

Ramblers Cycling Club Time Trial Rules and Tips

Time trials are test of a rider or riders in a team against other riders to set the fastest time over a set distance. They are a test of each individual or team against the circuit and conditions on the day so especially - **no drafting is allowed**.

There are precise rules for time trials to ensure that riders do not gain an unfair advantage. If these rules are breached the rider/s concerned will likely receive a time penalty or be disqualified. These rules are essentially those of the world governing body for time trials.

- When a rider catches another, the rider caught may not lead the rider behind, and the rider behind must not follow directly behind in the slipstream of the rider ahead. The UCI rules say a 2m sideways gap is required but as our roads are open and can be narrow, this is not always practical and/or safe.
- When the rider behind passes, the rider who has been caught must not follow behind in their slipstream. Within a kilometre the rider who has been caught must drop back to at least 25m behind the rider now in front.
- Riders may not help one another.

The same rules apply to team trial trials with the following additions:

- The rule about not leading or following other riders applies also to riders that drop behind. A rider who has dropped from their team may not join in with another team, or receive or provide assistance.
- Riders, even of the same team, may not push one another.
- The exchange of food, drinks, small items of equipment, wheels and bicycles and help with running repairs is permitted between riders of the same team.
- If a rider is disqualified their team shall be disqualified.

In practical terms the rules mean that if a rider is caught, as the rider behind approaches within 25m they need to ensure they are to the side and not ride directly behind. They have shown superior speed to catch the rider ahead but they now need to be sure they have the power to pass and preferably pull away from that rider before they approach any closer than 25m.

Ideally they should overtake then move away. The rider behind must now fall back so that within a kilometre they ride 25m behind the rider now in front. Even if the passing rider passes but then only travels at the same speed as the rider who has been caught, that rider must drop back and hold a position 25m behind.

Note: At 30km/hr, 25m = 3 sec; at 38km/hr, 25m = 2.5 sec; at 45km/hr, 25m = 2 sec.

If the rider ahead fades and the rider behind feels they can overtake they must follow the same rules. (There is a belief that there is a rule that a passed rider may only re-pass once but the writer has not been able to substantiate this).

There have been several instances noted in club time trials where these rules have not been followed and riders have ended up looking like they are rotating in a road race. This is cheating.

It is important to note the rule about dropped riders in team time trials. They must not get involved with other teams in any way. They cannot jump on the wheel of a passing team with the aim of re-joining their own team for example.

Some tips for riding time trials

Time trials are known as the “race of truth”. There is just you, your bike, the road and the conditions – there is truly nowhere to hide. Some people find this appealing but others find it daunting.

- If possible ride the course before your event. You may find factors such as false flats, rough seal, or trees and dips in the road affecting wind strength and direction - things you may not have noticed in your car or even in a road race.
- If you have a specialised time trial bike you probably won't need to be told to do some pre-race training on it, but if you haven't and only rarely use time trial bars, do some riding with them. You need to get used to the crouched aero position and also be prepared for the different feel and loss of control (estimated at 40%) of time trial bars.
- Be well warmed up for the start. This is a little difficult with a big field but ideally you should be lightly sweating when you start.
- It has been said that the five rules of time trialling are: Don't start too hard, Don't start too hard ... and so on. So, don't start too hard! The temptation in the excitement of the standing start and the desire to get up to speed as quickly as possible is to crank it up too fast and then find within a kilometre of the start that your lungs are bursting and your legs are burning.

Start strong and get settled quickly but fight the temptation to go all out too early. Time trials are all about pacing yourself. Your need to settle into a consistent pace you are confident you can maintain. At the same time it has to be fast or you will not have chance of winning. That's a key part of the challenge of this event.

Be prepared to climb into the hurt box and stay there. Some people go a bit far in the macho stakes with statements like “I can't have been going that hard – I didn't throw up!” But a good rule of thumb is if you aren't hurting, you're not going hard enough.

Some people split the race up into quarters and progressively increase their pace while other split it in half. In most cases most riders would step it up to maximum for the final couple of kilometres. You should have nothing left at the finish and if that's so, then you can do no more.

There are few more things to remember for team time trials.

You should practice as a team beforehand to assess relative strengths of the riders and work on rotating to ensure it is smooth and safe. The club generally only rides a team event once a year so the format and its particular demands are foreign to a lot of riders.

You may rotate to the left or right depending on any wind but you may also decide to just rotate to the right which more riders will be more familiar with.

When you have done your turn, pull to the right but not too far and slip back smoothly to the rear. As you near the tail you may need to up your cadence to move smoothly in behind the last rider without leaving a gap you need to make up - using up precious energy.

Most teams will rotate regularly though if a team has particularly strong rider they may do a longer pull on the front.

Set yourselves a target pace depending on your team's abilities and the conditions and as soon as the rider on the front falls below that, they should pull off. If a rider is struggling to come through for their pull they should drop a bit further back when they rotate back to indicate to the next team member that they should drop in earlier. But not too far or they will slip off the back.

This allows the flagging rider a chance to recover. But if the rider still can't come through they should tell their teammates and drop off.

It has been proven that all other things being equal five riders will travel faster than four so you should try and keep your team together as long as you can, providing you are moving at the pace you want. Times in team events are taken on the fourth rider which allows a rider who is off the pace to fall away or means a team can lose a rider who has a mechanical issue and remain in the event.

If your team is faster than a team in front you must follow the rules about passing. As you get close to them you should tell them "riders passing" stop your rotating while you pass and only resume once well clear.

A little bit of preparation for a team time trial and discussion of the special issues involved so everyone on the team is clear about things can help make them a lot of fun.