck] up.**
6. Free your mind and your legs will follow. Your mind is your worst enemy. Do all your thinking before you start riding your bike. Once the pedals start to turn, wrap yourself in the sensations of the ride – the smell of the air, the sound of the tires, the feeling of flight as the bicycle rolls over the road.
7. Tan lines should be cultivated and kept razor sharp. Under no circumstances should one be rolling up their sleeves or shorts to somehow diminish one’s tan lines. Sleeveless jerseys are under no circumstances to be employed.
8. Saddles, bars, and tires shall be carefully matched. Valid options are:
 - Match the saddle to the bars and the tires to black; or
 - Match the bars to the color of the frame at the top of the head tube and the saddle to the color of the frame at the top of the seat tube and the tires to the color where they come closest to the frame; or
 - Match the saddle and the bars to the frame decals; or
 - Black, black, black

9. If you are out riding in bad weather, it means you are a **badass**. Period. Fair-weather riding is a luxury reserved for Sunday afternoons and wide boulevards. Those who ride in foul weather – be it cold, wet, or inordinately hot – are members of a special club of riders who, on the morning of a big ride, pull back the curtain to check the weather and, upon seeing rain falling from the skies, allow a wry smile to spread across their face. This is a rider who loves the work.
10. It never gets easier, you just go faster. As this famous quote by Greg LeMan tells us, training, climbing, and racing is hard. It stays hard. To put it another way, per Greg Henderson: “Training is like fighting with a gorilla. You don’t stop when you’re tired. You stop when the gorilla is tired.”
11. Family does not come first. The bike does. Sean Kelly, being interviewed after the '84 Amstel Gold Race, spots his wife leaning against his Citroën AX. He interrupts the interview to tell her to get off the paintwork, to which she shrugs, “In your life the car comes first, then the bike, then me.” Instinctively, he snaps back, “You got the order wrong. The bike comes first.”
12. The correct number of bikes to own is $n+1$. While the minimum number of bikes one should own is three, the correct number is $n+1$, where n is the number of bikes currently owned. This equation may also be re-written as $s-1$, where s is the number of bikes owned that would result in separation from your partner.
13. If you draw race number 13, turn it upside down. Paradoxically, the same mind that holds such control over the body is also woefully fragile and prone to superstitious thought. It fills easily with doubt and is distracted by ancillary details. This is why the tape must always be perfect, the machine silent, the kit spotless. And, if you draw the unlucky Number 13, turn it upside down to counter-act its negative energy.
14. Shorts should be black. Team-issue shorts should be black, with the possible exception of side-panels, which may match the rest of the team kit.

15. Black shorts should also be worn with leader's jerseys. Black shorts, or at least standard team-kit shorts, must be worn with Championship jerseys and race leadership jerseys. Don't over-match your kit, or accept that you will look like [nerd].
16. Respect the jersey. Championship and race leader jerseys must only be worn if you've won the championship or led the race.
17. Team kit is for members of the team. Wearing Pro team kit is also questionable if you're not paid to wear it. If you must fly the colors of Pro teams, all garments should match perfectly, i.e no Mapei jersey with Kelme shorts and Telekom socks.
18. Know what to wear. Don't suffer kit confusion. No baggy shorts and jerseys while riding the road bike. No lycra when riding the mountain bike (unless racing cross country riding). Skin suits only for cyclocross.
19. Introduce yourself. If you deem it appropriate to join a group of riders who are not part of an open group ride and who are not your mates, it is customary and courteous to announce your presence. Introduce yourself and ask if you may join the group. If you have been passed by a group, wait for an invitation, introduce yourself, or let them go. The silent joiner is viewed as ill-mannered and Anti-V. Conversely, the joiner who can't shut their cakehole is no better and should be dropped from the group at first opportunity.
20. There are only three remedies for pain. These are:
 - If your quads start to burn, shift forward to use your hamstrings and calves, or
 - If your calves or hamstrings start to burn, shift back to use your quads, or
 - If you feel wimpy and weak, meditate on Rule #5 and train more!
21. Cold weather gear is for cold weather. Knickers, vests, arm warmers, shoe covers, and caps beneath your helmet can all make you look like a **hardman**, when the weather warrants their use. If it isn't wet or cold, save your Flandrian Best for Flemish weather.
22. Cycling caps are for cycling. Cycling caps can be worn under helmets, but *never* when not riding, no matter how hip you think you look. This will render one a [nerd] and should result in public berating or beating. The only time it is acceptable to wear a cycling cap is while directly engaged in cycling activities and while clad in cycling kit. This includes activities taking place prior to and immediately after the ride such as machine tuning and

tire pumping. Also included are cafe appearances for pre-ride espressi and post-ride pub appearances for body-refueling ales (provided said pub has sunny, outdoor patio – do not stray *inside* a pub wearing kit or risk being ceremoniously beaten by leather-clad biker chicks). Under these conditions, having your cap skull-side tipped jauntily at a rakish angle is, one might say, *de rigueur*. All good things must be taken in measure, however, and as such it is critical that we let sanity and good taste prevail: as long as the first sip of the relevant caffeine or hop-based beverage is taken whilst beads of sweat, snow, or rain are still evident on one's brow then it is legitimate for the cap to be worn. However, once all that remains in the cranial furrows is salt, it is then time to shower, throw on some suitable après-ride attire (a woollen Molteni Arcore training top circa '73 comes to mind) and return to the bar, folded copy of pastel-colored news publication in hand, ready for formal fluid replacement. It is also helpful if you are a *Giant of the Road*, as demonstrated here, rather than a giant [nerd].⁵

23. **Tuck** only after reaching **Escape Velocity**. You only employ the aerodynamic tuck after you have spun out your 53 x 11; the tuck is to be engaged only when your legs can no longer keep up. Your legs make you go fast, and trying to keep your [behind] out of the wind only serves to keep you from slowing down once you reach escape velocity. Thus, the tuck is only to be employed to prevent you slowing down when your legs have wrung the top end out of your block. Tucking prematurely while descending is the antithesis of **Casually Deliberate**. For more on riding fast downhill see **Rule #64** and **Rule #85**.
24. Speeds and distances shall be referred to and measured in kilometers. This includes while discussing cycling in the workplace with your non-cycling coworkers, serving to further mystify our sport in the web of their Neanderthalic cognitive capabilities. As the confused expression spreads across their unibrowed faces, casually mention your shaved legs. All of cycling's monuments are measured in the metric system and as such the English system is forbidden.

25. The bikes on top of your car should be worth more than the car. Or at least be relatively more expensive. Basically, if you're putting your Huffy on your Rolls, you're in trouble, mister. Remember what Sean said.
26. Make your bike photogenic. When photographing your bike, gussy her up properly for the camera. Some parameters are firm: valve stems at 6 o'clock. Cranks never at 90 or 180 degrees. Others are at your discretion, though the accepted practices include putting the chain on the big dog, and no bidons in the cages.
27. Shorts and socks should be like **Goldilocks**. Not too long and not too short. (Disclaimer: despite Sean Yates' horrible choice in shorts length, he is a quintessential hard man of cycling and is deeply admired by the Velominati. Whereas Armstrong's short and sock lengths are just plain wrong.) No socks is a no-no, as are those ankle-length ones that should only be worn by female tennis players.
28. Socks can be any damn color you like. White is old school cool. Black is cool too but were given a bad image by a Texan whose were too long. If you feel you must go colored, make sure they damn well match your kit. Tip: DeFeet Wool-E-Ators rule.
29. **No European Posterior Man-Satchels**. Saddle bags have no place on a road bike and are only acceptable on mountain bikes in extreme cases.
30. No frame-mounted pumps. Either Co2 cannisters or mini-pumps should be carried in jersey pockets (See Rule #31). The only exception to this rule is to mount a Silca brand frame pump in the rear triangle of the frame, with the rear wheel skewer as the pump mount nob, as demonstrated by members of the 7-Eleven and Ariostea pro cycling teams. As such, a frame pump mounted upside-down and along the left (skewer lever side) seat stay is both old skool and Euro and thus acceptable. We restate at this time that said pump may under no circumstances be a Zefal and must be made by Silca. Said Silca pump must be fitted with a Campagnolo head. It is acceptable to gaffer-tape a mini-pump to your frame when no CO2 cannisters are available and your pockets are full of spare kit and energy gels. However, the rider should expect to be stopped and questioned and may be required to empty pockets to prove there is no room in them for the pump.

31. Spare tubes, multi-tools and repair kits should be stored in jersey pockets. If absolutely necessary, in a converted bidon in a cage on bike.
32. Humps are for camels: no hydration packs. Hydration packs are *never* to be seen on a road rider's body. No argument will be entered into on this. For MTB, they are cool.
33. Shave your guns. Legs are to be carefully shaved at all times. If, for some reason, your legs are to be left hairy, make sure you can dish out plenty of hurt to shaved riders, or be considered a hippie [dope] on your way to a Critical Mass. Whether you use a straight razor or a Bowie knife, use Baxter to keep them smooth.
34. Mountain bike shoes and pedals have their place. On a mountain bike.
35. No visors on the road. Road helmets can be worn on mountain bikes, but *never* the other way around. If you want shade, see Rule #22.
36. Eyewear shall be cycling specific. No Aviator shades, blueblockers, or clip-on covers for eye glasses.
37. The arms of the eyewear shall *always* be placed **over the helmet straps**. No exceptions. This is for various reasons that may or may not matter; it's just the way it is.
38. Don't Play Leap Frog. Train Properly: if you get passed by someone, it is nothing personal, just accept that on the day/effort/ride they were stronger than you. If you can't deal, work harder. But don't go playing leap frog to get in front only to be taken over again (multiple times) because you can't keep up the pace. Especially don't do this just because the person overtaking you is a woman. Seriously. Get over it.
39. Never ride without your eyewear. You should not make a habit of riding without eyewear, although approved extenuating circumstances include fog, overheating, and lighting condition. When not worn over the eyes, they should be neatly tucked into the vents of your helmet. If they don't fit, buy a new helmet. In the meantime you can wear them backwards on the back of your head or carefully tuck them into your jersey pocket, making sure not to scratch them on your tools (see item 31).
40. Tires are to be mounted with the label centered over the valve stem. Pro mechanics do it because it makes it easier to find the valve. You do this because that's the way pro

mechanics do it. This will save you precious seconds while your fat [butt] sits on the roadside fumbling with your CO2 after a flat. It also looks better for photo opportunities.

Note: This obviously only applies to clinchers as tubulars don't give you a choice.

41. Quick-release levers are to be carefully positioned. Quick release angle on the front skewer shall be an upward angle which tightens just aft of the fork and the rear quick release shall tighten at an angle that bisects angle between the seat and chain stays. It is acceptable, however, to have the rear quick release tighten upward, just aft of the seat stay, when the construction of the frame or its dropouts will not allow the preferred positioning. For Time Trial bikes only, quick releases may be in the horizontal position facing towards the rear of the bike. This is for maximum aero effect.
42. A bike race shall *never* be preceded with a swim and/or followed by a run. If it's preceded with a swim and/or followed by a run, it is not called a bike race, it is called duathlon or a triathlon. Neither of which is a bike race. Also keep in mind that one should only swim in order to prevent drowning and should only run if being chased. And even then, one should only run fast enough to prevent capture.
43. Don't be a jackass. But if you absolutely *must* be a jackass, be a *funny* jackass. Always remember, we're all brothers and sisters on the road.
44. Position matters. In order to find the V-Locus, a rider's handlebars on their road bike must always be lower than their saddle. The only exception to this is if you're revolutionizing the sport, in which case you must also be prepared to break the World Hour Record. The minimum allowable tolerance is 4cm; there is no maximum, but people may berate you if they feel you have them too low.
45. Slam your stem. A maximum stack height of 2cm is allowed below the stem and a single 5mm spacer must always – *always* – be stacked above. A “slammed down” stack height is preferable; meaning that the stem is positioned directly on the top race of the headset.
46. Keep your bars level. Handlebars will be mounted parallel to the ground or angled slightly upward. While they may never be pointed down *at all*, they may be angled up slightly; allowed handlebar tilt is to be between 180 and 175 degrees with respect to the level road.

The brake levers will preferably be mounted such that the end of the brake lever is even with the bottom of the bar. Modern bars, however, dictate that this may not always be possible, so tolerances are permitted within reason. Brake hoods should not approach anything near 45 degrees, as some riders with poor taste have been insisting on doing.

47. Drink Tripels, don't ride triples. Cycling and beer are so intertwined we may never understand the full relationship. Beer is a recovery drink, an elixir for post-ride trash talking and a just plain excellent thing to pour down the neck. We train to drink so don't fool around. Drink quality beer from real breweries. If it is brewed with rice instead of malted barley or requires a lime, you are off the path. Know your bittering units like you know your gear length. Life is short, don't waste it on piss beer.
48. Saddles must be level and pushed back. The seating area of a saddle is to be visually level, with the base measurement made using a spirit level. Based on subtleties of saddle design and requirements of comfort, the saddle may then be pitched slightly forward or backward to reach a position that offers stability, power, and comfort. If the tilt of the saddle exceeds two degrees, you need to go get one of those saddles with springs and a thick gel pad because you are obviously a big [sissy]. The midpoint of the saddle as measured from tip to tail shall fall well behind and may not be positioned forward of the line made by extending the seat tube through the top of the saddle. (Also see Rule #44.)
49. Keep the rubber side down. It is completely unacceptable to intentionally turn one's steed upside down for any reason under any circumstances. Besides the risk of scratching the saddle, levers and stem, it is unprofessional and a disgrace to your loyal steed. The risk of the bike falling over is increased, wheel removal/replacement is made more difficult and your bidons will leak. The only reason a bicycle should ever be in an upside down position is during mid-rotation while crashing. This Rule also applies to upside down saddle-mount roof bars.

OK riders, that's the first half. Next week TTIPS will feature the second half.

Until Next Time.....
Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl

*Content of this article is excerpted in part from Velominati.com.