How to Enjoy Riding with the RBC

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Are you a new RBC member? Or perhaps a member who has joined the RBC but hasn't done any rides yet or has done just one or two? Here is a complete guide to help you enjoy your RBC rides. (The RBC also hosts non-riding activities, such as basic maintenance workshops and several dinners, but this article only covers RBC rides.)

1. The RBC is a *very* diverse group of cyclists!

- Some members don't like to ride on the road, so they restrict their rides to the Erie Canal path.
- Some members don't want to go on a ride that is more than 20 miles long.
- Most members follow two unstated RBC ride rules: no one is obligated to ride in groups (but most do) and no one is obligated to wait for other riders (aside from certain rides to be described later).
- Some members want a more social riding experience.
- Some members will enjoy a hilly 80-mile ride that starts near Geneva—and will ride their bikes from Rochester to start the ride, and then ride back home at the end of the ride!
- Some members are sanctioned bicycle racers, and will race during the week at local events when they are not enjoying RBC rides.
- Some members like to start, ride, finish, and then leave right after the ride ends. Others like to hang around after a ride and enjoy the company of other riders, maybe including food and drink.

2. Finding the right ride for you.

Has this happened to you?

- You had toe clips, but everyone else had clipless pedals.
- You were dressed in blue jeans and a loose-fitting windbreaker, but everyone else was dressed in Lycra shorts and tight-fitting jackets.
- Everyone was friendly while the sign-up sheet was being passed around, but within five minutes of the start you were totally on your own, the other cyclists just a speck on the horizon!
- What happened? You thought you were a pretty good cyclist!
- Well, you just went on the wrong RBC ride. Let's see how you can go on the right ride.

Unless you like surprises, it's a good idea to choose a ride with care. Choosing the right ride for you, with the right companions, the right distance and pace is a skill that one develops with experience.

To help find the right ride, check the ride information on our map index in the Members Area. It includes Ride Length, Vertical (total climbing, in feet), Description (from "flat" to "extremely hilly,") as well as the ratio of feet climbed per mile traveled. The RBC Club Rides App has a schedule of all club rides and also shows a "ride profile" for many of the rides.

Last, you should also familiarize yourself with the types of rides that RBC offers. Here's a description of the different types of RBC rides.

S&E (Slow and Easy) Rides

- Do you enjoy riding in regular street clothes such as jeans, a tee shirt and sneakers instead of the racing outfits that the fastest cyclists seem to wear? Do you like to stop occasionally to enjoy the scenery as you ride? Do you feel better when riding with a group of cyclists who are making an effort to go at your pace? Do you question your ability to repair a flat or to handle other mechanical difficulties on your own? Then the RBC rides we have labeled Slow and Easy may be for you.
- These rides usually average about 10-11 mph; some take place on roads, but others are entirely off the road (for example, the Erie Canal path).
- They range in length from about 10 to 25 miles—about 1 to 2 hours.
- They are usually ridden on fairly flat terrain, though you might see a few small hills on some routes.
- They are run from about May 1 to October 1, usually on weekend mornings or weekday evenings.
- On these rides, people tend to ride in one to a few groups. As a result, they are fairly social in nature.
- For these rides, the Ride Leader is also the sweep, or someone on the ride agrees to be the sweep. What is a sweep? A person who always stays at the back of the group, so that if anyone has mechanical problems (including that flat tire), the sweep will be there to help make things right. (You are still responsible for bringing basic tools and equipment—this is discussed later.) The sweep may also keep you company!
- These rides typically include some food event at the end of the ride (and noted on the RBC calendar). Contact the Ride Leader for details.

SWEEP Rides

- These rides often have a wider range of riders than the S&E rides, from people still getting their feet wet with the RBC to those who have been riding with the club for many years.
- For this reason, SWEEP rides usually break up into a larger number of groups based on ability. This is very dependent, as always, on who shows up for the ride. And, like some other RBC rides, some people may even wind up riding on their own, especially if someone's natural speed is either too fast or too slow for the other riders.
- The slowest riders will average about 12 mph. Lengths range from about 20 to 40 miles. There may be a mid-ride break for the longer rides. Rides last from about 2 to 4 hours (but less if you ride faster, of course).
- These are usually ridden on fairly flat to rolling terrain, with some occasional small hills, and run from about May 1 to October 1, again usually on weekend mornings or weekday evenings.
- Not surprisingly, SWEEP rides, like S&E rides, are sweep rides.
- A fraction of these rides will include a food event (noted on the RBC calendar).

Impromptu Rides

- These club rides are specifically designed to be social in nature. Riding in one group is encouraged, though not required. You may join an impromptu ride group and opt to ride faster or slower than the posted average speed. However, as part of that choice you may be riding solo.

- Typically only with several days' notice and an eye on the weather forecast, an RBC rider will volunteer to lead an Impromptu Ride. (Shorter notice means better weather will be more likely.)
- The date, time, start location, and information about the full route will be posted on the RBC Club Rides App. In addition, an average speed range for the ride may be posted—having an explicit average speed range naturally encourages group riding. It also means it would help to know what your speed capabilities are for the distance and terrain (hilliness) of the posted ride. However, even if you do not, you are welcome to take your best guess and join a day ride to find out. (Warning: many riders tend to overestimate their average speed.)
- After or during the ride, there is often a social gathering—yes, that means food—though riders are not required to participate since the primary focus is the ride.
- These rides vary greatly in average speed and length, so you will need to check the Impromptu Ride calendar for more information.
- These rides may run from early March to late November. Or beyond!

Regular RBC Road Rides

- These rides form the bulk of the rides on the RBC calendar. If no special name (S&E, SWEEP, …) appears next to the ride name, it is a regular RBC road ride.
- Typical gear for most riders includes road bikes, with clipless pedals and cycling-specific clothes. (Any RBC rider is free to ride *any* kind of bike, but using a road bike with toe clips or clipless pedals and cycling-specific clothes helps improve ride speed, pedaling efficiency, and comfort for most people.)
- These rides have the widest range of riders, with riding speeds averaging from 11 to 20+ mph. The fastest groups of riders will ride in a *pack*, often using the technique of *drafting*—riding in a tight group, one or two across, with the lead riders greatly reducing the wind resistance for the riders behind them. For slower groups, the rides will tend be more social in nature. And again, some people may wind up riding on their own.
- Lengths range from about 15 to over 100 miles. The fastest riders may make occasional short stops to refuel (and for other obvious reasons), while other riders may stop more frequently and for slightly longer times—perhaps with even enough time to eat a sub! Rides can last from 1 to 10 hours.
- These are ridden on all types of terrain. RBC designates rides as either flat, rolling, moderate, small hills, hilly, very hilly or extremely hilly. RBC terrain designation abbreviations for each ride are listed on the calendar, and an explanation of each can be found on the website here. Rides are scheduled from early March through late November, usually on weekend mornings or early afternoons, or on weekday evenings.
- These rides are not sweep rides. Riders are expected to not only bring basic tools, but know how to use them.
- Very few of these rides will include a food event (noted on the RBC calendar). However, sometimes groups of people will create a social event after the ride on an impromptu basis.

RBC Mountain Bike Rides and Adventure Rides

- These appear on the RBC calendar, but are relatively few in number.
- Mountain Bike rides are typically ridden on single-track trails—just what mountain bikes were designed for. Most riders have good mountain-bike experience. As usual, all are welcome—but please bring a mountain bike or a bike that can act like one.

- Adventure rides are mostly ridden on gravel and dirt roads. Parts of most rides can be pretty challenging, due to steep hills (both up and down), ruts, and rocks. This is what makes them an adventure. Again, please bring a mountain bike or a bike that can act like one.

Other designations, certain rides that are repeated, and some special rides

- Some rides may have “tandem” listed next to them. If you don’t have a tandem, don’t worry—these rides are just regular RBC rides in which we hope to get some of the tandem riders to show up as well.
- #230 Show & Go Rides. These are Thursday night rides, with one of the route options shown on map #230. The people who usually show up at these rides come for a serious fitness workout—a group that enjoys pushing their limits and developing high-speed group-riding skills. Riders who can't keep up initially usually end up dropped—that is, riding alone or with a second group. Persistence pays off though, and this fast group welcomes and encourages all riders to eventually hook-on. As always, *any* RBC rider can sign up for these rides.
- New Member Rides. Designed especially for new members, these rides avoid hills and offer “cuts” to shorten the distance if desired. There will be 2 ride leaders for these, with one at the back acting as a “sweep”. Usually there will be snacks provided at the end of the ride, with more time to socialize.
- Overnight weekend events. These vary in nature. For example Susquehannock Lodge Weekend takes place in Pennsylvania in late May or early June. It includes up to 2½ days of riding (road or mountain). Or you can hike. Or read. Or sleep. More details on these events appear in the web page or newsletter.
- The Andrew Spiller Memorial Challenge Ride and Picnic (“The Challenge Ride”) takes place in July. Come and hang out with other RBC members at the picnic site—the club provides beverages. Ride as few or as many miles as you like (that’s the Challenge). Some folks may be trying to see how many miles they can complete during the day. Others may come to do a couple of loops. Or, do what some folks do—come to the picnic and simply socialize with other RBC members.

3. Meeting other Compatible Riders

- Most people who ride in the RBC will find other people who ride about their speed—and whom they like well enough to ride with for several hours.
- Assuming you are interested in riding with other people on an RBC ride, how do you find these folks?
- Well, you need to go on RBC rides! Unless you are an experienced rider whose has ridden with other clubs, may we suggest you start with S&E or SWEEP rides?

- Go on a number of these rides. See who rides your speed. Introduce yourself. If there seems to be a fit, and you would like to ride with that person again, why not ask if they'll be riding next weekend? Or ask for their email address.
- Some of us *always* contact some of our riding friends this way, to make sure we will be enjoying their company on the ride. Some of us rarely or never do this, instead letting riding itself be the important part of the experience.
- Some of us have even met our spouses through RBC rides!

4. What to bring on your ride.

- A bike in good condition, with tires that are properly inflated. Road tires typically need to be pumped up every two weeks or so. Buy a floor pump if you don't already own one. (Think globally. Buy locally—but don't be afraid to use your RBC card to get a discount at the participating bike shops. By the way, some appreciate cash when you use your RBC discount.) If you don't know what "good condition" means, bring your bike to a bike shop. But also learn how to do basic bike checks and repairs—the RBC usually has one or more clinics during the year on these topics.
- An RBC map and/or cue sheet of the ride. These are available to you as an RBC member from the RBC CD, for example. (If you forget, the Ride Leader *may* have an extra map for you—but that's really your responsibility, not theirs.)
- ID and some money. Maybe your cell phone. (But try not to rely on your phone for emergencies.)
- Appropriate clothing. Yes, many of us like cycling-specific clothes, and likely you will too if you ride more than 10 or 20 miles. But "appropriate" also means the right clothes for the season—wearing blue jeans in 40 degree rainy weather can induce hypothermia.
- Water bottles (two are good) or equivalent. You will need to learn how much water your body needs, but one quart per hour on a hot and sunny day may not be enough.
- Food or equivalent (this includes money to buy food) for longer rides, say over two hours. This could be a sports drink in a water bottle (but bring a bottle with only water, in case you need to flush a bug out of your eye or clean a cut). Or it could be energy bars. One favorite is a banana—easy to eat, with a disposable wrapper, good energy, and a low price.
- Bike helmet, appropriately fitted. Know how to wear your helmet correctly, or learn. A helmet can save your life—but only if it is worn properly.
- Eye protection, such as wrap-around sunglasses. It's best to avoid a bug in your eye at 30 mph, or a rock from a passing car.
- A set of bike tools for typical road repairs. This includes tools for fixing a flat—a pump, a set of tire irons, a spare tube (for a quick change), and a patch kit (in the unlucky event you get more than one flat). Something to hold them in, frequently a small bag under your saddle. (The pump will normally be held on the frame.)
- Toe clips (at least) are recommended. These will not only let you pedal more efficiently, but will also provide a more secure way to keep your feet on the pedals. Having a foot slip off your pedal while cycling is dangerous.
- You will likely want to get additional gear later, such as cycling gloves, and shoes designed for cycling (and with pedals that match them), but these are not must haves. Many of us use mirrors as well, for added safety. Cyclometers are good for learning your riding speed, and how far you have ridden.

5. What should you do before and during the ride?

- Prepare everything early so you are not rushed. (Not all of us follow this rule— and chaos ensues.)
- Try to get to the ride about 10-15 minutes early. This will give you time to take out your bike, put on your gear, such as your helmet, and lock up your car. Or just ride to the ride–but if you choose this option, allow time for unexpected delays. If you are unfamiliar with the start location, add some time. If you want to socialize before the ride, add more time.
- Sign the log sheet—the Ride Leader will have this, and will probably walk around asking people to sign it. Although this provides RBC with a liability waiver (if you are injured, don't blame us), the reason many people want to sign the log sheet is that it gives them RBC mileage for the ride. (Actually, some people care about mileage, and others don't—or say they don't!) The mileage of all members is tracked by the RBC—during the season the mileage figures are published in the RBC Newsletter. (There are also some awards given out each year for mileage.)
- Listen to the Ride Leader's announcements at the beginning of the ride. These will mainly concern any unusual road condition the Ride Leader knows about, possibly where the food stops are, and reminders about safety.
- When you ride in a group, you are expected to let others know about things you see such as road hazards, cars approaching from ahead or behind, and so on. If you don't know the standard ways to communicate these, just ask the Ride Leader before the ride, and also watch how the other riders handle these situations on the road.
- When the ride starts, please obey the law. Riding two abreast, for example, is permitted unless another vehicle is overtaking. However, safety is the primary concern—a frantic effort to get in single file can be more dangerous than the alternative.
- Ride in a straight line—no weaving or wavering. Avoid slowing down unexpectedly if there is a rider behind you—any reduction in speed that might affect riders behind you should be announced by calling out "slowing." Signal your turns and point out road hazards that the rider behind you may not see.
- Enjoy the ride!

Revised: 1/18/2016 (bkj)